



British Youth Council

Supporting a Stronger Civil Society: An Office for Civil Society consultation on improving support for frontline civil society organisations.

6 January 2011.

Introduction.

The British Youth Council (BYC) as the national youth council of the UK is a membership organisation for 130 youth participation groups across the UK and supports a network of over 600 local youth councils. Millions of young people are supported through our membership to engage in civil society through these organisations, for example NUS represents the interests of 7 million students, half a million girls and young women are involved in GirlGuiding UK and up to 19,800 young people volunteer their time every month as local youth councillors. We support young people in our membership to have their say in decision-making at a local, national and international level, campaign on issues they believe in, inspire them to have a positive impact, and gain recognition for their contributions to communities, society and the world.

As a membership body for organisations working with these young people, BYC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on how the Government can improve support for frontline youth organisations so they can ensure young people have the opportunity to make a difference to civil society

Underpinning the British Youth Council's response to this consultation is data from our survey of young people's views on the concepts of the Big Society, where a sample of over 1000 children and young people took part. A summary of the survey reports findings – **The Big Listen** – is attached as an Appendix. A full copy is attached to this submission for reference.

This report shows that many young people who are already volunteering their time in their communities through our network want to contribute towards the building of the Big Society and believe they should be supported to do so.

Half of respondents to the BYC survey, Big Listen, told us they would volunteer their own time to keep local services threatened with closure open. 45% would take part in neighbourhood meetings to hold the police in their local area to account and a third of us, 34%, would set up our own neighbourhood groups. In addition, nearly half of the young people (48%) had their own suggestions of how to get young people to engage with the Big Society.¹

Essentially we believe and can show that young people are willing to take on a role in voluntary and community groups if they are supported to do so, and as a result will not only be shaping our communities for the better today, but will continue this sense of community ownership into adulthood.

Question 1: How can online services for frontline groups be improved?

BYC welcomes the idea of the Office for Civil Society supporting a streamlining existing online directories that support voluntary and community groups.

BYC currently regularly shares resources and funding opportunities with our members and networks through our website and e-newsletters. We have seen a massive increase in the downloading of our free How to Guides in the last 12 months.

¹ British Youth Council 'Big Listen' survey of 1007 young people aged 7 to 25. The findings are yet to be published but have already been shared with the Cabinet Office.

We would therefore recommend the promotion of easily accessible online services, bulletins, free Guides, backed up with telephone advice.

Question 2: What can Government do to forge more effective links and transfer skills between small civil society organisations and businesses or larger charities?

BYC welcomes the recognition by the Government that many frontline groups do not always know what pro bono support is available in their area and that this is a key barrier to the effective involvement of business in supporting the civil society. We believe that improved information on existing support available from businesses or larger charities for community and voluntary groups would be extremely valuable for our sector.

BYC has also long championed employee supported volunteering (ESV). Young people in our membership believe that employers in our communities should value volunteering undertaken by their young workers as it provides numerous benefits for volunteers, employers and the community. Not only is ESV a cost-effective way for employers to meet corporate social responsibility, it gives young workers the opportunity for personal development, training, and building relationships with local residents. Young people believe that employers should support volunteering through flexible hours, use of resources, time off in lieu, regular time off to volunteer and financial remuneration. BYC would welcome the development by the Cabinet Office of new tools and resources to assist the brokerage of ESV through local, regional and national infrastructure organisations. BYC could also support work by the Cabinet Office to support youth groups and councils to recognise the value of ESV and find information on ESV brokerage.

Question 3: How could brokerage of pro bono support be improved?

We believe that targeted and relevant information on brokerage of pro bono support would be key to improving involvement by voluntary and community youth groups, and that there is potential for this to be produced and disseminated in partnership with national infrastructure organisations in the sector.

Information needs to be more easily accessible and visible. We recently went through a process to access pro bono support – but had to fill in a lot of paperwork, undergo assessments and still had to wait six months before we got to see our first advisor. These services need to be more responsive.

Question 4: What support might your organisation need to become more resilient?

- Help and introductions to a more diverse source of income streams to avoid dependency for core work.
- Access and introduction to new markets.
- Recognition of full cost recovery.
- Assistance to build up reserves or access to underpinning resources to ensure key staff are not lost at the end of financial years when contracts end or come up for renewal.

- Longer-term contracts beyond the typical 1 -3 year grant programmes or annual renewable contracts. Whilst we appreciate they need to be reviewed and improved, there are examples of 10 year contracts in other sectors.
- Pro bono Mentoring
- Free and accessible training to embed skills.

Question 5: What do you think should be the priorities for a bursary fund?

We believe one of the priorities should be youth led enterprise and youth led community projects linked to and reflecting the needs of young people as expressed through the national network of over 650 local youth councils and nearly 20,000 young councillors.

Such bursaries would foster community engagement of a younger generation in a way that embeds the principles of the policy with people who are creative, ambitious and energetic, and would therefore be more likely to be sustainable as they make the transition to permanence.

We believe that another priority would be bursaries that encourage co-working between established or retired expertise and the younger generation. Such inter-generational mutual support would also serve to result in something that was greater than the sum of the parts. Bursaries could be linked to some of the needs in the resilience list in Question 4, e.g. to fund access to training.

Question 6: How could any bursary fund be delivered simply and fairly?

We would recommend greater use of local decision making over the dissemination of bursaries – by local people for local people – but to national standards and a fair framework. As a youth-led organisation we have experience in developing young people's decision making models – where young people are either elected, or selected to represent special interests or needs reflecting the profile of their community. Groups such as YouthBank have a model for grant dissemination which could be combined with our local youth council model already exists in many localities.

The Office for Civil Society could ensure that it is easier to apply, with promotion of opportunity through national infrastructure organisations whose members include those who can identify the barriers that previously make such systems bureaucratic, or reporting burdensome.

Question 7: How could consolidation grants help ensure the sustainability and efficiency of infrastructure services?

Consolidation grants should be targeted to organisations who not only share goals but values. However organisations with different delivery systems and markets should be encouraged to consolidate so that they consequently reach more people, and are more effective by using a mixture of their combined best methodologies.

BYC has recent experience of collaboration as we announced that we are now hosting the Young Mayors Network on 8 December 2010. The Young Mayors Network has been established (and hosted) by the Campaign Company since 2008

to give directly-elected young mayors the chance to support each other and come together with a view to getting their voices heard on a national stage. This collaboration will enable us to share resources and staff, and strengthen the links between the Young Mayors Network and BYC's broader network of 620 local youth councils and 130 member youth organisations.

We would like to extend the membership of our Council to include other supplier organisations that are run by younger people into cooperative consortium and believe that the resources to achieve this could come from a consolidation grant.

So BYC supports the Cabinet Office's proposal of time-limited consolidation grants to enable infrastructure to implement merger or substantial collaboration and would be happy to use our experience in the processing of designing the criteria of such grants at a local level mirroring our consultation at a national level.

Question 8: Are there ways that expert intervention can support areas which are lacking social capital to improve local relationships and develop a stronger civil society?

We believe that infrastructure organisations can play a role in encouraging public sector partnerships and providing knowledge to both the public sector and community groups on how to work together in decision-making and the designing and delivering of local services. For example, BYC has recently been working with Local Government Improvement and Development's Youth Engagement in Democracy Stakeholder Group to demonstrate the value of youth participation in decision-making to local authorities in service development, share best practice and produce practical resources for frontline councillors on youth participation.

(Question 9 previously submitted)

Question 10: Do you have further suggestions or comments on how the Office for Civil Society can help frontline groups become more efficient and effective?

- Ensure representatives of frontline groups have ways to communicate simply with decision makers, locally and nationally.
- Ensure the provision of support demonstrates a responsiveness to need by requiring national organisations to have representatives of frontline groups in their membership and in positions to influence development of resources e.g. in the Boardroom. For example BYC is run by young people elected by its membership, including from small locally based groups.
- Create a directory of helpful organisations (online) that front line groups can access.

Appendix: Summary of the 'Big Listen' findings.

On our communities

- 1) More of us (74%) feel like we belong to the UK as a place, rather than to our local area (63%) or neighbourhood (61%).
- 2) Six out of ten of us (61%) felt that there are still widespread negative perceptions of young people within their communities.
- 3) We have lots of ideas on how to improve our local area for the better. Half of us, 505 young people, gave our suggestions.

On speaking up about our local area

- 4) 82% believe it's important, and three quarters of us (75%) want, to have a greater influence in decisions made in our local area, on topics such as how the local community is run, and what happens to local services.
- 5) Just over half of us feel that we can influence on decisions being made at a neighbourhood and local level (54%), whereas only three in ten think we can influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole (30%).
- 6) 61% feel our views are taken less seriously because of our age, yet 65% believe that when 'people like me' have a say we can make a difference.
- 7) We feel we can make friends and influence people by getting involved in local decision-making:
 - a) 72% of us said we felt we'd had a say.
 - b) 67% of us said it helped us meet new people and make friends.
 - c) 61% of us said it gave us a personal sense of achievement from being involved.
- 8) Four out of ten of us (42%) told BYC that we are involved in youth participation through youth representation structures, such as local youth councils or youth parliaments.
- 9) If young people are involved in youth participation we are more likely to...
 - a) Believe it's important for us personally to influence decisions being made in our local areas.
 - b) Feel that 'when people like me get involved they can make a difference'.
- 10) Whether we are engaged in youth participation or not, most agree that our views are taken less seriously in local decision-making because of our age. Six out of ten of us (60%) told BYC that 'My views are taken less seriously because of my age'.

On the Big Society

- 11) We like the idea of being empowered through the Big Society. When we were told that the Prime Minister had said of the Big Society idea - "*You can call it liberalism. You can call it empowerment. You can call it freedom. You can call it responsibility*" - 37% of us felt that the idea of empowerment would engage young people in the Big Society. A third thought the idea of freedom would appeal (34%) then responsibility (22%) and liberalism (7%).

- 12) We feel that if young people want to get involved in the Big Society then we should be both able to and supported to do so. Indeed half of us would volunteer our own time to keep open local services threatened with closure.
- 13) Nearly half of us (48%) have suggestions of how to get young people to engage with the Big Society.

On the National Citizen Service

- 14) Over half of us (53%) think the National Citizen Service, a voluntary summer programme for 16 year olds, is a good idea. 20% do not and 27% are not yet sure.
- 15) Two thirds of us (66%) think a key barrier to young people becoming part of the National Citizen Service would be having a summer job or wanting to get one. More than half of us (55%) also think young people might lack the confidence to volunteer and get involved.

For more information

about BYC training:

www.byc.org.uk/training

or to download further resources:

www.byc.org.uk/resources

British Youth Council

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

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