

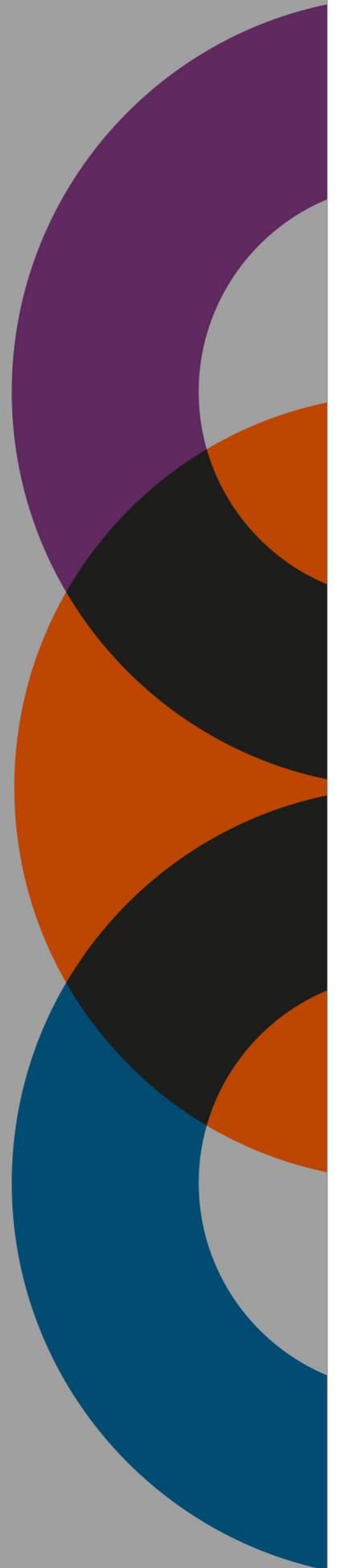


The Listening Fund: Organisational listening self-assessment

Summary report

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The organisational listening self-assessment

This report was prepared as part of the Centre for Youth Impact's evaluation of [the Listening Fund](#) (LF). It offers descriptive summary analysis of the results of the initial organisational listening self-assessment completed by funded partners. This descriptive analysis will be combined with other future elements of the evaluation to offer more detailed analysis and practical recommendations. The self-assessment takes a broad conception of organisational listening drawing on Mcnamara's¹ 'architecture of listening' framework which adopts the following definition:

"Organizational listening is comprised of the culture, policies, structure, processes, resources, skills, technologies and practices applied by an organization to give recognition, acknowledgement, attention, interpretation, understanding, consideration, and response to its stakeholders and publics." (p19)

As far as we are aware, no self-assessment of organisational listening exists and so this was developed specifically for the Listening Fund although it is hoped that it will have relevance and use beyond the life of the LF. The self-assessment was developed by the Centre for Youth Impact and refined through stakeholder engagement and cognitive testing with four organisations who were not funded as part of the LF. The online self-assessment form contains 26 questions relating to Mcnamara's dimensions of organisational listening adapted for the specific context of organisations that listen to and with young people. Data was collected between April and June 2018 via SurveyMonkey. Organisations were encouraged to print off a copy of the self-assessment and complete it with at least one other person in their organisation. This likely included someone with a strategic overview of the organisation and someone who plays an active role in the organisation's listening practice. Completion of the self-assessment was entirely voluntary with 21 of the 22 LF funded organisations or 'partners' submitting a response (a response rate of 95%)². Data for this summary was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010. Open responses were subjected to thematic analysis.

Reflections and limitations of the self-assessment

Before exploring the findings, it is worth outlining the strengths and limitations of the self-assessment. The overall feedback from partners was that the survey was both valid as an assessment of organisational listening practice and useful as a reflective tool to plan improvements. One respondent felt that the self-assessment *"made us think and evaluate our current process"*. Importantly, the assessment was seen to celebrate and recognise good practice with one partner saying *"in filling in this self-evaluation we are proud of the depth of listening we already partake in as an organisation, but we also recognise there is always room for improvement"*. Crucially some felt that the self-assessment had given new insights and as one partner put it *"the questionnaire made it clearer to us, that whilst we believe to have the tools and procedures in place to actively listen to*

¹ Macnamara, J. (2015). Creating an "architecture of listening" in organizations. *UTS, Sydney*.

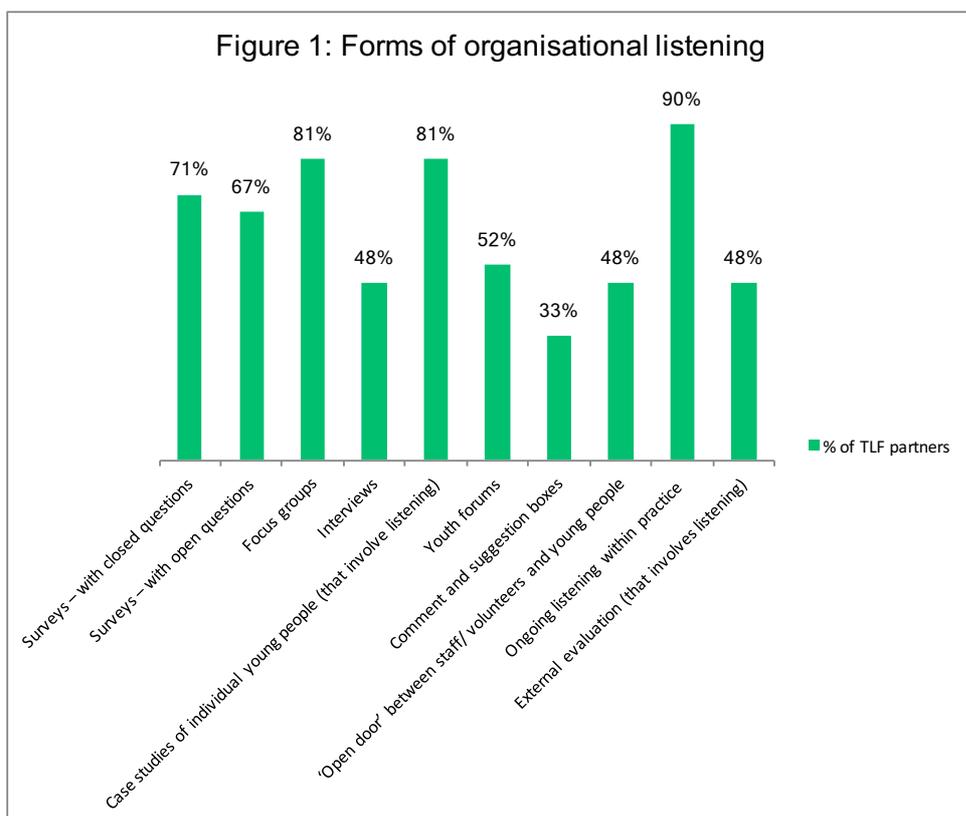
² The data presented here is from all 21 respondents unless otherwise stated

young people, we need to increase our efforts in communicating our learnings with individuals and ‘closing the loop’”. However, the self-assessment has limitations that were highlighted by partners – two in particular. Firstly, despite the adoption of a broad definition of organisational listening a small number of partners felt that the conception contained within it did not apply to their work either because a “focus on ‘listening’ is a bit limited because we don’t just ask young people their views, we co-produce our work with them as much as possible as soon as possible” and because one partner’s project is focused on “the political challenge of ensuring that adults in authority actually listen and respond to what they are saying” – rather than intra-organisational listening practice as such. Secondly, as an organisational self-assessment the tool was seen as limited in capturing the variance within organisations between different projects, teams and individuals. In an attempt to integrate this in to the assessment, partners were strongly encouraged to involve multiple perspectives in completing the survey and there is a question which asks directly how varied listening practice is within the organisation. Table 1 below shows that there was also variance across partners in the perceived variety of listening practice within partner organisations.

Table 1: The extent to which listening practice varies across their organisation (%)

5 - a great deal	14%
4	33%
3	29%
2	24%
1 - not at all	0%

The type, regularity and nature of listening undertaken



As can be seen in Figure 1 below, LF partners are already engaged in a large number of different forms of listening. Almost all (90%) undertake *ongoing listening within practice*, four fifths (81%) undertake *focus groups* and four fifths (81%) collect *case studies of individual young people (with some element of listening)*.

Half (48%) undertake *interviews* and *external evaluation*. Half (48%) also have youth forums. Almost half (48%) of partners said they undertake some form of listening with young people weekly, 14% undertook some form of listening with young people monthly, 29% quarterly and 10% either annually or less often. Half of partners (48%) engaged young people anonymously in organisational listening and half (52%) did so non-anonymously. Less than 10% (n=2) partners have an organisational listening policy with 90% not having one.

Who is engaged in organisational listening

Partners were asked to estimate the proportion of young people who engage in at least one form of listening. As can be seen from table 2, this varies considerably across LF partners. A third (35%) engage 76%-100%, a fifth (20%) engage 51%-75% and just under half (45%) engage less than half of the young people they work with in at least one form of listening. These figures suggest considerable variance in the proportion of young people engaged in listening although they are likely to be an approximation.

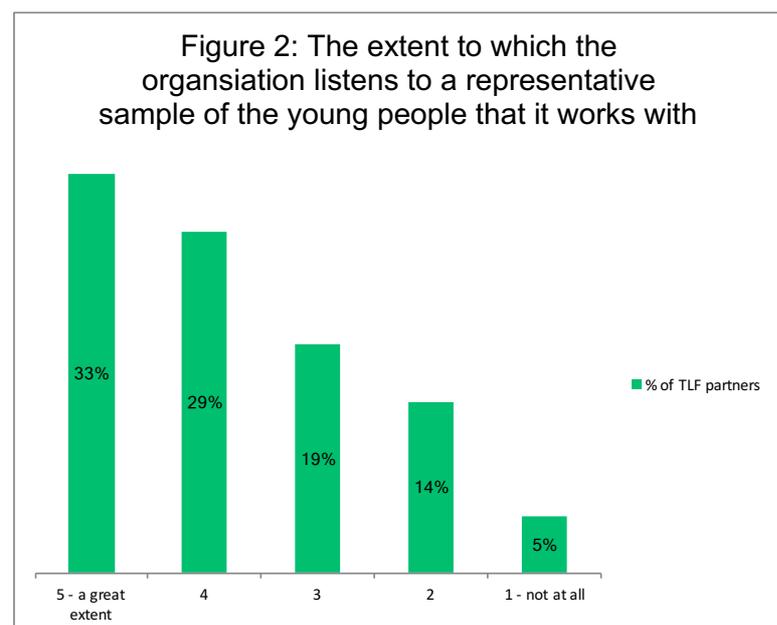
Table 2: Proportion of young people who engage in at least one form of listening (% of TLF partners)

0-25%	15%
26-50%	30%
51%-75%	20%
76%-100%	35%

'Don't know' responses removed from analysis (n=20)

Overall, 14% of partners felt that the young people they work with are willing to engage in their organisation's listening to a great extent on a five-point scale (with 5 being 'to a great extent'). A third (33%) rated the willingness at 4, 29% rated it 3 and 24% rated it 2. No partners rated the extent of willingness of their young people to engage as 'not at all'.

Figure 2, shows that the extent to which LF partners listen to a representative sample of the young people that they work with – although, again, these figures are likely to be an approximation. By representative we mean that the types of young people that engage in listening activity are the



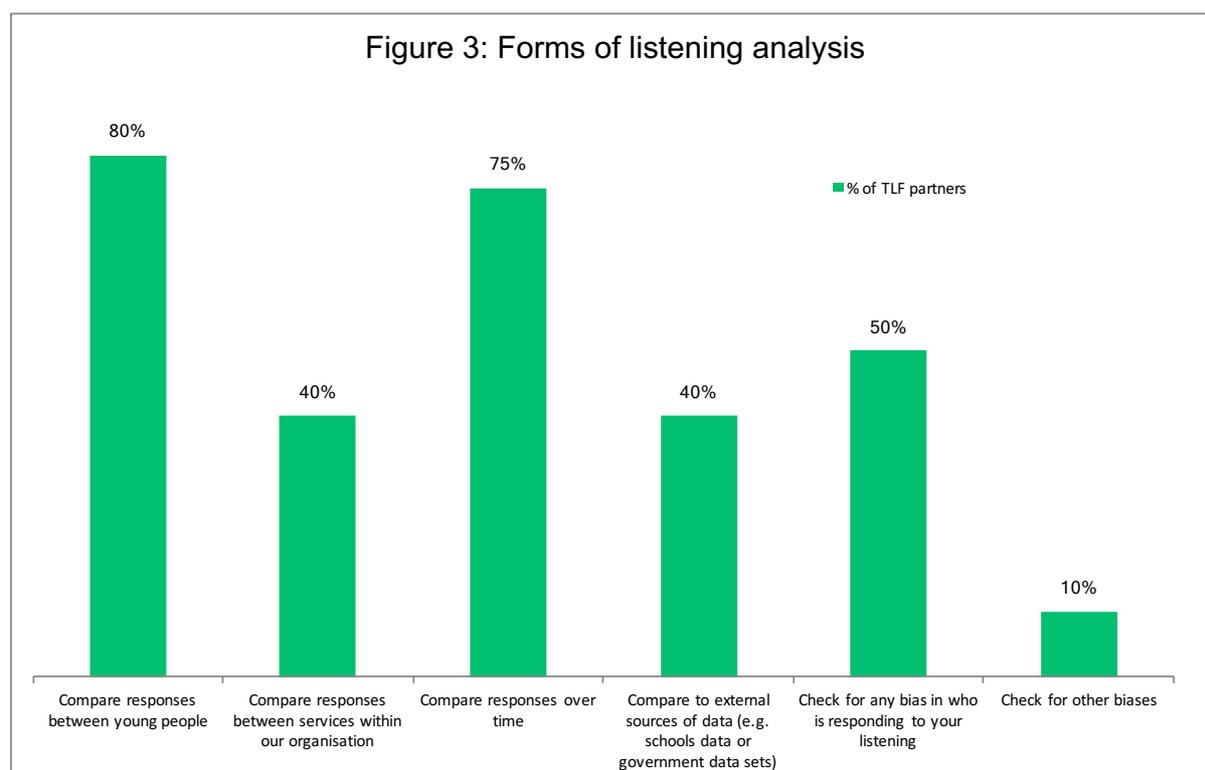
same types of young people who engage more broadly in their organisation's work. As can be seen, the perceived representativeness varied considerably with a third feeling their organisation listens to a representative sample of the young people they work with 'to a great extent'. A fifth (19%) rated themselves on the bottom two scales of a five-point scale on this question.

Two-thirds (67%) of partners actively undertook outreach activities in order to engage those groups who they have found it difficult to engage in listening,

with a third (33%) not doing so. Most of those who specified what these outreach activities were mentioned outreach in a specific place (e.g. schools, colleges, or youth centres) or through a specific activity (e.g. one-to-one or sports and dance).

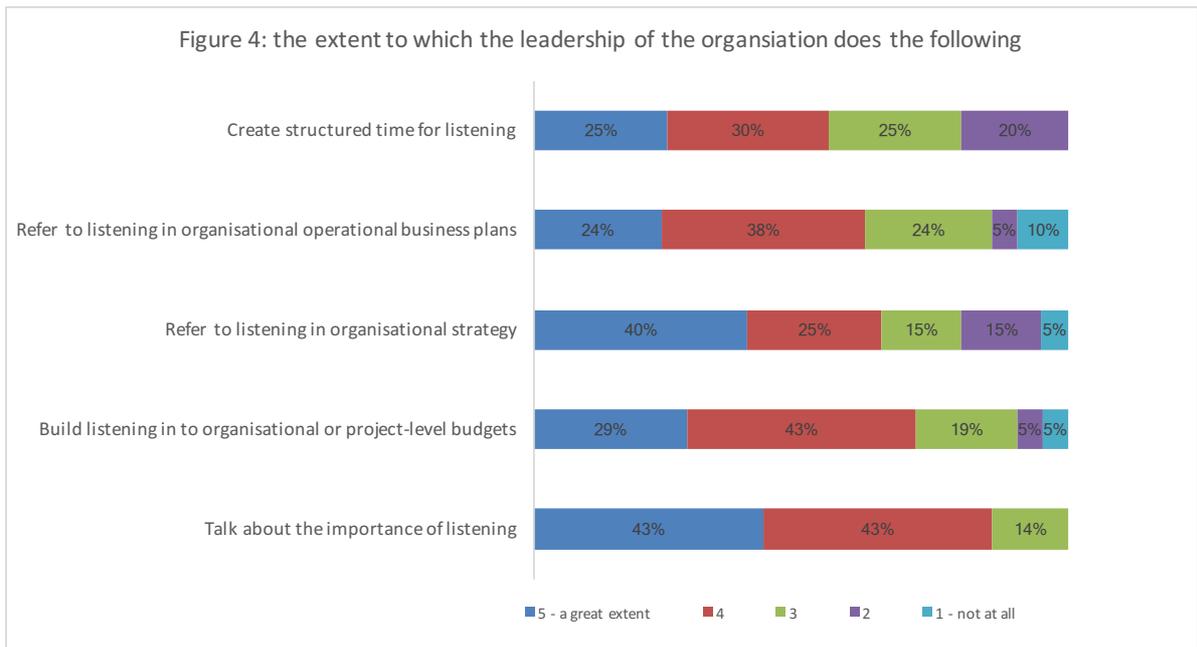
Analysis of organisational listening

Partners undertake a number of different forms of analysis of the data they gather through listening. The vast majority (80%) compare responses between different young people and three-quarters (75%) compare responses over time. Much less (50%), check for bias in who responds and two-fifths (40%) compare responses between services and to external data sources.



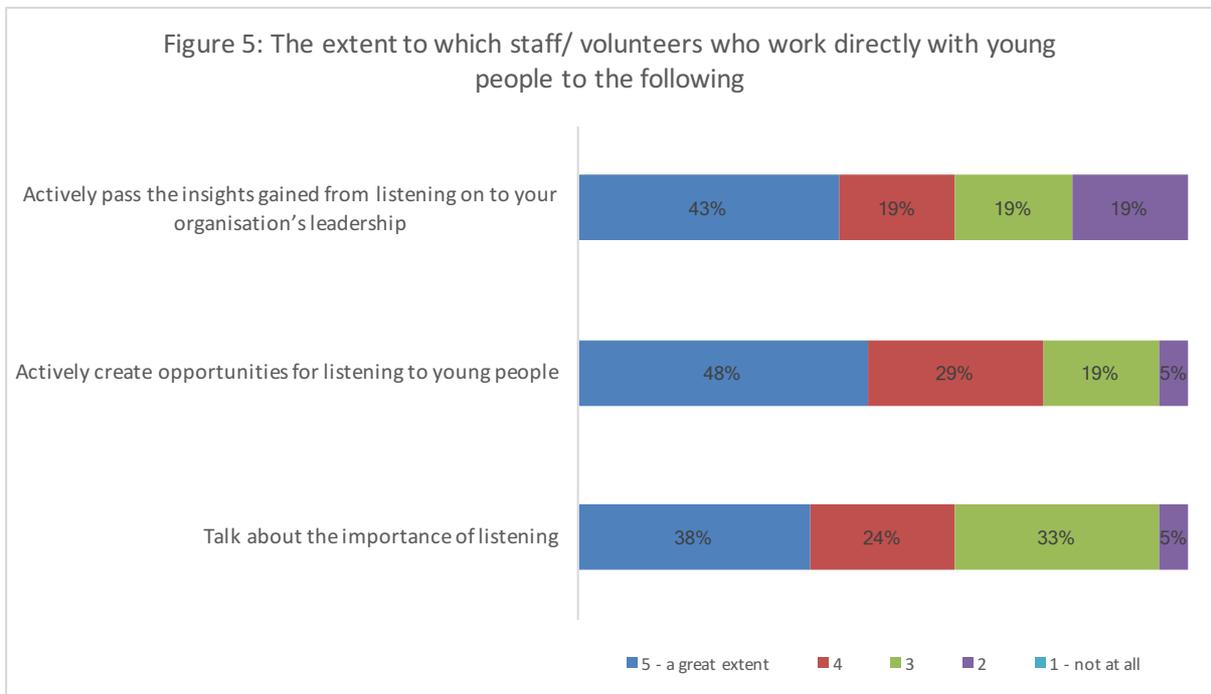
Leadership

Please note that the self-assessment of leadership will likely be affected by whether a member of the leadership team within the organisation was involved in completing the self-assessment, however, the analysis in figure 4 provides some useful insights. The highest scoring area for leadership was talking about the importance of listening (43% assessing as 'to a great extent') closely followed by referring to listening in organisational strategy (40%). Scores were lower for putting this in to practice including building listening in to project-level budgets (29%), in creating structured time for listening (25%) and in referring to listening in operational business plans (24%). Again, there was considerable variety across partners on all of these dimensions.



Staff and volunteers

As can be seen from figure 5, almost half (48%) of partners assessed that staff/ volunteers actively create opportunities for listening to young people to a great extent. Generally, the insights gained from listening were passed on to the organisation’s leadership.



Skills in organisational listening

Table 3 shows the perception of organisational skills in different areas of listening. Skills were most highly rated around individual case studies (75% rating this as very high skilled or high skilled) and focus groups (71% rating this as very high skilled or high skilled). Skills around youth forums were also rated highly although over a fifth (22%) rated their skills as low or very low in this area. The areas where skills were rated lowest were in undertaking interviews and in analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Table 3: Organisational skills in areas of listening

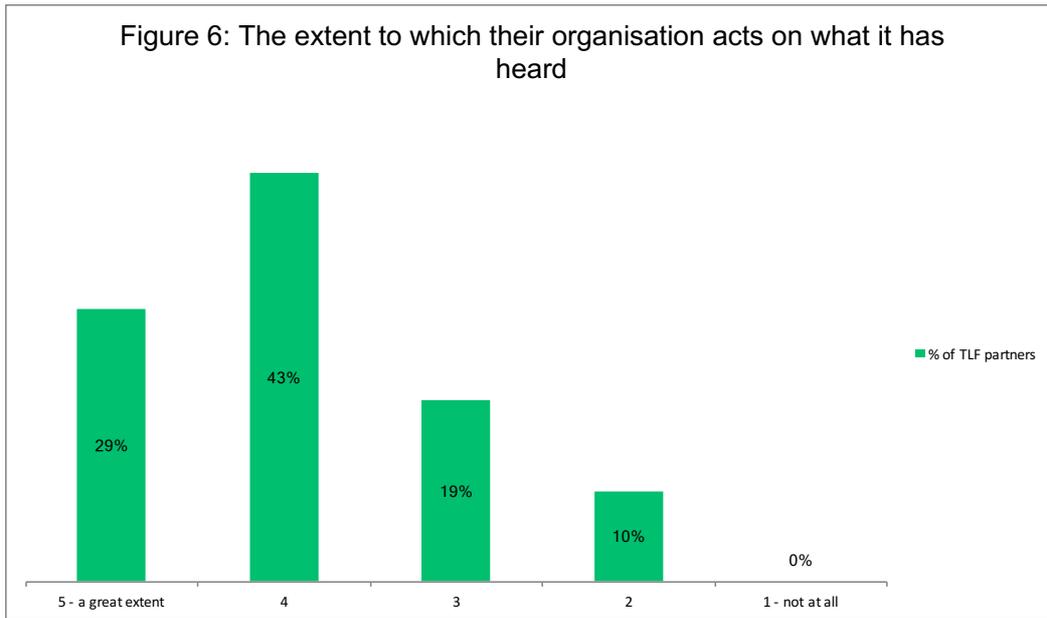
	Very high skilled	High skilled	Neither high nor low skilled	Low skilled	Very low skilled
Surveys	0%	63%	21%	16%	0%
Focus groups	24%	48%	10%	19%	0%
Interviews	0%	50%	30%	20%	0%
Case studies of individual young people (that involve listening)	40%	35%	20%	5%	0%
Youth forums	22%	44%	11%	17%	6%
Analysing quantitative data	19%	24%	43%	14%	0%
Analysing qualitative data	29%	24%	38%	10%	0%

Listening is included in at least one staff or volunteer's role description in three-quarters (71%) of partners. This included a wide diversity of roles ranging from programme managers, policy, frontline staff, mentors as well as dedicated engagement or involvement roles. Just over a quarter (29%) of partners had a specific budget line within the organisation for listening – with three-quarters (71%) not.

Sixty-two per cent of partners use some form of technology to support listening with 38% not using any. Of those who use some form of technology a wide diversity were mentioned including a range of communication tools (e.g. Slack, Zoom, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Step Chat, text message), a range of specific data collection tools (e.g. SurveyMonkey, video diaries) and a range of analysis tools (e.g. Lamplight, Salesforce, Watson analytics).

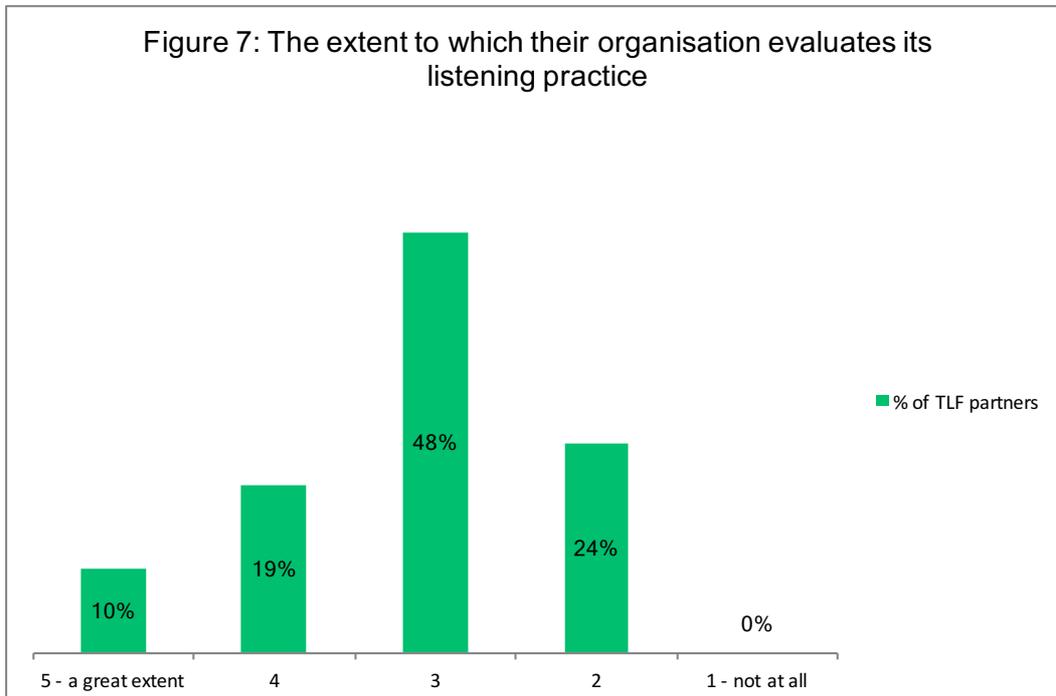
Acting on listening

Almost a third (29%) of partners assessed that their organisation acts on what it has heard to a great extent with a further 43% rating their organisation 4 on a five-point scale for extent of action (see figure 6). No partners felt they didn't act at all.



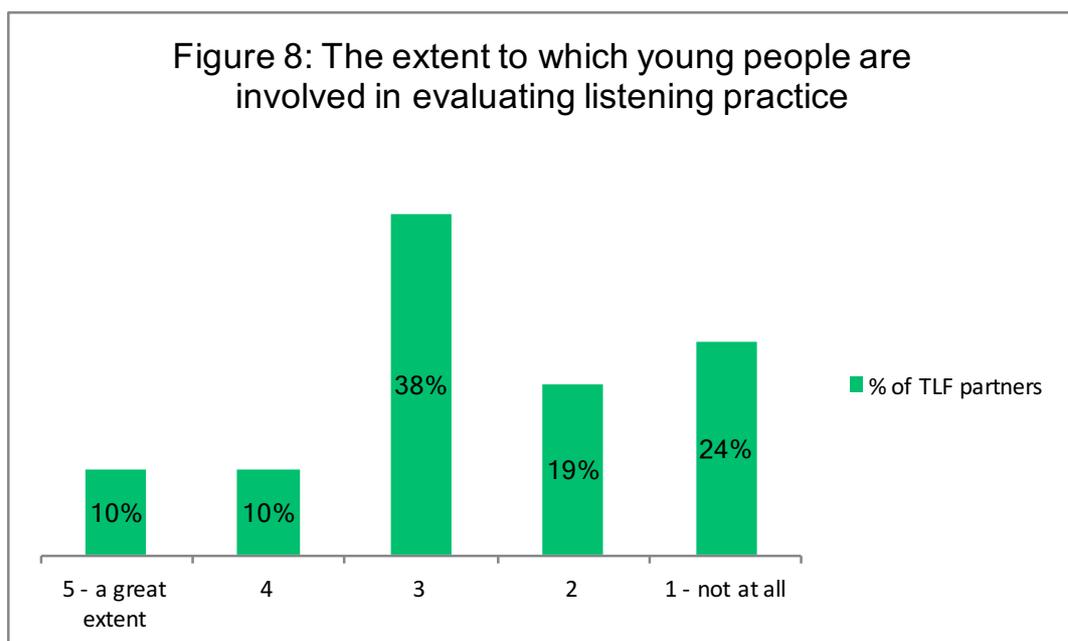
Evaluating listening (or listening about listening)

The scores were much lower for evaluating their own listening practice. A tenth (10%) said this was done to a great extent (see figure 7).



As can be seen from figure 8, the scores were yet lower for the involvement of young people in listening practice with a quarter (24%) not doing this at all.

Figure 8: The extent to which young people are involved in evaluating listening practice

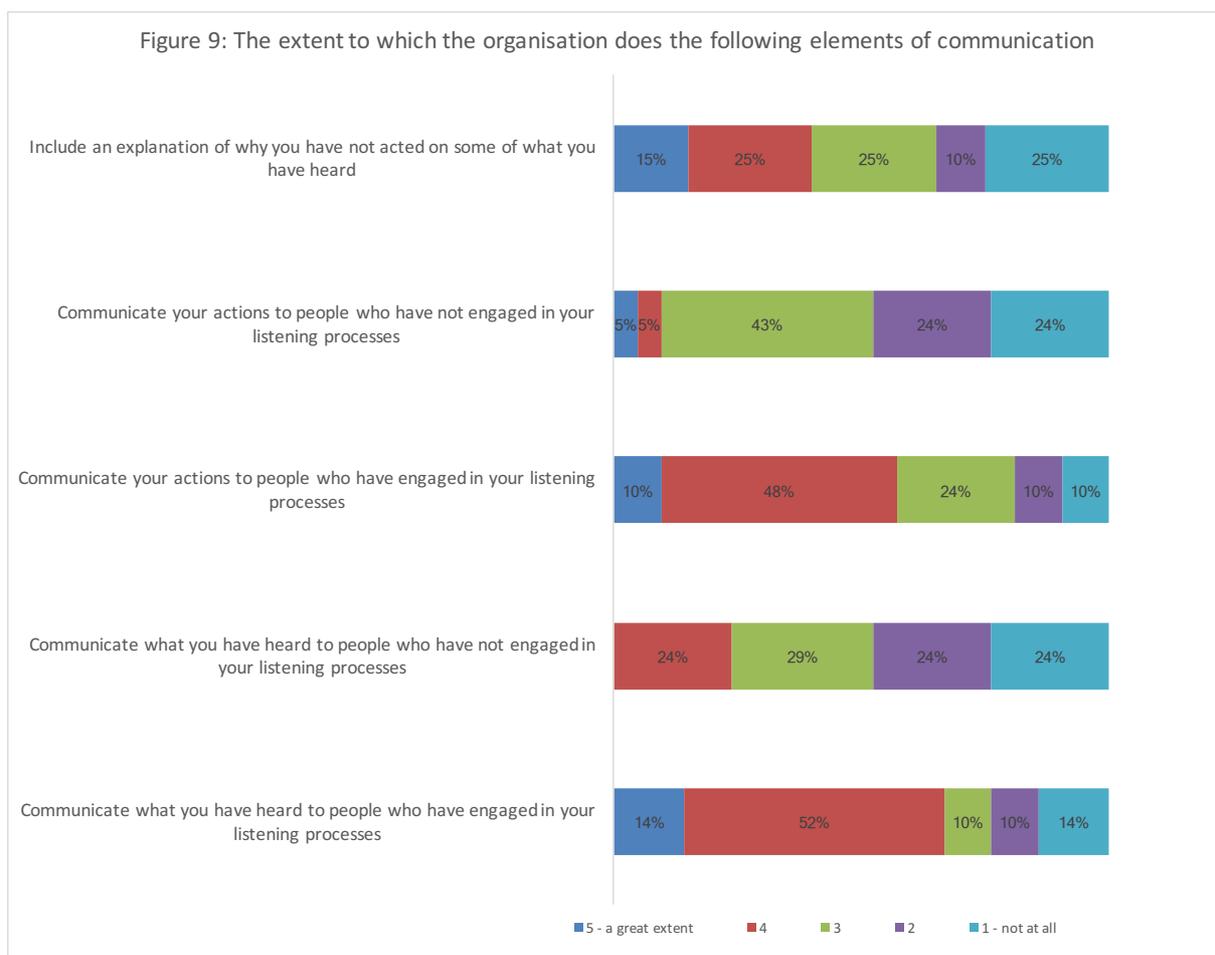


Communicating listening

The different types of communication of listening were undertaken to varying extents by organisations (see table 4 and figure 9). The highest scores were to communicate what was heard to those who engaged in the listening process (3.4/5) and to communicate actions to the same group (3.4/5). Scores were lower for partners explaining why they haven't acted and communicating to young people who have not engaged in the listening process.

Table 4: Types of communication undertaken.

Type of communication undertaken	Average score of extent (5 is high, 1 is low)
Include an explanation of why you have not acted on some of what you have heard	2.9
Communicate your actions to people who have not engaged in your listening processes	2.4
Communicate your actions to people who have engaged in your listening processes	3.4
Communicate what you have heard to people who have not engaged in your listening processes	2.5
Communicate what you have heard to people who have engaged in your listening processes	3.4



Use and framing of listening

Table 5 and figure 10 show the results for what listening is used for – presented in different ways. As can be seen, the highest scoring use was to give young people an opportunity to express themselves. The lowest scoring use was to influence the fundamental strategic direction of the organisation (although listening was still perceived to be used for this to a high extent).

Table 5: Use of listening

Use for listening	Average score of extent (5 is high, 1 is low)
Because it is young people’s democratic right to shape the services they receive	3.8
To influence the fundamental strategic direction of your organisation	3.5
To influence how you develop your services	3.9
To evaluate your services	3.9
To give young people an opportunity to express themselves	4.4

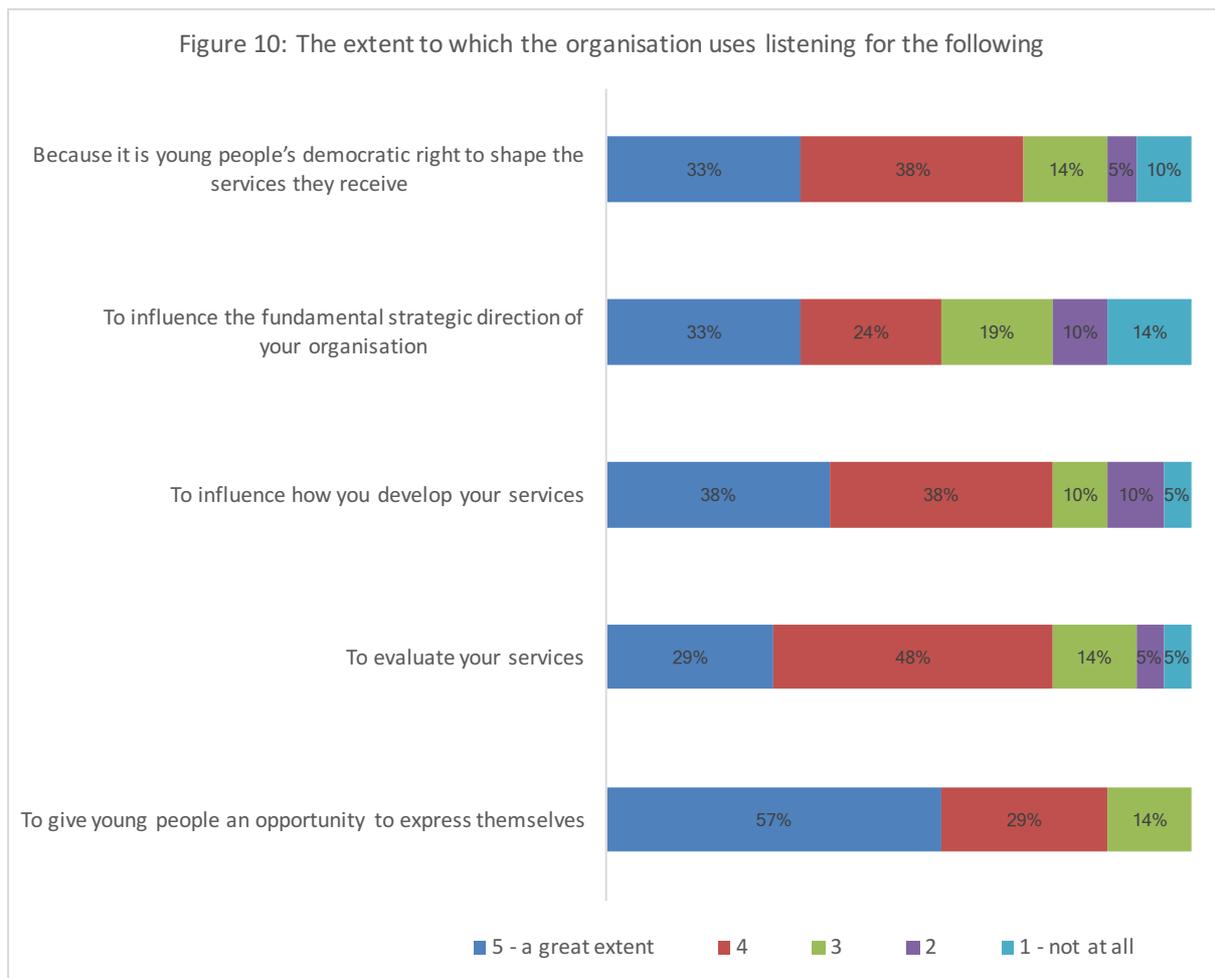
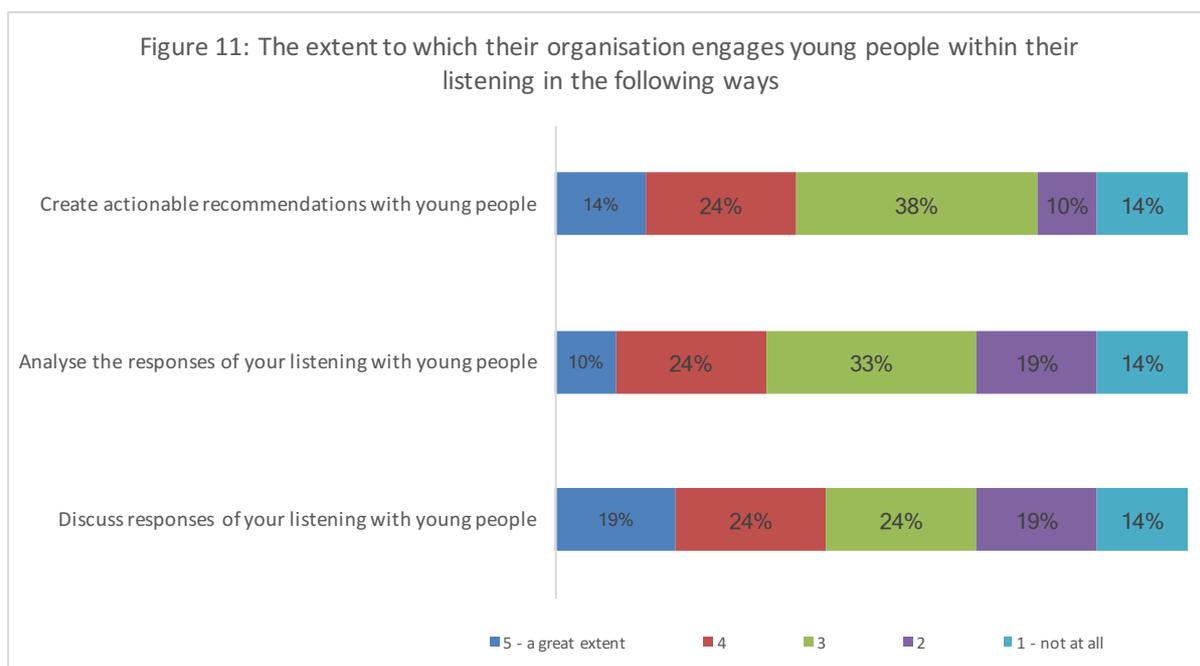


Figure 11 relates to a question that asked directly what the role of young people was within listening. The extent of engagement of young people in these different elements varied markedly across partners.



Hart’s ladder of participation

Partners were asked to rate their organisation on Hart’s Ladder³ (n=20) (see figure 12). Again, the clearest finding is the variety across partners. Fifteen percent rated their organisation at the top where *young people and adults share decision-making*. No partners rated themselves on the bottom two rungs of the ladder but one partner rated its participation as *young people tokenised* and two partners rated their participation as *young people assigned and informed*.

This variance was supported by open response questions, which revealed that different partners are at very different stages in developing their approach to organisational listening. For one, listening “*appears as an integral, but not separate, part of our work. It’s ingrained in the 1-2-1 support we provide and is practiced throughout the organisation via constant feedback on sessions and activities but also via regular interaction with our [youth] group*” and another saying “*we are often changing and adapting the way we listen to young people in order to improve our services*”. In contrast, another saw themselves as “*at the early stages of developing [their] organisational approach to listening.*”

³ Hart, R. (1997) *Children's Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizens In Community Development And Environmental Care*. UNICEF

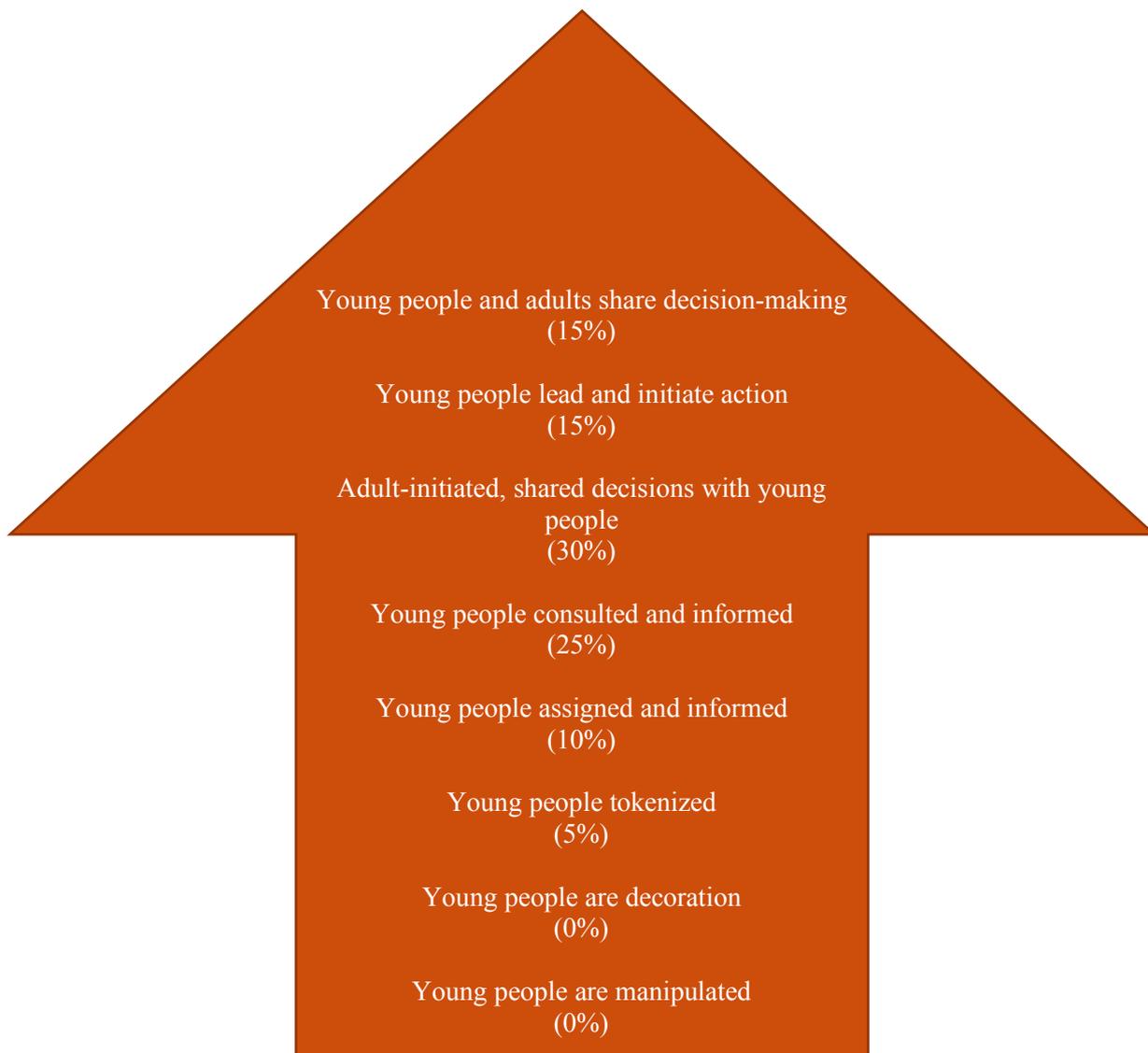


Figure 12: Where partners rated themselves on Hart's ladder

Final thoughts

Partners were asked if there was anything else they would like to say regarding their listening practice. Of those that commented, the most common remarks stated how the LF grant had provided time and resource to make improvements over the next two years including wanting “to ensure that this is carried out more strategically across the organisation”, a desire for it to “be set out in a formalised process” and by “finding more ways to close the feedback loop”.