



Drugs: Our Community, Your Say.

Home Office

British Youth Council response

Friday 19th October 2007

The British Youth Council (BYC) is the national youth council of the United Kingdom. We represent a unique coalition of young people who've joined together through national, regional and/or local youth organisations. Our membership and network numbers includes over 170 organisations and 400 youth councils. BYC promotes the active citizenship of young people and works to ensure that they are more involved in decisions about their lives.

We aim to do four things:

- Provide a voice for young people;
- Promote equality for young people;
- Help young people be more involved in decisions that affect their lives;
- Advance young people's participation in society and civil life.

We bring young people together to agree on issues of common concern and encourage them to bring about change through taking collective action.

BYC is run by young people for young people. Young people shape our work at all levels through participation in our projects, and regular consultations on policy. Young people also control our governance as a member of BYC's board of 13 annually elected trustees all between the ages of 18 and 24.

BYC encourages young people to become engaged and active through a number of mechanisms:

Publications: BYC produces a range of publications to help youth organisations realize their plans for development.

Supporting youth councils: BYC also actively promotes local youth councils as a model for young people to come together to discuss issues that are important to them and to use their collective resources to lobby effectively for local action.

Policy and Parliament: BYC facilitates young people's involvement in national governance through regular consultations that feed into the Westminster policy making process.

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Key Points:

- **BYC believes that for the government to discover the most effective ways of helping young people avoid and overcome drug problems they need to actively engage in greater consultation with young people.**
- **Education programmes, drug information campaigns and support services should be designed in full consultation with young people to maximise their chances of being effective, and where possible these services should be youth-led.**
- **The government should also concentrate on increasing access to effective drug education, treatment and support services for all young people across the United Kingdom.**
- **BYC advocates a move to include drug education within a compulsory, more thoroughly integrated, PSHE and citizenship curriculum for education Key stages 1-4. BYC believes that awareness and personal responsibility need to be instilled from an early age.**

Building a new drug strategy

1b. Which are the most important [aims of the new drug strategy] and why?

The British Youth Council welcomes the government's proposal within the new drug strategy to improve drug education, treatment, and support services for young people. These are fundamental objectives in order for the strategy to meet the needs of young people.

BYC believes that the government should focus its efforts on ensuring that there is easy access to effective drug education, treatment, and support services for all young people in Britain. This is because, as the consultation paper states, 'the quality of the teaching and learning experience [regarding drug education] is still variable' and the 'availability of specialist treatment varies widely across the country'.¹ These are significant problems for young people which need to be addressed by the government.

BYC also proposes that there should be ongoing consultation between the Home Office and young people to ensure that their views are central in informing the government's drug strategy concerning young people. This would mean that areas in which young people feel the current system could be improved are taken into

¹ Home Office (2007) *Drugs: Our Community, Your Say*: 9, 16.

account and the strategy will be the best possible fit for young people's requirements.

Chapter 1. Young people, education and families.

2. What is the most effective way to keep children off and away from drugs?

BYC believes that in order to find the most effective ways of helping young people avoid, and overcome, drug problems the government needs to consult young people to find out which measures they find the most supportive.

BYC applauds the Home Office for including organisations such as the Young People and Drugs High Focus Initiative and the Youth Justice Board within its evidence base and for its use of consultation events involving young people in London. However, within this consultation document the actual voices of young people and their opinions on the drug strategy are still lacking.

BYC feels that young people should be more involved in decisions that affect the quality of the educational, treatment and social care services that they receive. If the government wishes to provide informational materials on drugs that fulfil the criteria of being both credible and educational it is important that it is mandatory that young people are consulted over their contents and format. Information campaigns should be designed by young people for young people.

In addition, it is important that young people are involved in the design of support services meant specifically for young people. Moreover, there is evidence to show that 16 to 18 year olds, especially those with the most complex needs, are slipping through gaps in service and support provision.

For instance, one young woman said in regards to health services: "It's intimidating being mixed with older people. I wouldn't go if there were adults going to be there as well". Another young woman consulted believed: "There's certainly an area where you have to break it down where a young person's needs, for example, maybe a child under the age of 12, is different from those of a teenager".²

BYC also emphasises that the principles of anonymity within these integrated services should be promoted.

Adopting an approach which is more inclusive of the opinions and concerns of young people will mean that the new drug strategy can more fully support their needs and will maximise the chances of the strategy being effective.

² Children Right's Alliance for England (2007) *Children and young people talk about age discrimination and equality*: 8-9.

7. What role should education in schools and other settings play in reducing the harm caused by drugs? What should drug education aim to achieve, when should it start and how might it be improved?

BYC agrees with the Home Office that 'education in schools and other settings helps young people to acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to keep themselves safe from harm when they encounter illegal drugs and legal substances such as alcohol, tobacco, medicines and volatile substances'.³ Drug education and public information campaigns should aim to be an effective tool that enable young people to make informed decisions about their health and increase their understanding of drugs and their effects.

Drug education can be improved by engaging young people in the creation of educational materials for schools or involving their peers in lessons. This would mean that the information given would be relevant and user-friendly for young people.

BYC believes that awareness and personal responsibility about social issues need to be instilled in young people through education from an early age. BYC believes that further progression must be made in creating within the curriculum a compulsory and more thoroughly integrated Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), inclusive of a robust drug education, for Key Stages 1 to 4.

Improving PSHE education is vital if Britain is to make any significant headway through the avenue of education in tackling drugs and alcohol problems amongst young people. This also applies in addressing other pertinent social issues such as teenage pregnancy, STI rates, and civic participation.

Chapter 2. Public information campaigns

8. What role should drug information campaigns play, what should they aim to achieve and how can this be measured?

BYC supports the government placing emphasis on the need for drug information to provide a source of credible and reliable information about drugs (both legal and illegal) to all young people. BYC supports the 'Talk to Frank' drug information campaign and finds the figures on page 13 concerning young people's awareness of the campaign encouraging.

However, BYC would still like to highlight the need to consult young people during the formulation and execution of such campaigns in order to increase their effectiveness. In the consultation paper it is noted that certain information campaigns targeting young people, for example a campaign about alcohol aimed at those under 18 years old, are still needed. These future campaigns present a tangible opportunity for the active engagement of young people in their design.

³ Home Office (2007) *Drugs: Our Community, Your Say*: 9.

12. Is there a place for role models, including those drawn from peer groups, in drug information campaigns?

BYC believes there is a strong place for role models, especially those drawn from peer groups, in drug information campaigns. This is because BYC strongly advocates the involvement of young people in the design and delivery of these campaigns in order to effectively engage young people about these issues.

BYC is committed to services for young people being led by young people. Young people have a right to be heard in the policy process and active young citizens should be able to get involved in order to seek their own solutions to the problems they face and bring about positive changes in our society.

In sum, the key message in the response from the British Youth Council to this consultation paper is that a fundamental prerequisite for the success of the government's new drug strategy concerning young people is that young people are consulted throughout its development and implementation.

Giving young people genuine influence over the improvement of their education, treatment and support services is the most effective way of ensuring that there is steady progress in reducing the harm to young people caused by drugs.