

## **The History of BYC**

The British Youth Council (BYC) is celebrating 62 years of empowering young people in the UK to have a voice.

Read on to find out more about BYC's history and the exciting, if not sometimes rocky, path BYC took to becoming the National Youth Council of the UK.

### **Uniting young people across Britain from 1948**

BYC was born in the charged climate of post-World War Two international relations.

Established by the Foreign Office of the British Government in 1948 as a prelude to British involvement in the 'World Assembly on Youth' (WAY), the original purpose of BYC was to unite young people in Britain against the forces of communism.

In 1963, BYC became independent of the British Government and was established as a charity in its own right to champion the opinions of young people. From the late 1960s BYC's work in bringing together youth councils across the UK really took off.

To begin with, BYC worked to support the establishment of a National Youth Assembly, whose membership of local youth councils came together to organise their collective voice at a national level.

Despite this, work expanded into BYC developing its own network of local youth councils - a move championed by staff member John Denham, former Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

### **Supporting young people's causes in the Seventies**

In the 1970s, BYC started to make a considerable impact on youth politics by increasing its profile, assisted by its tradition of appointing young vibrant Chairs.

In 1971 BYC organised the annual WAY event in Manchester where the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, was the key note speaker.

Two years later, BYC elected David Hunt as Chair, then a Conservative MP and now member of the House of Lords, helping to further establish BYC's national and international profile.

The two subsequent Chairs of BYC, Janet Paraskeva (now First Civil Service Commissioner and former CEO of the Law Society's Council) and Peter Mandelson (former Labour MP and European Trade Commissioner) also used their skills to develop and build the organisation.

With Peter Mandelson as Chair, BYC established a commission publishing the respected "Youth Unemployment: Cause and Cures" report. Also involved in its write up was the then General Secretary of BYC, Tom Shebbeare (now CEO of the Prince's Charities).

This report made a big impact at the time and was widely discussed in the media. Following its publication, some of the young people involved with BYC were given the chance to visit the then Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, to discuss the issue of youth unemployment.

### **Getting involved in international politics and causing a stir**

In 1978, BYC controversially participated in the 11<sup>th</sup> World Festival on Youth in Cuba.

Peter Mandelson and Trevor Philips (the then President of NUS, now Head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission) led a delegation to Havana, where motions were passed on the human rights records of the USSR and USA.

The delegation also included an array of promising future politicians and leaders, including: Charles Clarke (now Labour MP and former Home Secretary), Paul Boateng (former British High Commissioner to South Africa and Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Labour MP), Brian Wilson (former Labour MP) and Tom Wylie (who went on to become the CEO of the National Youth Agency).

BYC's delegation returned to the UK to a very positive reaction from both the public and the media for all their work.

### **Facing tough times but working hard to represent young people in the UK**

In the 1970s BYC established BYC Scotland. At the time, Wales and Northern Ireland had the Welsh Youth Forum and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum respectively, but there was a void of young people's representation in Scotland which BYC aimed to fill.

BYC Scotland was incredibly active until its closure in 1987 due to Government funding cuts. During this period, the organisation was steered and led for a number of years by Mark Lazarowicz, now Labour/Co-operative Party MP.

With the fresh decade ushering in a new radical political era, the 1980s saw BYC faced with an increasing number of challenges in what were very difficult times for the Third Sector.

Crucially, BYC had its founding Foreign Office grant withdrawn, coupled with a couple of structural membership changes. Despite this, its valuable work continued, namely promoting local youth councils and playing a hand in the UK's signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Leading in research and campaigns on youth issues in the Nineties**

In the 1990s, BYC worked with its partners to create a number of campaigns on issues such as youth unemployment and young people's voter registration, assisted by the invention of the internet, which allowed the charity to raise its profile in new and dynamic ways.

BYC also led the field in youth policy and research with two journals: 'Youth Issue' and 'Youth Agenda', while producing a number of respected publications including 'Never Had it So Good', 'State of the Young Nation' and the 'Peer Education Manual'.

This series of research, consultation and policy work culminated in 2000, when BYC conducted the biggest consultation with young people that the Government had ever commissioned on areas such as education, employment and youth empowerment. The conclusion, 'Listening to the Unheard', led to the formulation of a European White Paper on Youth, which BYC co-ordinated as the UK members of the European Youth Forum.

### **Empowering young people in the Noughties**

BYC continues to build on past successes, working hard to support all young people in the UK to exercise their right to participate in decisions that affect them and voice opinions on issues that they are passionate about. BYC prides itself on being an inspiring organisation that works to empower young people, and it has the capacity to do this in a number of ways.

In recent years, BYC has established a series of national programmes and interactive training courses that focus on developing young people's skills. These range from schemes such as 'Youth at the Table' which gives young

people the skills to become board members, to events such as 'Young People and Your Democracy' which gave young people who are not in formal education a chance to visit democratic institutions and meet their elected representatives.

In 2004 BYC joined the Participation Works partnership, going on to attract large-scale funding to deliver a number of projects allowing young people to participate in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives.

In 2006, BYC and Youthnet published 'Respect: The Voice behind the Hood', which revealed that 90% of young people were bothered by the media's representation of them, leading to a campaign for more positive images of young people in the media.

BYC's International Department maintains the charity's strong history of ensuring young people from the UK are represented internationally. Recently BYC representatives have attended events in South Africa, Denmark and Saudi Arabia. The department also works to increase awareness of international issues and supports young people to act on these.

Over the past 62 years, young people's opinions have always been at the heart of BYC policy making and recently the charity has taken steps to make its policy and campaigns even more responsive.

In late 2007 BYC launched an online 'Rolling Youth Manifesto', designed to highlight the issues young people currently think BYC should work on. This led to the creation of BYC's very own General Election Manifesto which was launched in 2010, containing five top priorities for the new Parliament.

The priorities included calling for an Equal National Minimum Wage for everyone over 16; the creation of a National Youth Transport card offering 16 to 25 year olds a third off public transport fares; comprehensive investment in mental health services for young people; the end of child poverty in the UK by 2020 and the reduction of the voting age for parliamentary and other public elections to 16 years – a proposal which BYC has supported for over ten years and continues to do so as a member of the Votes at 16 Coalition.

Other recent work has included an education campaign voicing concerns with measures of compulsion included in the Education and Skills Bill, the Respect? campaign which is run with Youth Net, working to challenge negative stereotyping of young people, and the Climate Change campaign which encourages young people to get actively involved in reducing carbon emissions.



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In the future BYC looks forward to continuing its support of young people to participate in decisions that affect them as well as campaigning for change and a better future.

If you would like more information about BYC, please call us on 0845 458 1489, email [mail@byc.org.uk](mailto:mail@byc.org.uk) or for press enquiries contact our Press Office on 020 7785 6463 or email [press@byc.org.uk](mailto:press@byc.org.uk).

## **For more information**

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## **British Youth Council**

**We empower young people across the UK to have a say and be heard.**

[www.byc.org.uk](http://www.byc.org.uk)

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