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YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING IN SCOTLAND: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS



YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING IN SCOTLAND: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Children and Families Analysis

February 2018

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Key findings

The 2017 Young People in Scotland survey asked respondents a number of questions about their ability to make their views heard and acted on in decisions that affect their lives. Fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos MORI Scotland and analysis and reporting was conducted by the Scottish Government, Children and Families Analytical Services

Perceptions of adults listening and acting on views

- When asked about adults in general, over half of young people surveyed agreed that adults were good at listening to their views (58 per cent) and that adults were good at taking their views into account when taking decisions that affect them (53 per cent).
- Around a fifth disagreed that adults were good at listening to their views (20 per cent) and taking their views into account when taking decisions (19 per cent).
- Boys were more positive than girls on both these statements. For example, 62 per cent of boys agreed that adults were good at listening to young people's views, compared to 55 per cent of girls.
- Pupils perceptions of adults worsened substantially between S1 and S5. For example, 72 per cent of respondents in S1 felt that adults generally were good at taking their views into account when making decisions, compared to 42 per cent of S5 respondents. However, perceptions then improved slightly in S6.
- Respondents with a physical or mental health condition were much less positive. Among those with a health condition, 30 per cent disagreed that adults were good at taking their views into account when making decisions, compared to 15 per cent of those without a health condition.

Barriers to being listened to and having views heard

- The most commonly selected reason for why adults don't listen to young people was 'it doesn't fit with what they want to hear' (38 per cent), followed by 'they don't like their views being challenged' (33 per cent).
- The most commonly selected reason for why adults don't act on young people's views was 'they don't like their views being challenged' (30 per cent), followed by 'they don't have the power to make any changes' (26 per cent) and 'they don't think that my views are important' (also 26 per cent).
- Girls, young people with a health condition, and those in the later school years were more likely to select each of the barriers. These groups were also less likely to say that there were no barriers to adults acting on their views.

Perceptions of adults running out-of-school activities

- Respondents were more positive about adults who run out-of-school groups or activities than adults in general. 70 per cent of respondents agreed that they felt able to let adults know their views on how the groups/activities are run; the same percentage agreed that adults who run these activities were good at listening to their views; and 66 per cent agreed that adults were good at taking their views into account when taking decisions.
- Pupils in the later school years were more negative about adults listening to them and acting on views, but the pattern was less strong than for questions about adults in general.

Perceptions of say in the running of schools

- Respondents were also asked a series of questions about how much say they had relating to schools.
- Thirty four per cent of respondents felt that they had a lot of or some say in what they learn, 39 per cent in how they learn and 31 per cent in decisions affecting the whole school. Around half felt that they had a little or no say for each measure.
- There was little variation in perceptions between different socio-demographic groups.

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a survey of secondary school pupils in Scotland on perceptions of their ability to influence decisions that affect their lives. The aim of the research was to better understand the extent to which young people feel they can make their views heard and that those views are acted on by adults in general, in out of school activities and at school.

Background

The Year of Young People (YOYP) 2018 aims to inspire Scotland through its young people, celebrating their achievements, valuing their contribution to communities and creating new opportunities for them to shine locally, nationally and globally.

Its objectives are to:

- Provide a platform for young people to have their views heard and acted upon
- Showcase the amazing talents of young people through events and media
- Develop better understanding, co-operation and respect between generations
- Recognise the impact of teachers, youth workers and other supporting adults on young people's lives
- Provide opportunities for young people to express themselves through culture, sport and other activities

This research informs the participation theme of YOYP that focuses on enabling young people to significantly influence public services and decisions which affect their lives, and to increase opportunities for young people to take part in positive activities and experiences.

The survey findings provide a baseline for the position prior to the Year of Young People, and provide an understanding of different aspects of young people's involvement in decision making, as well as any variation between different socio-demographic groups within the population of young people.

Methods

The Young People in Scotland Survey is an online omnibus survey run by Ipsos MORI Scotland, which surveys a representative sample of pupils in Scotland aged 11 to 19 in 50 state secondary schools in Scotland. Fieldwork was carried out between 4 September and 17 November 2017 and 1781 interviews were completed. The data was weighted by gender, year group, urban-rural classification, and SIMD classification.¹

The analysis and reporting was undertaken by the Scottish Government, Children and Families Analytical Services.

¹ The survey was part of the wider 2017 Young People in Scotland omnibus survey conducted by Ipsos MORI Scotland.

2. Views Towards Adults in General

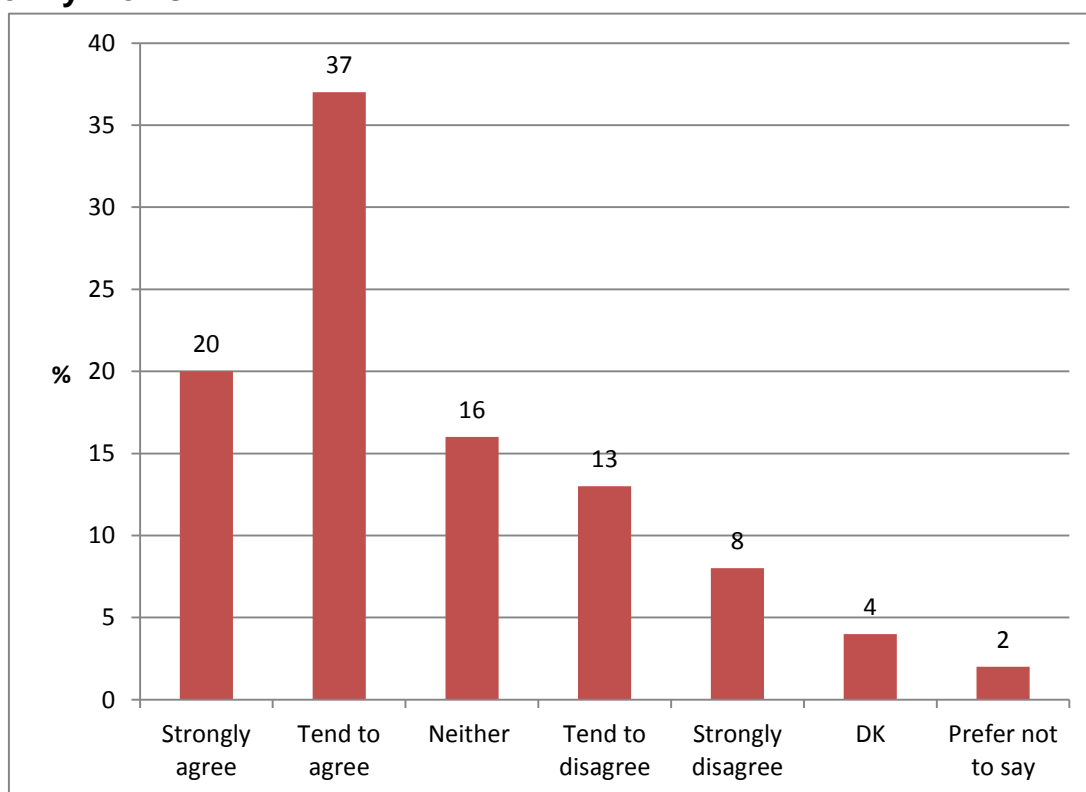
The first set of question asked about young people's perceptions of adults in general, including family, teachers, youth workers, sport coaches and Scouts/Guides leaders.

Adults listening to young people

Pupils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that adults in general, such as their family, teachers, youth workers, sport coaches and Scouts/Guides leaders, are good at listening to their views.

As Figure 2.1 shows, almost six in ten (58 per cent) respondents agreed that adults were good at listening to their views (20% strongly agree, while 37% tended to agree). However, two in ten disagreed that adults were good at listening to them (8 per cent strongly disagreed, 13 per cent tended to disagree).

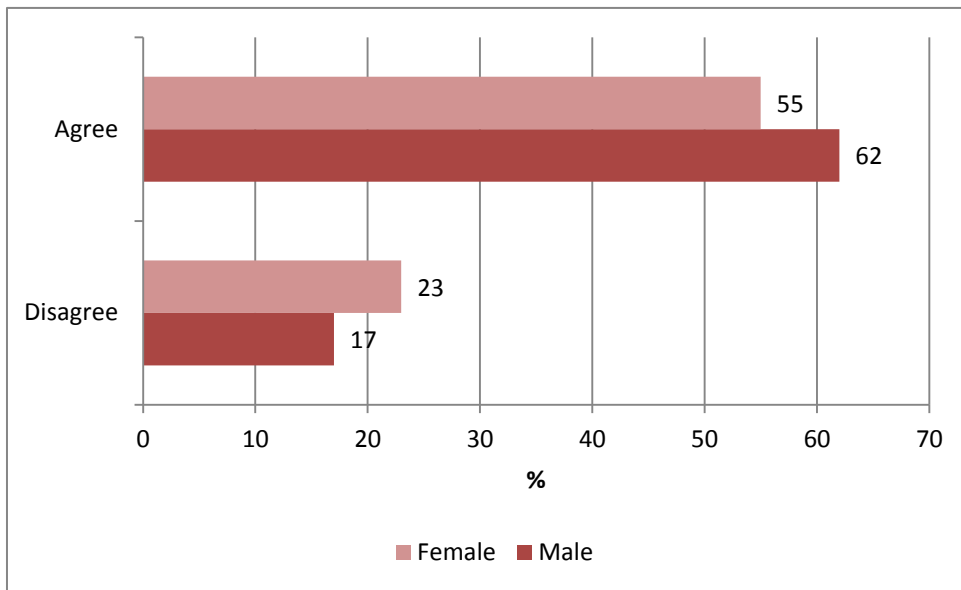
Figure 2.1 Agreement with statement 'Generally, adults are good at listening to my views'



Base: 1781

As Figure 2.2 shows, boys were more positive than girls, with 62 per cent of boys agreeing to the statement compared to 55 per cent of girls.

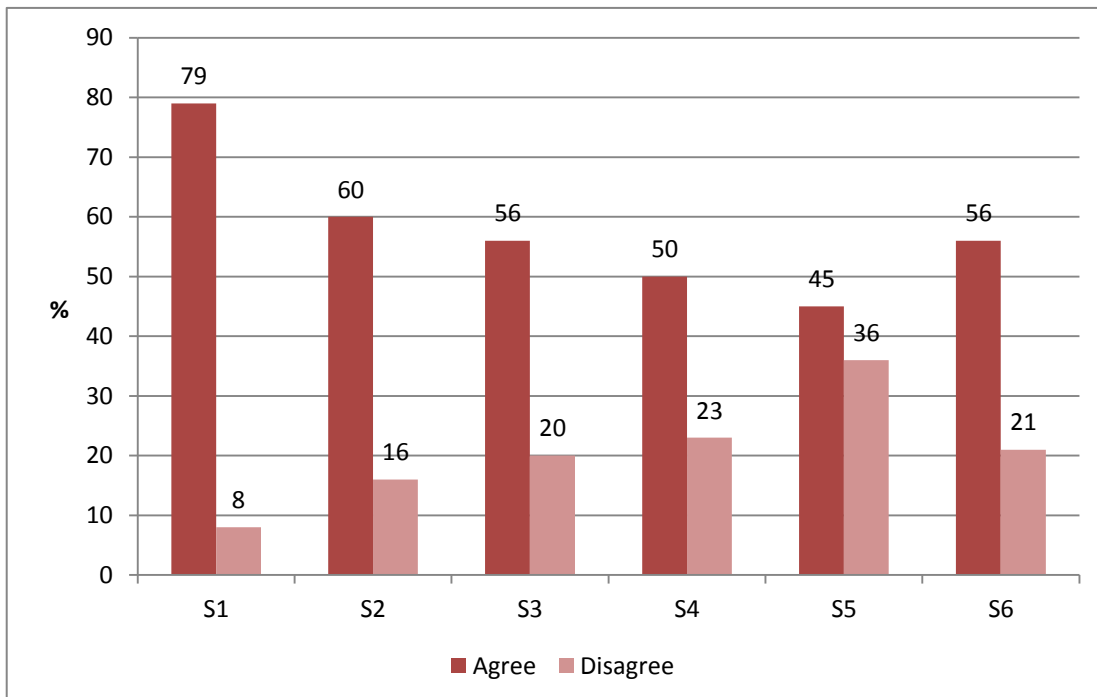
Figure 2.2 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at listening to my views’, by gender



Base: 1715

As Figure 2.3 shows, the percentage agreeing that adults are good at listening decreased consistently between S1 and S5. In S1, 79 per cent of pupils agreed that adults are good at listening to their views, while in S5, 45 per cent agreed. However, in S6 perceptions were more positive with 56 per cent of pupils agreeing that adults are good at listening to their views.

Figure 2.3 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at listening to my views’, by school year

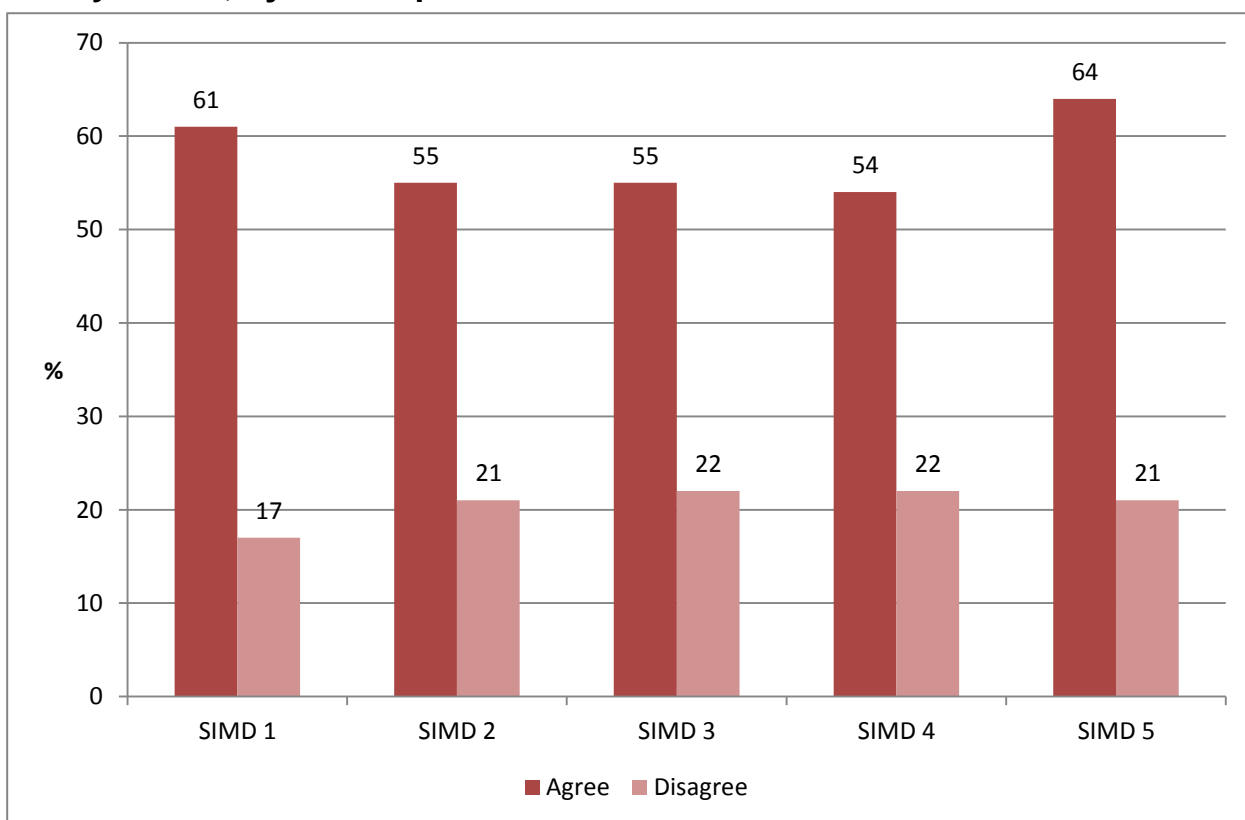


Base: 1755

Pupils with physical or mental health conditions were much less likely to feel listened. 29 per cent disagreed that adults are good at listening to their views, almost twice as many as among those with no health condition (17 per cent).

As Figure 2.4 shows, patterns by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)² did not show a clear directional pattern. Those in both the most and least deprived areas were more likely to agree that adults listen to their views (61 and 64 per cent respectively) than those in the middle quintiles (54 to 55 per cent).

Figure 2.4 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at listening to my views’, by area deprivation



Base: 1781

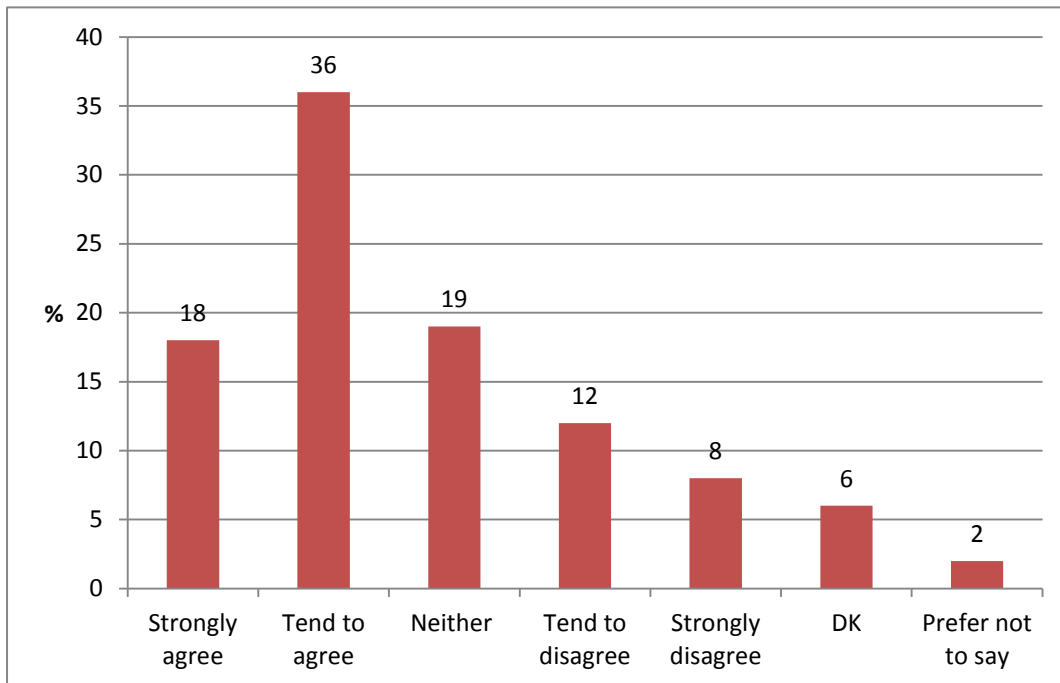
Adults taking young people’s views into account

Pupils were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that adults in general, such as their family, teachers, youth workers, sport coaches or scouts/Guides leaders, are good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them. This question was intended to gauge whether young people feel that adults take action after listening to their views.

² The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way. It ranks small areas (data zones) from most deprived to least deprived. SIMD quintiles are bands containing 20% of data zones, from most deprived (SIMD1) to least deprived (SIMD5).

As Figure 2.5 shows, just over half (53 per cent) of pupils agreed that adults take their views into account when making decisions (including 18 per cent strongly agreed). Just under two in ten disagreed (including 8 per cent who strongly disagreed).

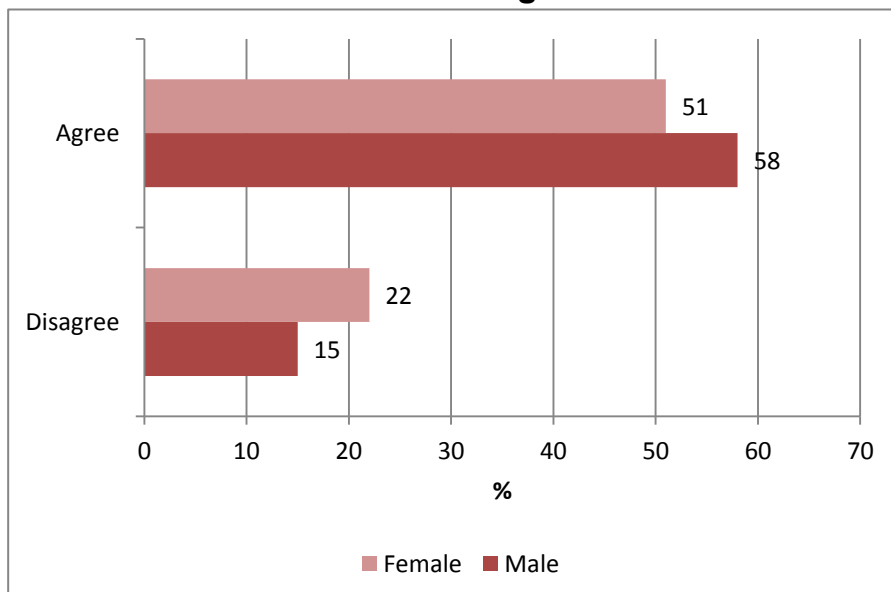
Figure 2.5 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me’



Base: 1781

As Figure 2.6 shows, boys were more positive than girls: among boys, 58 per cent agreed and 15 per cent disagreed that adults took their views into account when making decisions, compared to 51 per cent and 22 per cent among girls.

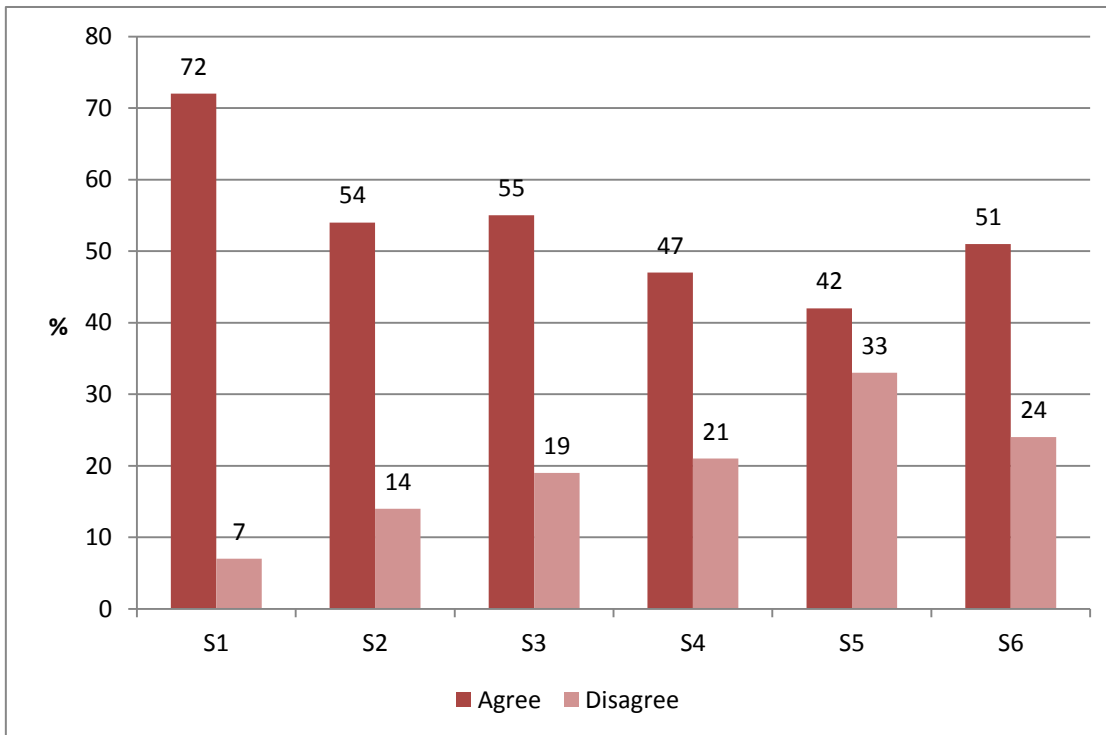
Figure 2.6 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me’, by gender



Base: 1715

As Figure 2.7 shows, perceptions were most positive in S1 (72 per cent of pupils agreed that adults take their decisions into account) and became progressively more negative up to S5 (42 per cent agreed), but then recovered slightly at S6 (51 per cent agreed).

Figure 2.7 Agreement with statement ‘Generally, adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me’, by school year



Base: 1755

Pupils with a physical or mental health condition were substantially less positive. Those with a health condition were twice as likely to disagree that their views are taken into account, than those without a health condition (30 per cent, compared with 15 per cent).

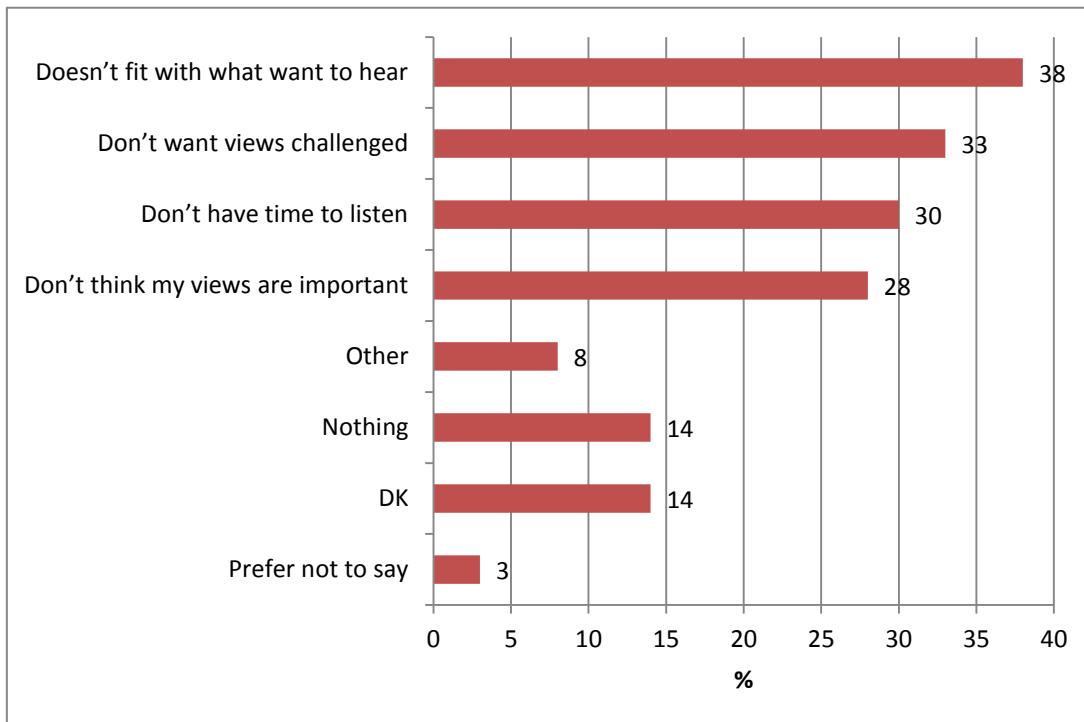
Barriers to listening

Survey respondents were asked what, if anything they thought stopped adults from listening to their views.

As Figure 2.8 shows, over two thirds of young people gave at least one barrier that stopped adults from listening to them from a pre-coded list. Just 14 per cent said that there were no barriers, and the same percentage said they didn't know.

The most commonly selected answer was 'it doesn't fit with what they want to hear' (38 per cent); followed by 'they don't like their views being challenged' (33 per cent); 'they don't have time to listen' (30 per cent); and 'they don't think my views are important' (28 per cent).

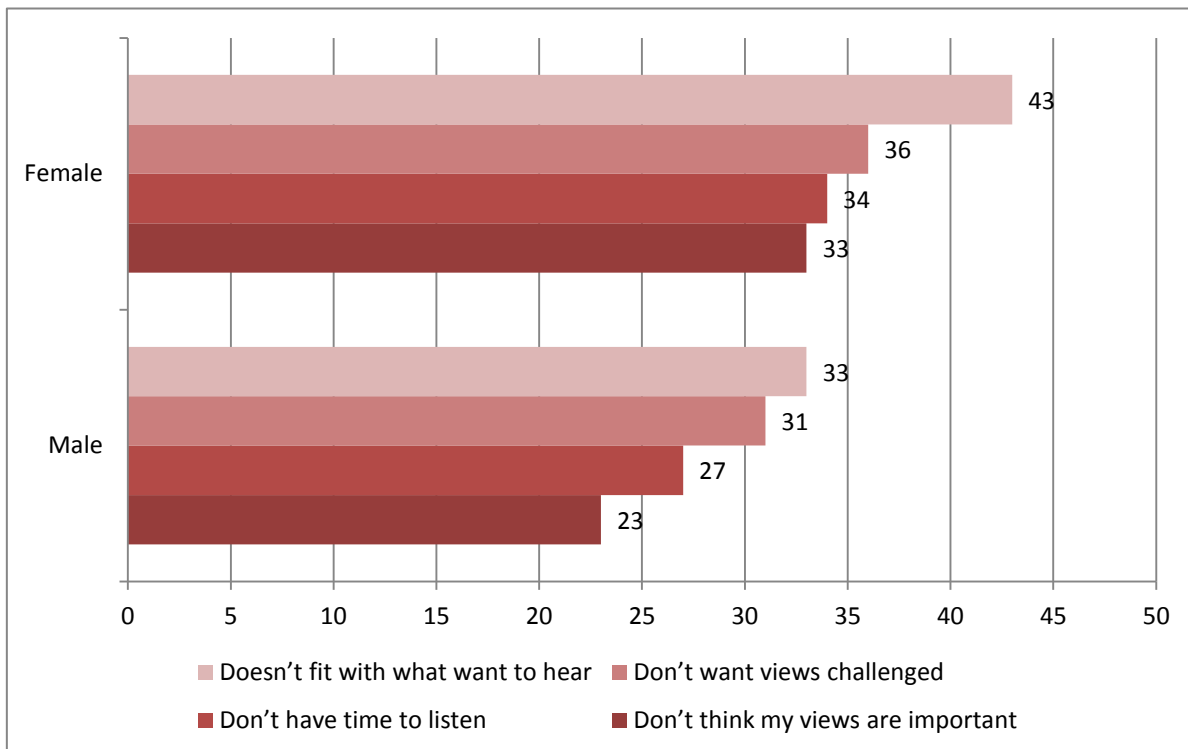
Figure 2.8 Barriers to adults listening to young people



Base: 1781

As Figure 2.9 shows, girls were more likely to select each of the barriers (including other) than boys. However, there was no statistically significant gender difference in the percentage of respondents saying that there there were no barriers.

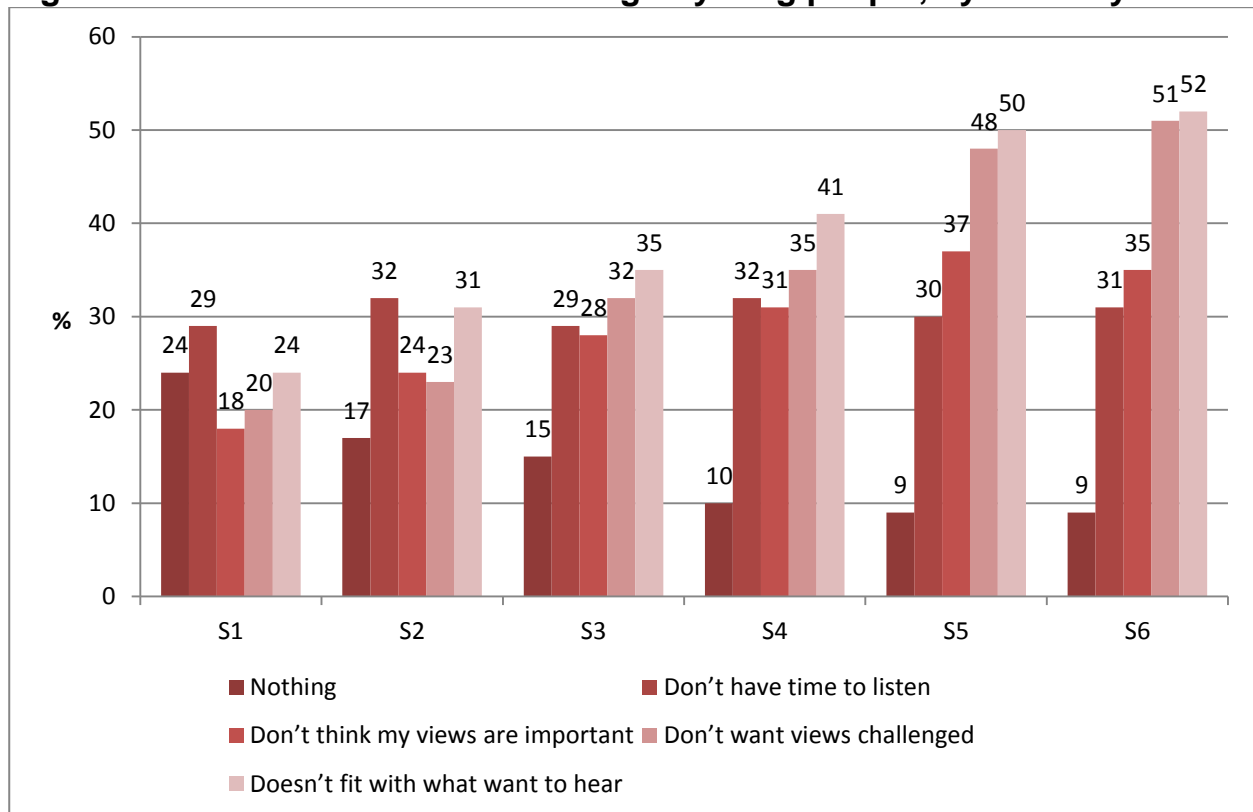
Figure 2.9 Barriers to adults listening to young people, by gender



Base: 1715

As Figure 2.10 shows, the percentage selecting most of the barriers increased consistently with school years. For example, S6 pupils were more than twice as likely (52 per cent) to give ‘it doesn’t fit with what they want to hear’ as a reason for adults not listening to them than S1 pupils (24 per cent). The only exception to this pattern was the statement ‘they don’t have time to listen’, which was selected by around three in ten pupils in all school years.

Figure 2.10 Barriers to adults listening to young people, by school year



Base: 1755

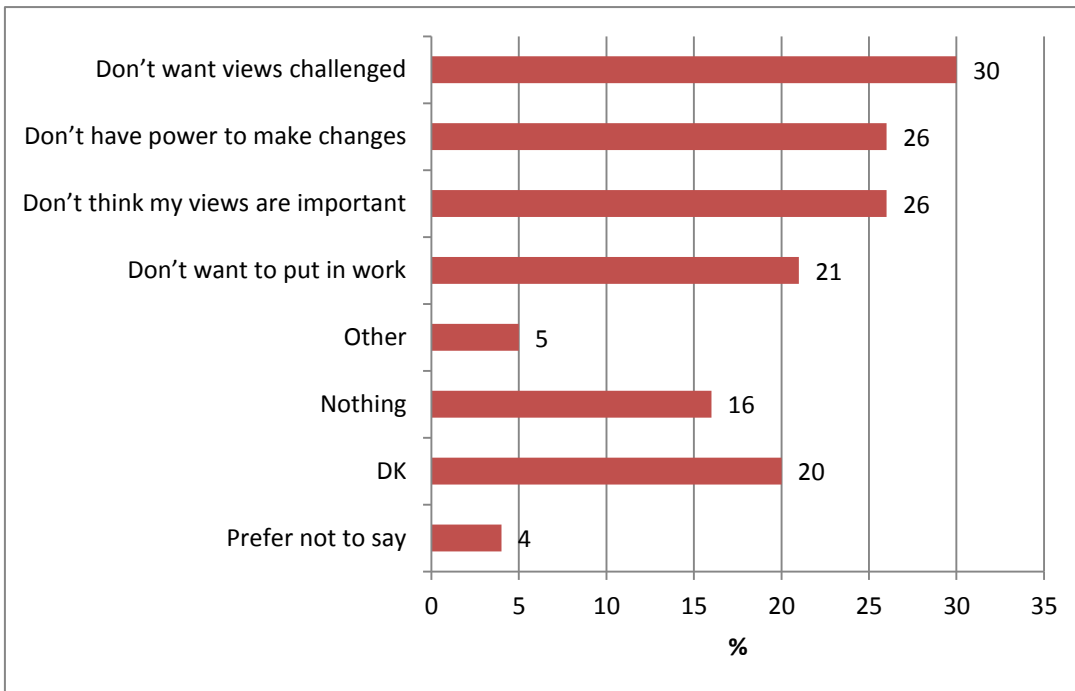
Young people with a physical or mental health condition were more likely to select all options, particularly ‘they don’t think my views are important’, which was selected by 37 per cent, compared to 26 per cent among those without a health condition.

Barriers to taking young people’s views into account

Respondents were then asked what they saw as the barriers to adults taking their views into account when making decisions. As Figure 2.11 shows, the most commonly selected statement was ‘they don’t like their views being challenged’ (30 per cent); followed by ‘they don’t have the power to make any changes’ (26 per cent); ‘they don’t think that my views are important’ (also 26 per cent) and ‘they don’t want to put in the work to make any changes’ (21 per cent). The percentage saying they didn’t know was high at 20 per cent.

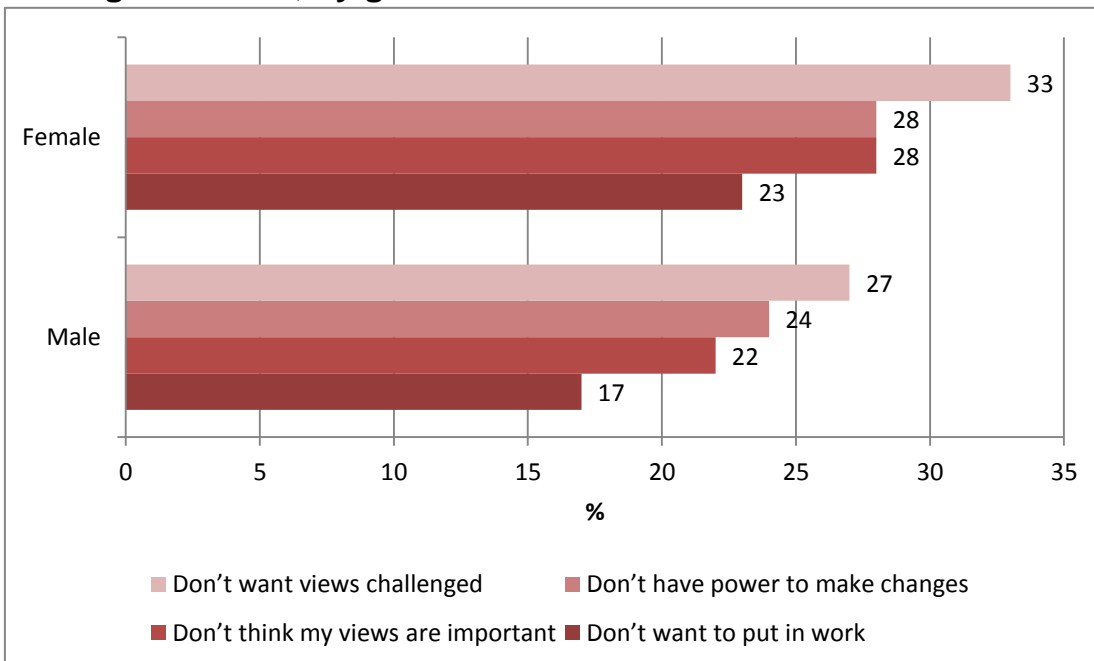
Again, girls were more likely than boys select each statement, and were also less likely to say that there were no barriers or that they didn’t know. Figure 2.12 presents these findings.

Figure 2.11 Barriers to adults taking young people’s views into account when making decisions



Base: 1781

Figure 2.12 Barriers to adults taking young people’s views into account when making decisions, by gender

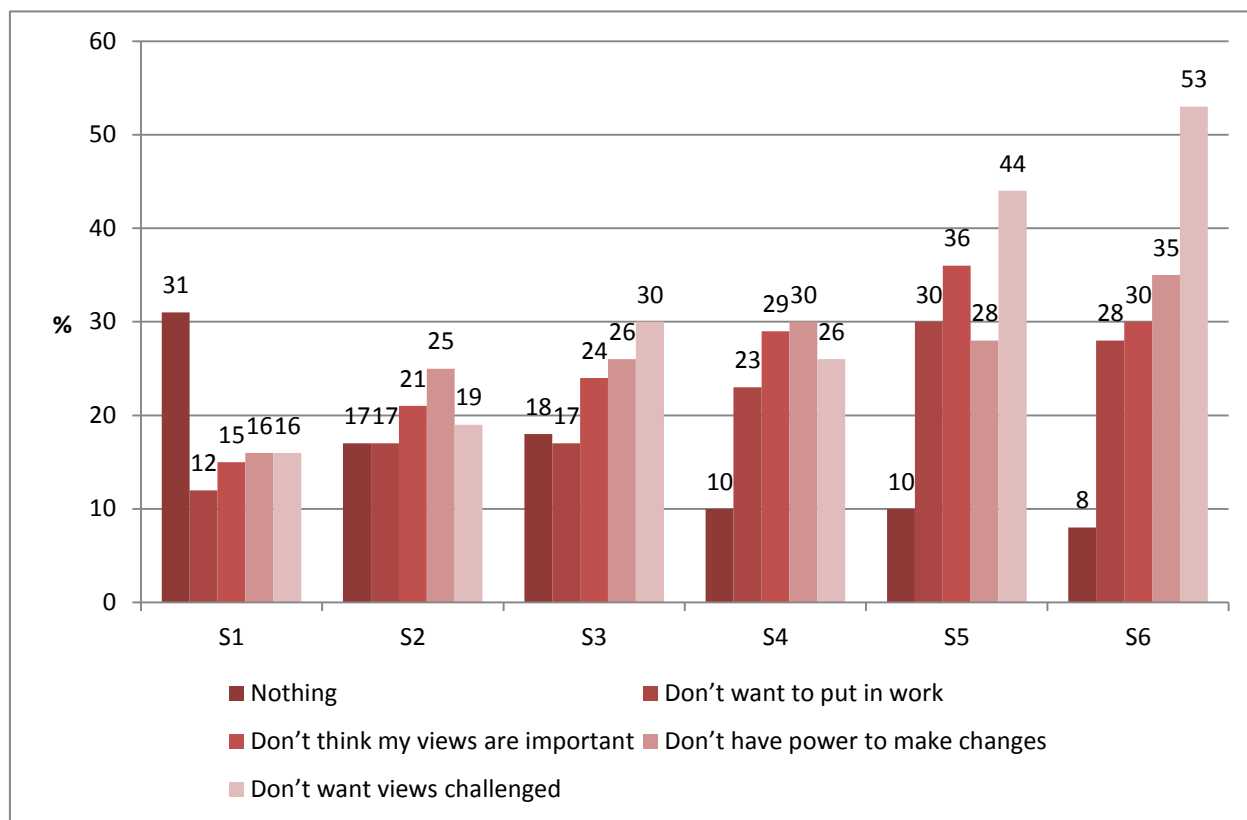


Base: 1715

As Figure 2.13 shows, the percentage selecting each option broadly increased with school year, although not quite as consistently as for the previous question. The gap between S1 and S6 views was very wide: Pupils in S1 were nearly four times as likely to say that there were no barriers (31 per cent compared to 8 per cent in

S6), and more three times as likely to feel that adults don't like their views being challenged (16 per cent compared to 53 per cent).

Figure 2.13 Barriers to adults taking young people's views into account when making decisions, by school year



Base: 1755

Pupils with a physical or mental health condition were more likely to select all options, in particular 'they don't want to put in the work to make any changes' (30 per cent compared to 19 per cent of those without a health condition) and 'they don't think my views are important' (30 per cent compared to 24 per cent of those without a health condition).

3. Views on decision making in out-of-school activities

Pupils who took part in out-of-school activities and groups were also asked a series of similar questions about their perceptions of adults regarding decision making in those activities.

Just under two thirds (63 per cent) took part in out-of-school activities. Participation was highest among S1 pupils (77 per cent) and then reduced to S5 (53 per cent), increasing again in S6 (65 per cent). White pupils, children without a health condition, and those living in the least deprived areas were slightly more likely to participate in such activities.

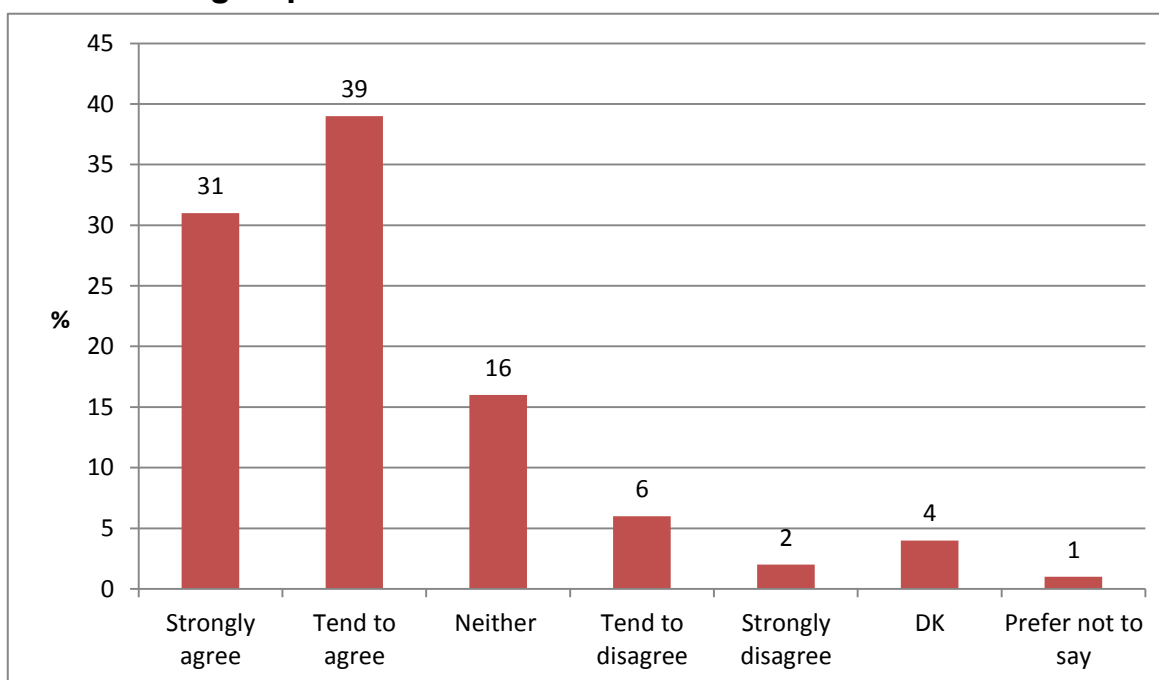
Pupils were asked to agree or disagree with three statements about the adults that run these out-of-school activities:

- I feel able to let the adults know my views on how those groups/activities are run
- Adults are good at listening to my views, in those groups/activities
- Adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me, in those groups/activities

Ability to make views known

Perceptions of adults running out-of-school activities were more positive than for adults in general. Seven in ten respondents agreed that they could let adults who run these groups or activities know their views on how the groups or activities were run (just under a third agreed strongly). Eight per cent disagreed (two per cent disagreed strongly). Figure 3.1 illustrates.

Figure 3.1 Agreement with statement ‘I feel able to let adults know my views on how the groups/activities are run’



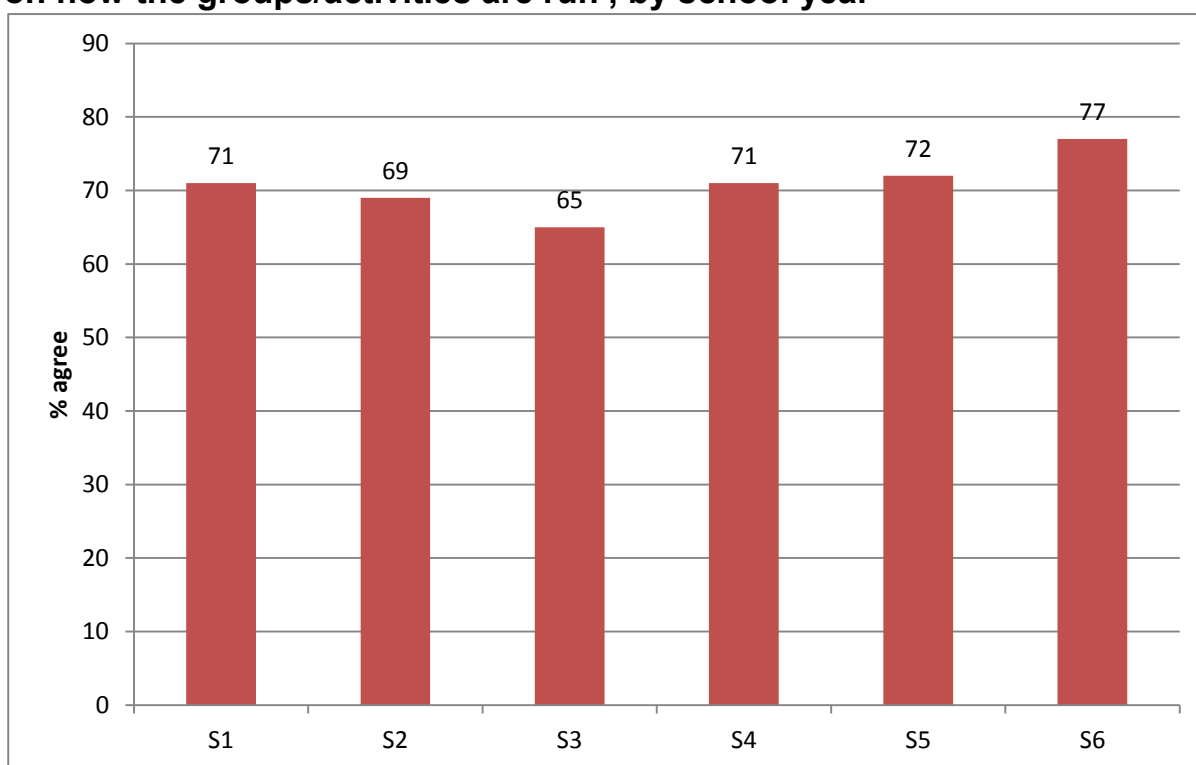
Base: 1137

Boys were more positive, with 74 per cent saying they agreed that they could make their views known, compared to 67 per cent of girls.

Unlike previous questions, there was no consistent pattern by school year. As Figure 3.2 shows, S6 pupils were most likely to agree (77 per cent) that they could make their views known, while S3 pupils were least likely to agree (65 per cent). The other school years were broadly similar (69 to 72 per cent). There was also little difference between any school years in the percentage of pupils that disagreed.

Pupils with a physical or mental health condition were less likely to agree (64 per cent) than those without one (73 per cent).

Figure 3.2 Agreement with statement ‘I feel able to let adults know my views on how the groups/activities are run’, by school year



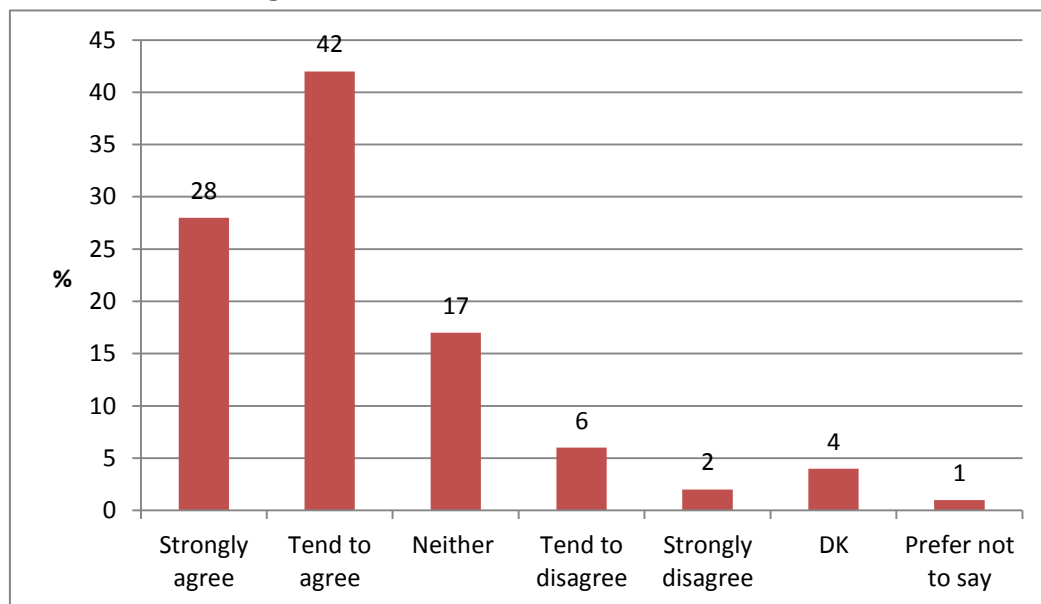
Base: 1127

Adults listening to young people

Pupils were also asked their views on adults who run the groups and activities listening to their views. As Figure 3.3 shows, seven in ten respondents agreed that adults running the groups or activities were good at listening to their views (just under three in ten who strongly agreed). Eight per cent disagreed (two per cent strongly disagreed).

The gender difference was relatively small, with 73 per cent of boys and 68 per cent of girls agreeing that adults are good at listening to their views.

Figure 3.3 Agreement with statement ‘Adults are good at listening to my views, in these groups/activities’

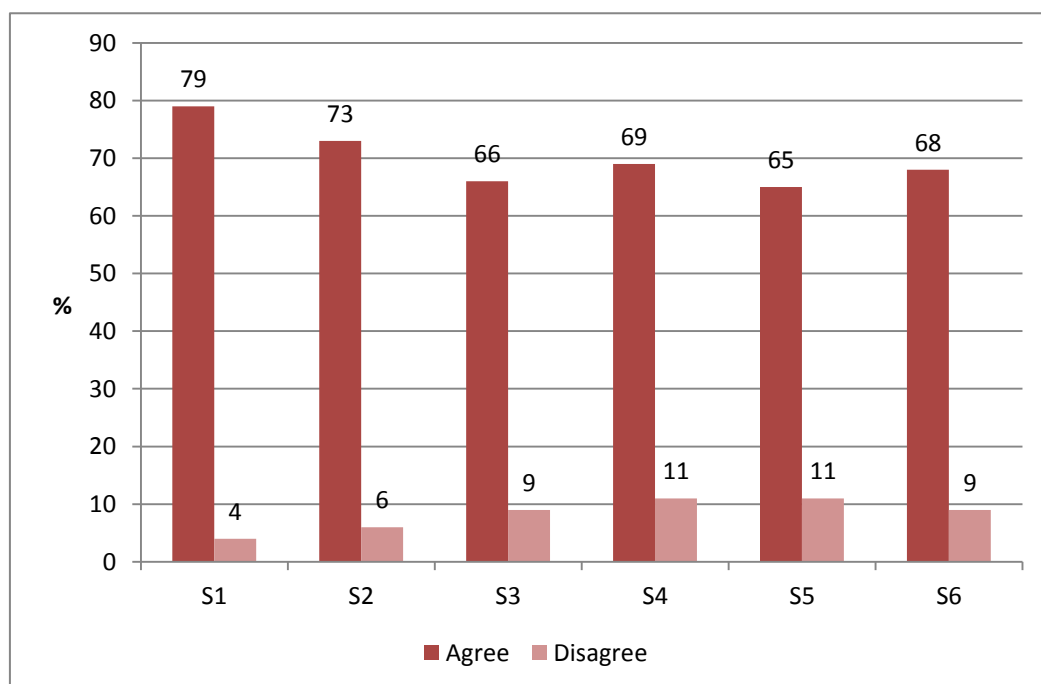


Base: 1137

S1 pupils were most likely to agree that adults running the groups or activities were good at listening to their views (79 per cent), and S5 pupils the least likely (65 per cent). Figure 3.4 presents data.

Pupils from the least deprived quintile were most likely to agree that adults running the groups or activities were good at listening to their views (76 per cent) compared to other quintiles (66 to 71 per cent). There was no consistent pattern within this.

Figure 3.4 Agreement with statement ‘Adults are good at listening to my views, in these groups/activities’, by school year

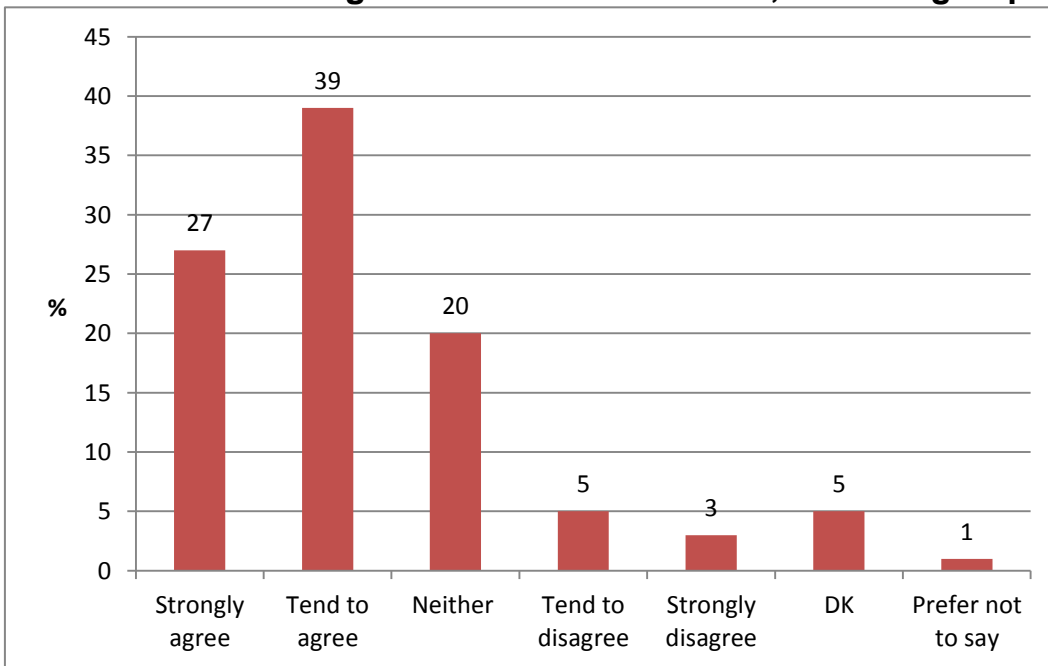


Base: 1127

Adults taking young people’s views into account

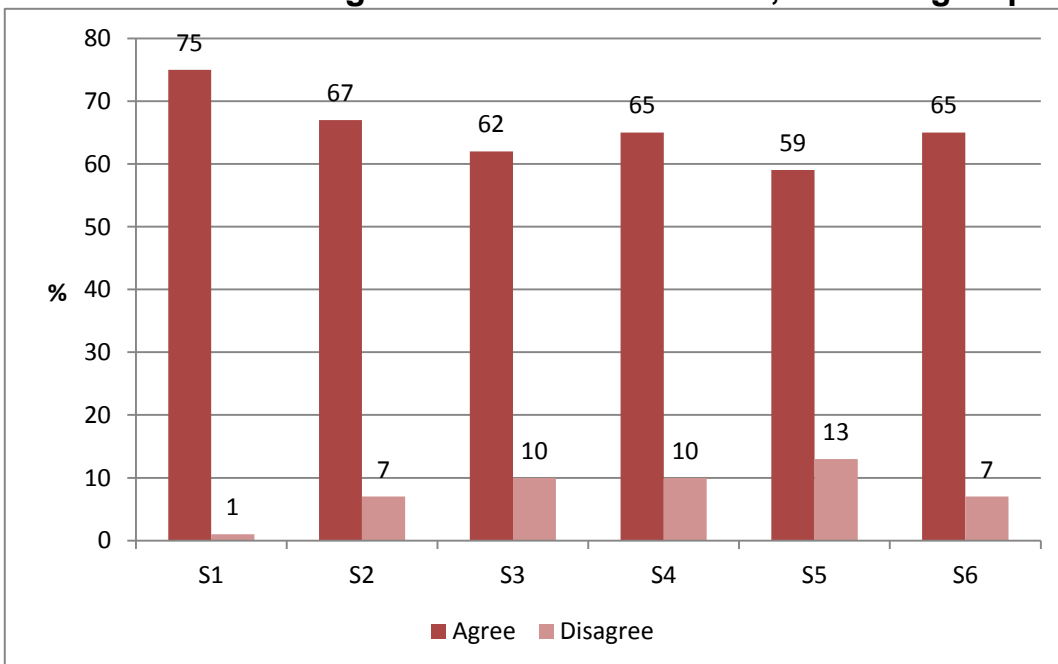
Finally, pupils were asked how good the adults who run the groups or activities are at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them. As Figure 3.5 shows, two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) agreed that adults in the groups or activities were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them, while only 8 per cent disagreed.

Figure 3.5 Agreement with statement ‘Adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me, in these groups/activities’



Base: 1137

Figure 3.6 Agreement with statement ‘Adults are good at taking my views into account when making decisions that affect me, in these groups/activities’



Base: 1127

As Figure 3.6 shows, S1 pupils were most likely to agree that adults in the groups or activities were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them (75 per cent), and S5 pupils the least likely (59 per cent). There was no consistent pattern for other years, although the percentage that disagreed increased between S1 and S5.

Pupils from the least deprived quintile were most likely to agree that adults in the groups or activities were good at taking their views into account when making decisions that affect them (72 per cent) compared to the other quintiles (61 to 66 per cent).

4. Views on decision making in schools

The survey also included a number of questions on how much say pupils have in the running of their school. Wording is slightly different as these questions were commissioned as part of a separate question set, but they complement the questions about out of school activities.

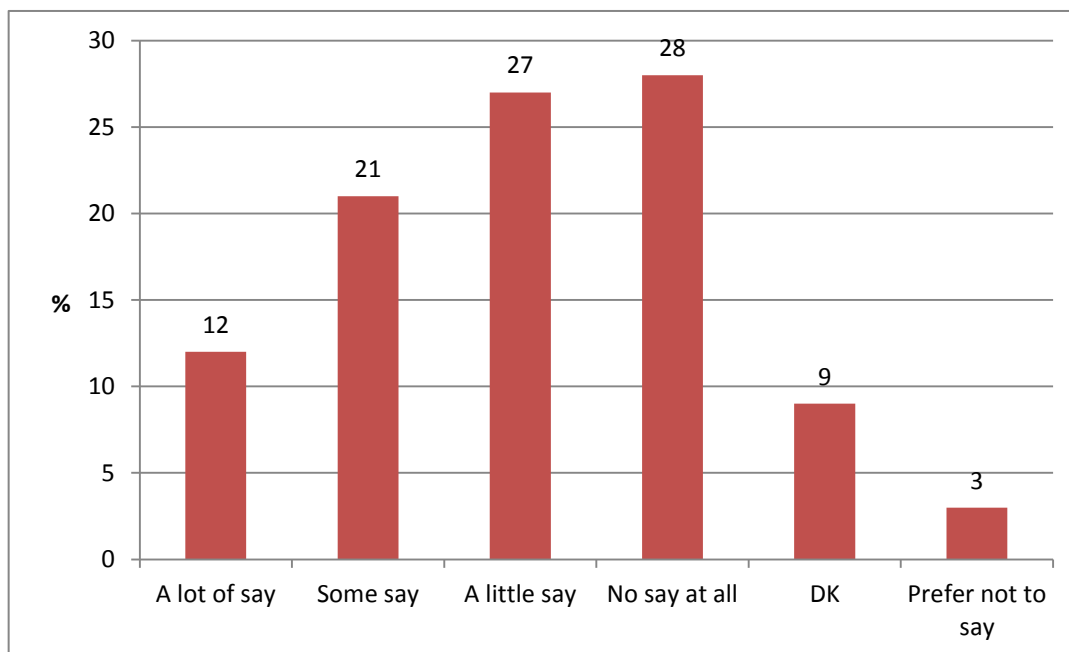
Pupils were asked how much say they have over:

- What they learn
- How they learn, defined as 'which teaching and learning methods are used or which activities they do'
- Decisions which affect the school as a whole

What they learn

As Figure 4.1 shows, a third of students said that they had either 'a lot' (12 per cent) or 'some' (21 per cent) say in what they learn. Over half (55 per cent) said they had 'little' (27 per cent) or 'no' (28 per cent) say in what they learn.

Figure 4.1 How much say young people have on what they learn

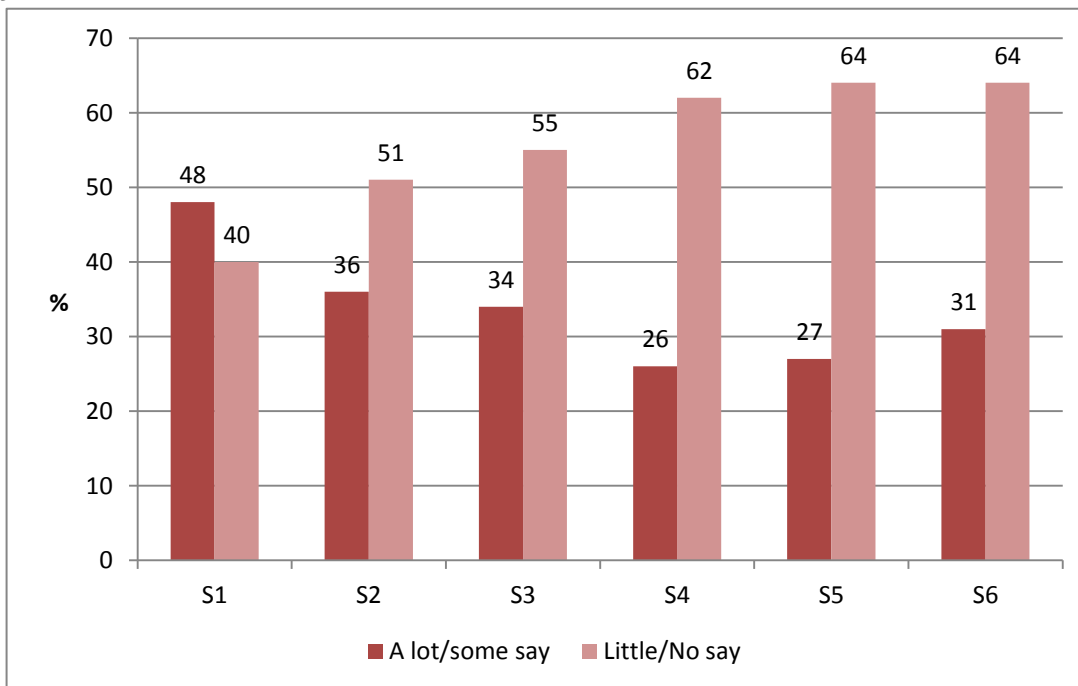


Base: 1781

Girls were more negative than boys, with 60 per cent saying that they had little or no say over what they learn, compared to 51 per cent of boys.

As Figure 4.2 shows, the percentage saying they had little or no say increased consistently with school year, from 40 per cent in S1, to 64 per cent in S6. The percentage saying they have a lot or of say decreased in line with this.

Figure 4.2 How much say young people have on what they learn, by school year



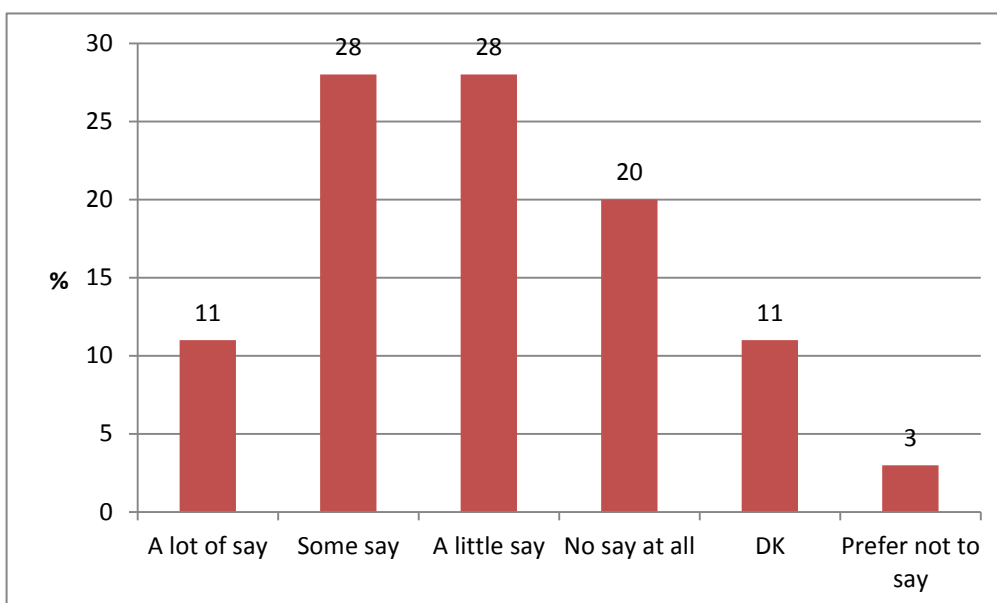
Base: 1755

There was no consistent pattern by area deprivation.

How they learn

When asked about how they learn, just under four in ten young people felt that they had ‘a lot’ (11 per cent) or ‘some’ (28 per cent) say in how they learn. Just under half said that they had ‘little’ (28 per cent) or ‘no’ (20 per cent) say in how they learn. Figure 4.3 illustrates.

Figure 4.3 How much say young people have on how they learn



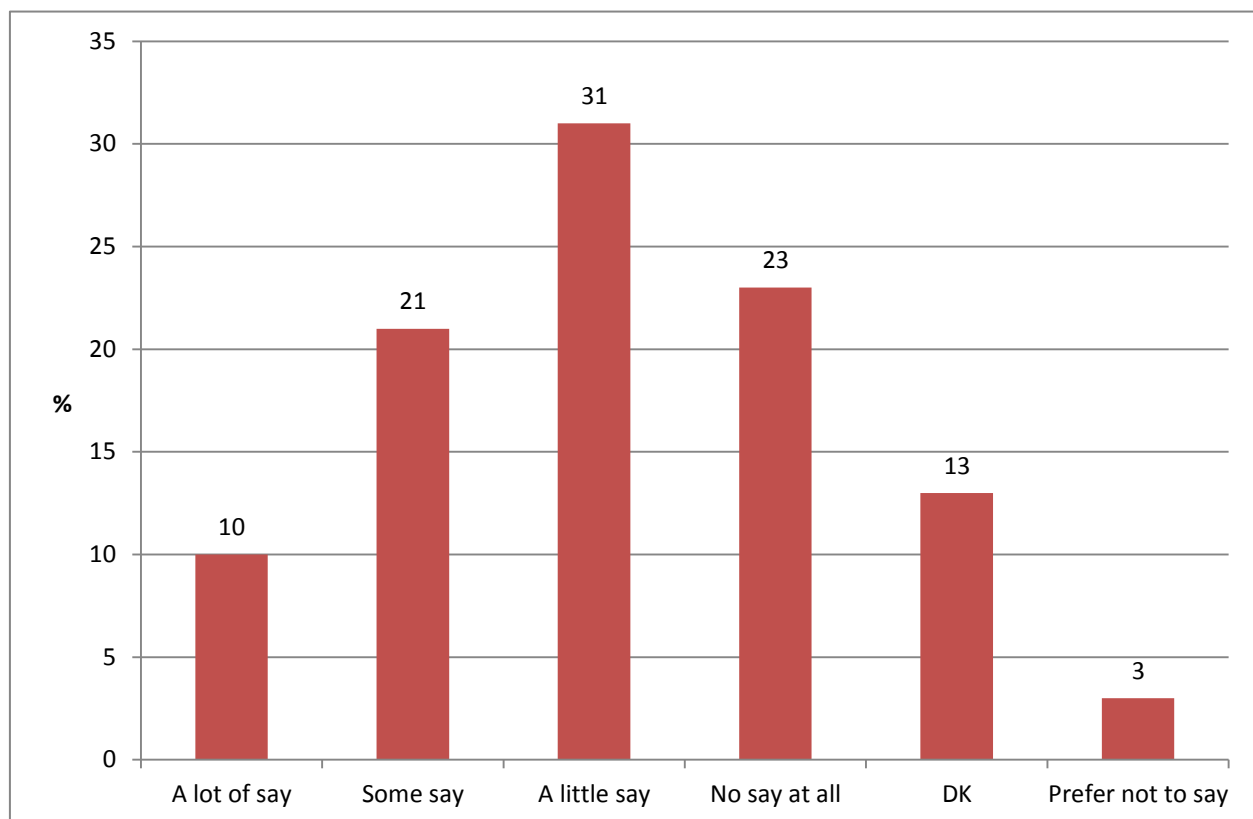
Base: 1781

Those in S1 were more positive than other school years. There were no other meaningful socio-demographic differences in findings.

Decisions affecting the whole school

Finally, survey respondents were asked how much say they had over decisions that affected the whole school. Just under a third of students said that they had either 'a lot' (10 per cent) or 'some' (21 per cent) say over decisions that affect their school as a whole. Over half said they had 'little' (31 per cent) or 'no' (23 per cent) say over decisions that affect their school as a whole. Figure 4.4 illustrates.

Figure 4.4 How much say young people have on decisions affecting the school as a whole



Base: 1781

S1 pupils were more positive than other school years. There were no other meaningful socio-demographic differences in findings.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact **socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk** for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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