



Connected Parliaments

Reimagining Youth Engagement with Parliaments in Australia
PRACTICAL TOOLKIT & CALL FOR ACTION



FOREWORD

The *Connected Parliaments* project began as an exploration of how parliaments in the United Kingdom, Scotland and Ireland have been experimenting with new ways of engaging young people, including through using social media, legislative tracking apps, online gaming and regional outreach programs aimed at teenagers and young adults. I wanted to investigate and evaluate the different engagement strategies being used in these jurisdictions and identify practical strategies for Australian parliaments to use to empower young Australians to participate in our parliamentary lawmaking process.

But I quickly learned that to truly understand and address barriers to meaningful engagement between young Australians and their parliaments, I needed to ask some bigger questions when I travelled overseas. I came back with a powerful drive to reimagine youth engagement with parliaments in Australia as something that extends well beyond institution-led opportunities for youth participation. In this report, I make a call for action for parliaments, governments and communities to step aside and make space for the voices of our young people, so that we can address intergenerational inequality and youth disempowerment head-on. I also offer some practical tools for taking small but important steps forward together ... *right now!*

Our democratic future depends on our young people not just 'getting involved' but *taking charge*. We need the courage to take a *power-shifting* approach to youth engagement with parliaments in Australia.

Parliaments are for people of all ages. The future is now.

INDEMNITY CLAUSE

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OVERSEAS COLLEAGUES

Thank you to everyone who met with me as part of my Fellowship. I was humbled by your generosity and expertise. Special thanks to Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira for her mentorship and for connecting me to many wonderful colleagues through the International Parliamentary Engagement Network. A big thank you to Sally Coyne from the Scottish Parliament, and Derek Dignam for going above and beyond with your programs of activities for me.

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LOCAL COLLEAGUES

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KEY WORDS

parliament; youth; engagement; democracy; politics; social action; institutions; government; lawmaking; policy making; empowerment.

COMMONLY USED TERMS

This report is about youth engagement with parliaments. It sometimes uses terms like **‘parliament and other democratic institutions’** to refer to an inclusive category of state controlled decision-making bodies and entities including national and sub-national parliaments, municipal and local councils, government departments and agencies and courts and tribunals.

The parameters and key features of the term **‘engagement’** are explored in depth in this Report, but as a starting point, ‘engagement’ should be taken to include any activity, communication, experience or practice that seeks to connect different groups or individuals with each other in a meaningful way, where an exchange of ideas, information or perspectives can take place.

In this Report, the terms **‘youth’** and **‘young people’** are used to refer to an inclusive category of people up to the age of 25. The term **‘children’** is also used to refer to people between the ages 0-15. The term **‘older people’** is used to refer to people over the age of 25.

The Report also uses the term **‘marginalised’** to describe individuals or communities who experience social distance from the practices and processes of parliaments and other democratic institutions. As explored in the Report, marginalisation can be caused by a range of intersecting identities and experiences (including employment status, Aboriginality, geographic location, experience of disability or mental distress, gender or gender identity, economic deprivation or poverty, ethnic or religious identity, educational attainment, English language proficiency) and may be temporal or enduring. In some jurisdictions, alternative terminology such as **‘hard to reach’** or **‘seldom heard’** is used to refer to communities or individuals who experience of exclusion or social distance from the practices and processes of parliaments and other democratic institutions.

Sometimes the Report uses the term **‘usual suspects’** to refer to those individuals or groups who have high levels of familiarity with, and access to, the practices and processes of parliaments and other democratic institutions. The ‘usual suspects’ in parliamentary settings commonly include past or current members of parliament, members of political parties, members of the public service, members of professional representative bodies or unions, academics and other subject-specific experts and those working in the field of policy design or policy advocacy.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine if the world was run by *teenagers*! Of course, those that are teenagers now *will* run the world one day – and so the question for the rest of us is: what are *we doing* to prepare them for the task ahead? How are our young people included in our democracy? What kind of spaces are we creating for young people to connect with our parliaments? These are the questions that need our urgent attention, and that form the basis of the discussion contained in this Report.

We have many great stories to tell about exceptional young people doing exceptional things in South Australia (see eg Young, 2022) but less information about what might work to engage young people who have missed out on school-based opportunities to learn about our democratic institutions, or who are disconnected and disengaged from local community programs. We can learn a lot about what works from democracies that look like ours. But we must be prepared to *listen* – particularly to the views of young people themselves.

[T]here is value in knowing how, why and when younger citizens are losing faith in the ability of democracy to deliver. (Foa et al, 2022, p. 4)

In this Report I aim to identify the guiding principles, key objectives, catalysts for change needed to improve youth engagement with Australian parliaments. I also share perspectives gained from my travels in the England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Wales, highlighting some key case studies as well as attempting to link some of the ideas I have encountered with the relevant scholarship and literature in this field. The Report concludes with a call to action and toolkit for those working within parliamentary settings to use, and contribute to, as we work together to reimagine youth engagement with parliament in Australia.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The average age of members of parliament in Australia is 50 (Australian Government, 2023; IPU Parline, 2023). Even though the 47th Australian Parliament is the most diverse we have ever seen (Remeikis, 2022), the people in power right now do not look like the young people I teach at university, or the young people working in our supermarkets, or surfing on our beaches. Their priorities for change are different, their hopes and dreams are different too. There is a disconnect between our lawmakers and our young people that is akin to the familiar gap between parent and teenager – both care about each other, but both walk in different worlds.

This disconnect is real and it is having a real impact on the way young people feel about democratic institutions like parliament. In fact, millennials are the 'most disillusioned generation in living memory' (Lewsey, 2023) when it comes to trust in democracy and the implications of this huge. As Foa et al have observed:

Globally, youth satisfaction with democracy is declining – not only in absolute terms, but also relative to how older generations felt at the same stages in life. There are notable declines in four regions: Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe, and the “Anglo-Saxon” democracies, including the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. In developed democracies, a major contributor to youth discontent is economic exclusion. Higher levels of youth unemployment and wealth inequality are associated with rising dissatisfaction in both absolute and relative terms – that is, a growing gap between

assessments of democratic functioning between youth and older generations. (Foa et al, 2022, p. 2)

When people are disconnected from public institutions like parliaments they turn other places to express their political views and they can become involved in extremism (Citrin & Stoker, 2018). They can also disengage from community activity and experience social and economic exclusion that can lead to loneliness (Chowdhury, 2021), which we know has short- and long-term mental health impacts (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021) that can in turn impact a person's ability to earn a living and to bring up healthy families.

[Y]outh disengagement reflects not merely apathy, but also a rising sense of frustration with the ability of existing democratic processes to deliver tangible change. The result of such frustration may be a growing "antipathy" to core liberal ideals such as compromise, consensus, acceptance of political opponents as legitimate and support for third-party institutions such as the media, judiciary or legislative checks and balances. (Foa et al, 2022, p. 22)

When our young people are disengaged or disconnected from our democratic institutions, we risk becoming type of 'post democracy' in which 'managerial politics has reduced the space for genuine ideological competition' and democratic discourse is less about norms such as compromise, free exchange of ideas, or the independence public institutions from government, and more about populism or 'authenticity' of politicians personalities (Foa et al, 2022, p. 22-23).

When young people are disconnected from our parliaments and our policy making forums, we also lose the opportunity to hear from them about their ideas and strategies for solving the complex set of challenges our society faces. We lose the chance to create the future they dream of. This is why we need *connected* parliaments: parliaments where young people not only feel welcome but empowered to *take over*.

GREAT WORK IS ALREADY HAPPENING, BUT IT'S TIME BROADEN OUR VIEW OF THE POSSIBLE



Photo credit: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Adelaide

The South Australian Parliament is a world leader when it comes to designing and delivering education programs for school children and teachers, and 'bringing the parliament to the people', including in regional areas (see e.g. Young, 2022). Youth Parliaments also take place each year (YMCA, 2203) as do meetings of Youth Advisory Councils and young mayors' (see e.g. Department of Human Services SA, 2022; Chandler, 2023) designed to provide feedback to on policy matters.

At the federal level, there is a dedicated unit within government (the Office for Youth), and federal Minister for Youth (the Hon Dr Anne Aly MP), supported by a recently appointed Youth Steering Committee, and a number of thematic Youth Advisory Groups (Australian Government, 2023). All of the major Australian political parties have youth memberships (think 'Young Labor' or 'Young Liberals), and there are a wide range of internships and scholarships available for budding political scientists and journalists (see e.g. Lancione, 2022). These are *good things*. They are inspiring young people to engage with, learn about, and be part of our democracy. But they

remain far too conventional to spark the type of broad socio-political shift that needs to occur to *empower* young people to *shape and change* our democracy to fit *their needs*. Existing efforts continue to imagine our parliaments, or our politics, with reference to the past. Older people – that is anyone over 25 – are out the front, in control, in *the way*.

We need a more ambitious agenda. One that is designed and led by young people themselves.

HOW ARE DEMOCRACIES LIKE OURS APPROACHING THIS CHALLENGE?

We can learn a lot about what works from democracies that look like ours, such as England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where 16-year olds can vote, youth assemblies are formed through democratic local elections and young people directly shape public policies and propose legislation in parliament.

In these places, there is a broad acceptance among law makers, policy makers and political leaders that the voices of young people *matter*, and that serious investment is needed both inside and outside of formal institutions, to make sure that young people's voices are heard.

In Scotland the Parliament no longer waits for young people to write submissions or sign petitions, but rather employs specialist engagement officers to work with disadvantaged communities to identify priority areas for change. It also uses citizen's juries to help inform the work of parliamentary committees inquiring into issues including climate change and housing.

In Wales, 16 and 17 year olds can vote and 11 year olds can run for election to the Welsh Youth Parliament, which works directly with adult MPs to generate legislative and policy agendas, scrutinise government action and expenditure and conduct inquiries. There's also a Future Generations Commissioner in Wales with a legislative mandate to require all government decision making – from the building of roads to the funding of health care or changes to planning laws- to factor in the impact of their work on future generations.

In England, I saw the UK Youth Parliament form a Select Committee and conduct an inquiry into the cost-of-living crisis and its impact on marginalised communities. This work was supported by a survey of young people called *Make Your Mark* that attracted over 1 million responses and has been used as a manifesto for change for lobbying local and national governments. This is backed by information-collecting powers held by the UK Children's Commissioner, to ensure that young people have access to critical information from government departments about decisions and policies that affect their lives.

In Ireland, I learned how the Speaker of the Parliament responded to a series of youth-led climate protests by inviting youth activists to speak directly to Parliamentarians about their demands and develop terms of reference for ongoing legislative reform.

In Manchester I heard how local youth councils are collaborating with regional authorities to distribute micro grants directly to disadvantaged young people who are designing and implementing their own social inclusion strategies. I heard University Unions successfully advocated for free public transport for students in their city.

In each of these success stories the adults involved have learnt to *listen rather than lead*. The institutions involved have *made space* for young people to create their own conditions for change. They have adopted *systematic approaches* to hearing from the right people at the right time and have invested in collecting rich information that can be shared across agencies and actors. By trusting young people with at least some power they have generated trust back.

They have gone beyond a teacher/student approach to including young people in democratic discourse. They reject the *dress up and pretend* approach to things like Youth Parliament. They know that government-selected Youth Advisory Groups rarely go beyond the usual suspects. They recognise that without genuine *political impact and influence* – either at a local or national level – youth voices will struggle to be heard.

When I reflect on the experiences shared with me on my fellowship, and consider the recent scholarship in this area, the following key themes emerge:

- Young people *are* political. They want to live in a safe, prosperous, more equal society (Greenwood-Hau & Gutting, 2021). Their lives are dominated by versions of the future that are pessimistic, and many experience lower standards of living than older people despite working or studying harder than ever before (Intergenerational Report 2023).
- Older people need to relinquish control and create space for young people to articulate their own reform agenda (Fletcher & McDermott, 2023). Young people are keen to be involved in lawmaking and policy making – but they want *allyship*, not ‘leadership’, from older people in power.
- Political appetite for expanding franchise for young people comes from self-interest, not tokenism or altruism (Tonge et al, 2021). When young people can vote, their political interests are taken seriously. Established political parties will advocate for younger people to be given the right to vote if it will broaden their own voter base.
- Young people have capacity to develop solutions to policy challenges and contribute to parliamentary lawmaking (Gonzalez-Ricoy & Rey, 2019), but must be supplied with sufficient resources, and guaranteed the right to have their views given the same legitimacy as the views of older people (John et al, 2023). Participating in activities designed by older people rarely satisfies the need for agency and change.
- Elite-led opportunities for youth engagement in parliament or politics (such as Youth Ministerial Councils, selective Youth Parliament programs and political internships) are well intentioned and can sometimes deliver useful insights into the priorities and experiences of young people. However, they can also exacerbate existing socio-economic and other divides (Shephard & Patrikios, 2013). Proactive steps must be taken to enable young people to recruit youth leaders themselves, including by enabling young people from marginalised communities to co-design youth leadership criteria (Interparliamentary Union, 2023).
- ‘Online’ is not the only answer young people are looking for. Digitalisation of democratic institutions can be an important way to improve access, but young people want high quality engagement with decision makers where human-to-human accountability can take place (Seelig & Deng, 2023). Relationships of legitimacy and trust must be in place before ‘online’ options can deliver.

These themes have helped inform the guiding principles, key objectives and calls for action set out in this Report.

HOW DO WE MAKE SPACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHAPE OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS?

We have what it takes to create connected parliaments in Australia. We have older people who know how to ‘get out the way’, and more importantly, we have young people who are ready to step up. *Make it 16* is a great example of the type of political campaign that has the features described above. It is run for and by young people who have a clear political objective: franchise for 16 year olds in Australian elections. It does not require any institution to give it ‘permission’, or to select who are the best people to be involved. It does not subscribe to the ideologies of any existing political party. Instead, it offers young people the chance for genuine democratic representation, and political influence on their terms. But of course, the *Make it 16 Campaign* does need money, and it does need allyship. That is where older people can come in. Not to ‘lead’ or ‘guide’ or even ‘help’ – but to walk alongside these young political actors and *listen* to their agenda for change.

Youth parliaments could also provide fertile ground for improved youth engagement in Australian democracy, particularly if they embrace the features of the Welsh Youth Parliament (discussed below) and entrench legitimacy through a genuine political commitment by sitting MPs to consider and debate the legislative proposals generated by the Youth Parliament. The Welsh model also ensures that young parliamentarians are elected by young people and includes quotas for marginalised communities. This approach recognises that educative programs aiming to improve young people’s understanding of parliamentary processes and procedures are important, but not enough. Space for young people to identify and prosecute their own reform agenda – and to actively challenge existing processes and procedures – is required.


The humble classroom is also fertile ground for revolutionary change. Current approaches to ‘student representation’ in school settings generally entrench existing power dynamics and privileges (Mayes, 2016). Children who feel isolated or excluded from school decision making process are silenced through these ‘representative’ forums – but this can change. We can make classrooms more democratic. We can put the least engaged students *in charge* for the day (Ferguson-Patrick, 2022). And if we had the courage to do this, we might learn a lot about ourselves and our relationship to democratic decision making and power in the process.



Through my Churchill Fellowship I have had the privilege of learning that people like me need to move aside and create space for young people to tell their stories, and raise their voices, and shape our democracies. And that is the challenge I have now set for myself. How can I open a door for young people to change a rule in their life? How can I work with others to lift them up, help them raise their voices, and let them know we believe in their capacity to run the world?

Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Edinburgh

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This Report is guided by the following five guiding principles that have been informed by the insights gained during my fellowship travels.

YOUTH LED

Meaningful youth engagement with parliaments and other democratic institutions is led by young people themselves. This means empowering young people with a diverse range of lived experiences to express their political views, share their vision for a fairer world, and contribute to the design and implementation of laws and policies that affect them and their communities. It also challenges older people to be allies rather than leaders of youth engagement strategies and techniques – to open the door and then step out of the way. Youth led engagement means older people, particularly those in positions of power, being open to doing things differently, and having the courage to act on ideas or priorities that are different from their own.

HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the related Conventions to which Australia is a party, set out the rights and freedoms that must be protected and promoted by state institutions, including parliaments. These internationally recognised human rights also serve as useful criteria to apply to the design, implementation and evaluation of public engagement strategies as they remind us of the limits of permissible government action, and the responsibilities of parliaments to ensure that everyone in our society, including children and young people, can actively participate in public life. Taking a ‘human rights approach’ means thinking about the inherent dignity, equality and freedom of each individual at the beginning, middle and end of any process, plan or strategy that is designed to connect people with each other, or people with democratic institutions like parliament. In practical terms, it often means using lists of internationally recognised human rights as a ‘check list’ to ensure that no perspectives or voices are missing, and applying internationally recognised proportionality tests to help determine when it might be justified to limit or restrict the rights of one person or group to protect the rights of others.

EVIDENCE-BASED

High quality engagement between young people and democratic institutions and processes is underpinned by evidence-based practice and tailored demographic data. When decisions are being made about how, when and where to allocate resources to facilitate engagement activities, we must have a clear picture of whose voices are being heard, and whose are being missed. Broadening our understanding of intersecting experiences of privilege and disadvantage, and how these experiences play out in different geographical constituencies, enables us to focus our energies on those most likely to be *disconnected* from parliamentary practices and processes, and creates the right conditions for relationships of legitimacy and trust to be built, nurtured and sustained.



INCLUSIVE & EMPOWERING

Meaningful engagement between young people and democratic institutions actively addresses and seeks to overcome social divides. These divides – which can occur along economic, geographic, educational, ethnic or other lines – often work to externalise communities and individuals from the democratic practices, processes and institutions that are supposed to recognise and represent their interests. When these social divides become entrenched, they can lead to open skepticism or disillusionment with

the capacity of systems of government, or practices of parliament, to play a legitimate or useful role in their lives. For this reason, inclusive engagement strategies must be developed by governments and parliament that go beyond the ‘usual suspects’, and experiment with new ways of presenting information, generating understanding, encouraging participation and facilitating two-way feedback. Such strategies need to be evidence based and trauma-informed, so that participants feel valued and safe, and experience tangible benefits as a result of working together. When engagement is inclusive and meaningful, it can lead to substantive policy or legislative change, but also shifts in power, or changes in culture, practice or perspective within the institution. When these shifts or changes occur, engagement is *empowering* for those who have previously felt excluded, ignored or disengaged. Inclusive, empowering engagement strategies benefit *everyone* in the democratic polity – they transcend ‘identity-based’ approaches, and recognise, respect and value the full spectrum of contributions and expertise.

RESPECT SELF-DETERMINED APPROACHES TO FIRST NATIONS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Australia’s political and legal system, and our democratic institutions, are products of colonialism. These systems and institutions are built on, and perpetuate, concepts of sovereignty that continue to deny the existence of First Nations peoples as the sovereign first peoples in the land now known as Australia. Many of the traditions and cultural practices within our parliaments are reminders of the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ land and laws. In this context, we must embrace opportunities presented to us by First Nations peoples to learn about what self-determined approaches to engagement could look like. Non-aboriginal people need to take responsibility for this learning and provide resources to support self-determined engagement by First Nations young people and their communities. This must be accompanied by a commitment to work together toward substantive policy and legislative change in areas identified as priorities for reform by First Nations peoples.



KEY OBJECTIVES

The recommendations, toolkit and key actions contained in this Report are orientated around achieving the following three key objectives that have been informed by my fellowship travels.

(RE)BUILD TRUST IN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Trust in democratic institutions is in decline in many modern democracies including Australia, and younger people often express particularly negative attitudes towards their governments and parliaments (O'Donnell, 2023). As Renwick et al has recently observed:

Public attitudes towards the democratic system matter. If people disengage, their views go unrepresented. If they do not trust those in charge, that makes the careful trade-offs and compromises that are essential to policy making harder (Renwick et al, 2023)

Recent studies suggest that perceived or actual corruption, misfeasance or incompetence are the antithesis of the trust-inducing conditions needed for meaningful public engagement in the work of parliament. If we are serious about engaging young people with our democratic institutions, we need to address these aspects of our governance and parliamentary structures, processes and cultures. We also need to acknowledge and respect the limits of what institution-led, or institution-supported, engagement strategies can achieve. We need to actively protect and promote the rights of all citizens to express their political views in a variety of ways, including through peaceful protest, and to take social action in response to issues or experiences that they care deeply about. Sometimes the institution *is the issue* in need of reform. Other times, the institution *is the barrier* blocking progress or change.

SHIFT INTERGENERATIONAL INEQUALITY

The hard reality for anyone interested in connecting marginalised groups and democratic institutions such as parliaments is that meaningful engagement requires evidence of substantive change or shifts of power away from those in established positions of privilege, towards those previously marginalised or excluded. In other words, people need to see a positive outcome from their efforts, particularly if they are being asked to trust institutional actors that they feel may have previously ignored them or contributed to their marginalised status. When democratic institutions 'reach out' to marginalised individuals or groups there is often an 'elephant in the room' that takes the form of economic, social or political inequality between the governors and the governed. There is often (but not always) a synergy between the factors that create practical barriers for meaningful engagement with parliaments and the factors that give rise to inequality.

Structural features of our economy, including taxation systems and some employment frameworks, favour older people over younger people (see e.g. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021). So too with Australia's political system, which limits franchise to those aged over 18 years and permits political donations and lobbying practices that often benefit older candidates over younger ones (Chowdhury, 2021). At the same time, current and future policy challenges, including climate change, pandemics and global political instability, threaten the security and prosperity of younger generations with a gravity and complexity that transcends the more immediate impacts on older Australians. Of course, a range of other intersecting attributes and experiences impact on the quality of life experienced by different groups and individuals in Australia, and age discrimination can also negatively impact older Australians as well as younger people (see e.g. Blackham, 2022). However, because the focus of this report

is on youth engagement with parliaments, it is important to highlight that many young people are working harder for less when compared with their parents and grandparents at the same stage of life, and as Foa and colleagues have documented, rising wealth inequality has left younger generations with lower incomes, higher costs of living, and less financial wealth (on average) than prior generations (Foa et al, 2020, p. 10). The insights I gained through my fellowship left me of the view that unless and until we acknowledge these intergenerational inequalities, we will struggle to build and sustain the relationships of trust necessary for meaningful engagement.

BROADEN WHAT COUNTS AS DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

It is easy to dismiss young people as uninterested in politics or apathetic participants in our democracy, particularly when they reject conventional party politics or fail to participate in institution-led engagement activities. However, young people *are* political (Chowdhury, 2021). They care deeply about our collective future, their communities, friends and families. Young people also have valuable problem-solving skills, experience in achieving principled compromise, and many have engaged in social action at local, national or international levels (Scalan Institute, 2023). If we want to improve the quality of youth engagement with parliaments and other democratic institutions we must recognise and respect youth political agency, particularly when it takes forms that challenge or differ from conventional political discourse. For example, issues-based political action is a valid form of democratic expression that can and should be respected, even if it is less familiar to older people who have experienced stronger ideological connections to established political parties (Daly, 2019). Similarly, utilising social media platforms, or even online gaming platforms, to express views on particularly policy issues, or to critique or challenge government decision making, is also a valid and sometimes powerful form of democratic participation (see e.g. Vromen et al, 2018). Peaceful protest and civil disobedience are also forms of democratic expression that deserve recognition and respect from those occupying powerful positions within established political discourse (see e.g. Pineda, 2021). The fact that these forms of democratic participation give rise to risks should not exclude them from our collective attention, particularly when contemplating how to create the right conditions for meaningful engagement with young people. Tradition, political party-based approaches to democratic and political participation also carry risks (see e.g. Roggeveen, 2018) that should be explored and addressed from a generational perspective, before we preference the conventional above the innovative in the context of engagement planning.



CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

During my fellowship I asked colleagues from overseas ‘what was the catalyst for change’ in your jurisdiction when it comes to improving the quality of the connection between young people and parliaments. I have described some of these insights and experiences shared with me from those working in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland and Wales below. Those insights and experiences have prompted me to identify a number catalysts for change that I consider to be relevant in the Australian context. These catalysts can be sparked by different institutions of government, including parliaments, executive governments and local councils. They can also originate from non-state actors, or global events well outside the control of any individual nation state. Some can be described as ‘external disruptions’ – unpredictable or uncontrollable events taking place outside or around the institution itself. Others are internal cultural shifts – often led by a specific individual champion or group of champions within the institution – that change the way the institution undertakes its core business, but without threatening its key democratic functions, values or identity. It is useful to reflect on these catalysts for change at this stage in the Report, before engaging in more detail with the case studies and other experiences shared with me as part of my fellowship. Later in the Report I align these catalysts with practical actions *we can take now* to work towards the key objectives set out above.

<graphic to come>

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH PARLIAMENTS

This Report focuses on youth engagement with parliaments and proceeds on the assumption that public engagement with parliaments (for people of all ages and all walks of life) is a positive, necessary component of a flourishing democracy. This is a view shared by many scholars and practitioners in Australia and beyond. For example, Professor Leston Bandeira has observed:

In the modern parliament, public engagement is essential for effective parliamentary scrutiny and to ensure that parliament remains relevant to society. (Leston-Bandeira, 2020).

The broad idea of public engagement is about ‘empowering people in relation to their surroundings’ to make a difference to the decisions and actions that affect their lives (Devonshire & Hathway, 2014). In their typology, Rowe and Frewer (2005) break down the concept of public engagement into three elements: public communication, public consultation and public participation, each defined in relation to the direction of flows of information, according to who initiates understanding and relevance, that is, how



Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Glasgow

the flows of information are received. Beyond information and understanding, Leston-Bandeira (2021) adds the step of *identification* involves citizens perceiving the relevance of the parliament to their own lives and experiences. This can lead not only to participation but also to *deliberation*: a process in which citizens not only participate but also engage with parliamentarians to lead, or significantly shape, an activity that contributes to a parliamentary decision.

The idea of deliberation requires that decision makers have access to accurate and relevant information, consider of a diversity of voices and different positions, reflect on the information received, and reach conclusions on the basis of evidence (Fishkin 2009). When applied to a parliamentary context, it requires elected members of parliament to go beyond the idea of ‘trading off’ values or interests of one group against another, and instead engage in an active search for a common ground between different values or interests (Levy & Orr, 2016). This in turn sees decision-makers engaging in reflection and sometimes, changing their mind.

During a 2021 international workshop on public engagement and parliaments, scholars and practitioners from around the world identified the following indicators of ‘good’ public engagement: inclusivity; diversity of participation; empowering; flexible; meaningful; open and transparent and collaborative (IPEN Toolkit, 2022). These themes are also reflected in the findings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s *Global Parliamentary Report 2022: Public engagement in the work of parliament* (the IPU Report) which described effective engagement as being:

1. Strategic: Embed a culture of engagement across parliament for a united and concerted effort towards broader and better public participation.
2. Inclusive: Make inclusion a priority so that parliament is accessible to all community members.
3. Participatory: Encourage people to participate in setting the agenda through opportunities to influence the issues taken up by parliament.
4. Innovative: Lead with bold and creative approaches that involve and inspire the community to engage with parliament now and into the future.
5. Responsive: Focus on meeting public expectations by listening to community feedback and continually improving. (IPU Report p. 8)

Participants also explained that facilitating good quality engagement did not mean ‘asking everyone all the time’ but rather ensuring quality encounters, time for meaningful dialogues and exchanges and openness to changing positions. In addition, participants at the Australasian Hub were keen to note that when undertaking ‘public engagement’ in Australia, we must recognise that the Australian public is not on homogenous group, but rather a complex and dynamic intersection of many different ‘publics’, each demanding careful consideration when considering engagement strategies and methods.

Unpacking this in more detail, those at the IPEN workshop identified some of the qualities of good public engagement as connected to the idea of *empowering* those who have previously been *disengaged* through inclusive, meaningful communication and by the building of relationships based on listening and trust. This in turn demands positive action on behalf of the institution or body seeking to *engage* another group to not just share information and invite participation, but to relinquish some control over the substantive agenda and the process of engagement. This can be challenging in the case of parliamentary engagement, where often both the substantive agenda and the process are intrinsically connected to the institution of Parliament. It can also give rise to mismatches in expectations between parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and public participants. Stoker and Evans (2021), for example, find that citizens prefer measures that make politicians more accountable over getting directly involved themselves. This is where learning from digital and other innovations employed by parliaments around the world can offer Australia a pathway forward to improving the quality of its engagement between public/s and parliaments.

As Evans and Stoker explore in their book *Saving Democracy* (2021), Australia is a critical turning point when it comes to public trust and satisfaction with democratic institutions and practices. The last decade has seen a significant decline in public trust in parliaments and other public institutions (Foa, 2020), but the recent COVID-19 experience has seen a shift in the way citizens are viewing and interacting with their elected representatives. This has led Evans and Stoker (2021, Preface), along with a range of other scholars including Hendriks and Kay (2018) and Laing and Walker (2021) to:

ignite a national conversation on how we can bridge the trust divide between government and citizen, strengthen democratic practice, and restore the confidence of Australians in the performance of their political institutions. (Stoker & Evans, 2021, Preface)

It is not just Australia that needs to ignite this type of national conversation. As the IPU Report provides:

Since parliaments derive their legitimacy from the people, public disenchantment threatens their authority. As representative institutions, parliaments are duty-bound to listen to the community and to meet public expectations when making laws, investigating public policy issues and holding the government to account. For decades now, parliaments have been working on ways to better engage with the communities they represent. Public engagement can take many forms and can be conducted either directly with individual community members or through organized groups. It encompasses the various processes and activities through which parliament connects with the community – to inform, educate, communicate, consult and involve. Declining trust in public institutions means that parliaments cannot simply continue with business as usual. It challenges parliaments to assess the progress they have made and to step up their efforts at engagement. Reversing the trend of disenchantment requires concerted action going forward. (IPU Report, 2021, p. 10)

Identifying different tools and strategies for public engagement, and working out what works and why, is a critical component of this national conversation and one that is essential if we are to continue to improve the quality of deliberation and youth connection within Australian parliaments (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2021). Meaningful youth connection to parliament can also improve the quality of the laws and policies made by our elected representatives, by incentivizing and encouraging deliberative law-making, that is based on ‘decision-making by discussion among free and equal citizens’ rather than ‘simply the aggregation of [political] preferences’ (Elster, 1991, p.1). By engaging with young people – and all people in the community - parliaments and parliamentarians can deliver on their fundamental democratic promises to ‘to uncover and publicise issues of public concern and citizens’ grievances, giving effective representation both to majority and minority views, and showing a consensus regard for serving the public interest’ (Dunleavy et al, 2018).

In their 2021 work on *New Options for Parliamentary Committees*, an Options Paper prepared for Committee Chairs within the NSW Parliament, Laing and Walker have described the benefits of deliberative approaches to parliamentary decision making as follows:

1. Better policy outcomes because deliberation results in considered public judgements rather than public opinions.
2. Greater legitimacy to make hard choices.
3. Enhance[d] public trust in government and democratic institutions by giving citizens an effective role in public decision making.
4. Make[s] governance more inclusive by opening the door to a much more diverse group of people.
5. Help[s] counteract polarisation and disinformation (Laing & Walker, 2021, p. 11).

Similar benefits of effective parliamentary public engagement have also been identified by the NZ Parliament when it evaluated the effectiveness of its 2018–2021 public engagement strategy. It found that during the 2019 and 2020, when explicit public engagement strategies were employed:

- Parliament’s reputation improved (up from 53.9 to 61.2 points, on a scale from 10 to 100).
- New Zealanders were more likely to advocate for Parliament (up from 10 per cent to 15 per cent).
- People were less likely to be critical of Parliament (down from 22 per cent to 15 per cent).
- Commitment to voting increased sharply (up from 18 per cent to 32 per cent).
- Refusal to vote decreased (down from 17 per cent to 8 per cent).

As the IPU Report summarises:

Public engagement matters because it is mutually beneficial for communities, for parliaments as institutions and for individual members of parliament (MPs). It enables parliaments to create better laws and policies by tapping into wider sources of information. It cultivates knowledge in communities and improves the quality of decision-making. It also allows closer monitoring of policy implementation. And in doing so, it sustains representative democracy in a rapidly changing world.

Flow on benefits associated with improving the quality of public engagement with parliamentary lawmaking include improving Australia's international standing with respect to a range of indicators including UN Human Rights Indicators and aligns with Australia's international law obligations, including Article 21 of the *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights* which protects the right of all persons to participate in public affairs.

The need for a deliberative approach to parliamentary lawmaking and to public engagement was also recognised as a high priority by those working within Australian parliaments at the Australian Hub of the IPEN Workshops hosted on in March 2021. These discussions generated a common view that improving parliamentary public engagement is not an option but a necessity for modern democracies like Australia, and that Australian parliamentarians should make this a key priority, particularly when it comes to our young people, our First Nations people and other vulnerable groups. (Moulds, 2021). There was also an agreement that a commitment to improving the quality of public engagement and deliberation within Australian Parliaments should not be misunderstood as 'asking everyone all the time' but rather ensuring *quality* encounters, *time* for meaningful dialogues and exchanges and *openness to changing positions*. It was also considered important to recognise that, as Hendriks, Regan and Kay remind us, there is not one 'public' but many 'publics' and each public demands careful consideration when considering engagement strategies and methods (Hendriks et al, 2018). For example, First Nations peoples must have the opportunity not just to 'be heard' in *response* to parliamentary activity but to have an *active voice* in the way the Australian parliament works, how it engages with First Nations peoples, how it exercises legal and political sovereignty over First Nations peoples (Appleby and Synot 2021; Larkin, 2021).

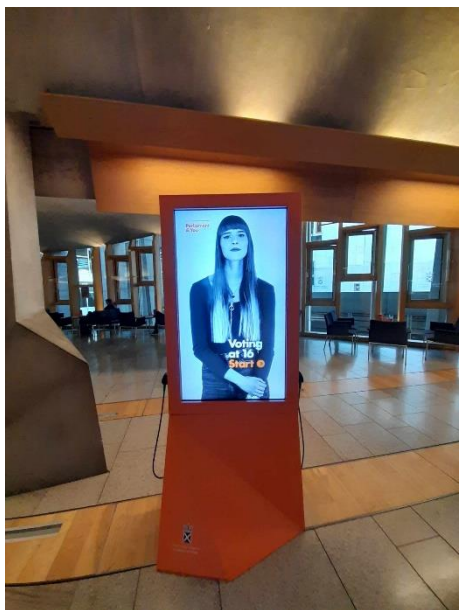
In this context, evaluating engagement strategies and looking for impact beyond the immediate 'success' or 'failure' of a particular technique or inquiry is critical to ensure that Australian Parliaments accurately capture the resources required to do things better in the future, and to make the case for more investment in the right engagement activities (Moulds, 2020). This sentiment is reflected in the Connecting Youth with Parliament Toolkit provided at the end of the Report, which is informed by the scholarship and ideas considered in this section of the Report.

In the next section of this Report, I reflect upon the insights and experiences generously shared with me by overseas colleagues during my Churchill Fellowship. These accounts return to the focus on youth engagement with parliament, but regularly reflect the key concepts and ideas explored in this section of the Report, and in the relevant scholarship and research referred to above.

LEARNING FROM DEMOCRACIES THAT LOOK (A BIT) LIKE OURS

In this next section of the Report, I provide a summary of my reflections and findings following my discussions and experiences when travelling in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and Wales in September – October 2023.

When reflecting on what pre-conditions are essential for meaningful engagement between young people and democratic institutions including parliaments, common elements emerge from the discussions I have had with the individuals and organisations listed in my itinerary. I have attempted to summarise these



common elements in my own words below, conscious of the contextual elements that must be considered before attempting to ‘transplant’ practices from one jurisdiction to another. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed above.

When I was meeting with the individuals and organisations below, I also shared examples of best practice and success from within Australia. These examples were well received and praised by those who share a common interest in empowering young people to participate in democratic discourse and engage with democratic institutions. The insights below should not be read as a critique of any existing practice occurring in Australia, but rather as a collection of thoughts on how we can continue to work together to improve future practice in Australia and beyond.

Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

ITINERARY

11 September 2023	House of Commons Library, UK Parliament, London
11 September 2023	Dan Carden MP, President of Youth Forum, Interparliamentary Union, House of Commons, UK Parliament, London
12 September 2023	Westminster Foundation of Democracy, London
12 September 2023	UK Children's Commissioner, London
12 September 2023	Philip Lord Norton of Louth, House of Lords, UK Parliament, London
13 September 2023	University of Leeds, Social Science Building, British Politics Group
14 September 2023	Howard League, London
14 September 2023	UK Youth, London
15 September 2023	Select Committee on Youth, UK Youth Parliament, Portcullis House, Westminster
18 September	UK Parliament Outreach, UK Parliament, London
19 September 2023	University of Manchester Student Union, Manchester
20 September 2023	Youth Participation Team, Manchester Youth Council, Manchester
22 September 2023	Young Manchester, Manchester
25-27 September 2023	Scottish Parliament, Research, Engagement and Outreach Teams, Edinburgh
26 September 2023	Youth Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament, Edinburgh
28 September 2023	Dr Mark Shepard, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
2 October 2023	Engagement & Education Teams, Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast
2 October 2023	Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast
4 October 2023	Engagement and Education Teams, House of Oireachtas, Dublin
5 October 2023	Think Tank for Action on Social Change, Dublin
5 October 2023	National Youth Council of Ireland, North Dublin
5 October 2023	Office of the Ceann Comhairle, Houses of the Oireachtas Service, Dublin
9 October 2023	UK Parliament Outreach (Education), UK Parliament, London
10 October 2023	Welsh Youth Parliament Team, Cardiff Bay
10 October 2023	Democracy Box, Cardiff Bay
11 October 2023	I Have a Voice, London
12 October 2023	British Youth Council, London



PERSPECTIVES FROM WESTMINSTER & LONDON

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The United Kingdom has experienced rapid demographic, political and constitutional change in the last few decades that has combined to give rise to a very different experience of British democratic life across generations – albeit with the many important constants that derive from the traditions, laws and customs of the British Monarchy and a Westminster Parliament. Many others have documented these changes, and the enduring principles that continue to define democratic systems and discourse in the UK, (see e.g. Keating, 2022; Bradbury et al, 2023; Vlahos, 2020) and I will not attempt to synthesis that complex body of work here. Instead, I will highlight some of the key controlled and uncontrolled disruptions or shifts that were described to me as being fundamental to understanding the current context in which youth engagement with the UK Parliament, takes place.

Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, London

These include:

- The process of devolution, which has seen the devolved nations of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales establish their own parliaments and national assemblies and exercise certain lawmaking powers, including determining their own approaches to electing members of their respective legislative assemblies.
- The Brexit Referendum, which took place in June 2016, and resulted in 51.89% of United Kingdom voters chose to leave the EU, while 48.11% voted to remain. The UK officially left the EU on 31 January 2020, after a period of negotiations and extensions that lasted for more than three years. The UK and the EU agreed on a new trade deal on 24 December 2020, which came into effect on 1 January 2021, and set out the rules and regulations for their future relationship. The Brexit experience has had significant political, economic, and social impacts on the UK and the EU, as well as on their relations with other countries and regions.
- The COVID-19 pandemic which not only resulted in a health crisis in the UK, but also posed unprecedented challenges to the democratic institutions and processes and resulted in cancellation of elections, the suspension of parliamentary scrutiny, the imposition of lockdown measures, and the expansion of executive powers that have raised concerns about the erosion of civil liberties, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. The COVID pandemic also exposed and exacerbated the existing social and economic inequalities in the UK, as well as the tensions between the central and devolved administrations.

As discussed above, these disruptions have operated as catalysts for change in terms of the way democratic institutions engage with the public in the UK, and vice-versa.

When visiting London, I was fortunate to meet with a diverse range of experts, practitioners and community leaders, each with valuable and unique perspectives on youth engagement with parliament. When reflecting on what pre-conditions are essential for meaningful engagement between young people and their parliaments, or their elected representatives, common elements emerge. I have attempted to

summarise these common elements in my own words below. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed above.

The top priority investment from governments and parliaments needs to be *youth led* engagement

In order to reach young people who are not already engaged with parliamentary practices or processes it is important for governments and parliaments to initiate, foster and sustain networks within hard-to-reach communities, including with youth workers with insights into the lives of marginalised young people. These networks can provide a safe bridge into key communities and provide critical feedback on barriers to engagement and help develop localised solutions and strategies. One example of this is the *Hope Hacks* program, which incorporates violence reduction services within youth service provision and builds relationships between young people and police.

Youth-led engagement can be informed by the work of Youth Advisory Boards, but this form of institution-led engagement needs to be advanced with thought and care. For example, in the UK there is a Children's Advisory Board that has been established to provide peer insights into the experience of transitioning from primary to secondary school. The UK Children's Commissioner uses this board to conduct surveys in schools and help children actively prepare for transition from primary to secondary school.

When facilitating and supporting youth-led engagement, all adult allies need to be trained in child safeguarding and trauma informed practice, and when selecting children and young people to be leaders, adult allies need to ask:

- *What impact will this opportunity have on the young person's life?*
- *Would engaging with this young person help us reach a group of others that have been previously excluded/help build trust with a previously disengaged group?*
- *Are there adults that can be 'champions' for harder to reach young people?*
- *Can we make these adults accountable and responsible for the logistics that sit behind good quality engagement practice (including providing access to online activities or transport to participate in face to face activities), to take the pressure of the young people involved?*

Meaningful engagement between young people and parliament demands a broad-based understanding of the lives of young people, the substantial policy issues they care about, and their ambitions for the future.

In the UK, many institutions, government agencies, local councils and charities rely on the 'Big Ask Survey' to access information about young people's lives, and their priorities for public services and law reform. The 'Big Ask' is the biggest survey of children and young people in Britain (UK Children's Commissioner, 2021). In 2023, UK Children's Commissioner also launched the 'Big Ambition', a future focused survey distributed via schools and available online in the lead up to the 2024 General Election. It aims to hear from children aged 6-18 across England about what they think needs to be done to make children's lives better (UK Children's Commissioner, 2023).

Taking a broad view of what counts as youth engagement with parliament or government can improve the effectiveness of youth advocacy and encourage involvement of private and public actors.

Identifying champions from outside the 'usual suspects' to mentor youth leaders and model different forms of democratic engagement and political influence is critical. For example, the *I Will Movement* has a strong focus on harnessing the experience and insight of the private sector, the lobbying sector and media when identifying champions and mentors for emerging youth leaders from diverse backgrounds. The *I Will Movement* facilitates a range of workshops and training sessions for young people inside and outside of educational and institutional settings. These sessions are focused on how to empower young people to raise the issues they care about in an effective, strategic way to maximise the positive outcomes

for themselves and the communities they represent. The *I Will* sessions unpack things like the difference between local authorities and UK government and Parliament and discuss a range of strategies to advocate for change including building alliances and coalitions, speaking directly with MPs, public servants, corporates, journalists, developing campaigns, protest activity, engaging with parliamentary inquiries. This work is underpinned by the resources on the *I Have A Voice* website and other related programs including voter registration programs, political ‘hackathons’ and leveraging networks to identify mentors for young people interested in political lobbying/social action. The *I Will* organisation takes a broad view of ‘what counts as political action’ and tries to uncover the behind the scenes aspects of politics in the UK, including unpacking who is talking to who, who is influencing who, and how young people can ‘get in the room’ where the decisions are being made. The *I Will Movement* has also worked closely with senior public servants to uncover how policies are developed, shaped, reviewed over time.

Meaningful engagement between young people and parliament has to deliver actual change that is visible to both sides. This can include legislative or policy change, as well as changes to processes, procedures and visibility of key actors and issues.

The highest quality engagement strategies are those that challenge assumptions about what young people care about, and what impact youth voices can have on public policy making and legislative design. There is a strong view among many youth advocacy organisations that young people should not be pigeon-holed into only being relevant for ‘youth issues’. Their voices should be central and respected across full range of government services and issues including climate change, taxation, foreign policy, immigration policy, and housing. There is also a need for a *mixed generation* conversation about many of these issues rather than a ‘silo-ed’ approach.

Institution-led engagement needs to be driven by excellent data and excellent digital capabilities that enable multiple entry points and facilitate meaningful feedback after engagement takes place

Data and research produced by the UK Parliament is useful for service providers and for the young people they work with, but parliamentary outputs (including Bills, committee reports, parliamentary library research, outreach activities, petitions) need to be integrated with user-focused digital platforms and information sharing systems with multiple entry points. There is a need to move beyond the hierarchies and divisions that operate within the parliament when presenting key information and access points for the public. For example, many youth organisations experience frustration at the lack of feedback that occurs after parliament and government inquiries, and this frustration also felt by youth workers and young people themselves.

Meaningful engagement means closing the distance between the governed and the governors. This means that the role of local councils and authorities is so important and a prime site for developing engagement skills and experiences, and effecting substantive change.

Local Councils have responsibility for delivering Youth Services in UK and are funded to do so, but they also enjoy a relatively broad discretion when it comes to how and what services are developed (UK Government, ‘Youth Review: Response’, 2022). Effective youth-led support services and advocacy programs often emerge from the work of individual champions or local leaders, sometimes in response to tragedy. There are many examples of youth-led programs that have arisen from a combination of family tragedies that have help to forge strong bonds between local leaders, police and other service agencies, and otherwise marginalised young people. An example is *Hackney Account*, which is a youth-led empowerment movement involving young people in the Hackney area working closely with police to develop innovative responses to youth crime. Another example is *Revolving Doors*.

A nationally-coordinated approach to raising youth issues and upholding children's rights is critical – and needs to have access to cabinet level decision making and be backed by sufficient resources to attract and retain high quality staff

For example, UK Youth has recently advocated for the appointment of Minister for Youth *with a Cabinet role* so that youth issues and youth voices can be integrated across all government portfolios within the UK Government (UK Youth, Manifesto, 2022). Statutory office holders like the UK Children's Commissioner are also important allies and can facilitate access to information, including information held by key service agencies and government departments, about children and young people's lives and wellbeing, and about their views on a range of policy issues. Well trained civil servants also make a big difference when it comes to design and delivering high quality engagement including with young people.

Addressing the over policing of young people is critical to facilitating positive engagement with government and related institutions.

This means reconceptualising punitive concepts of criminal justice, investing in restorative justice strategies and acknowledging and addressing power differentials that negatively impact on young people in policing and education contexts and limit their democratic freedoms, including right to protest. It also means focusing local attention on generating support for reforms that could promote cooperation and healing between young offenders, law enforcement and victims of crime. Local efforts to promote broader contextual understanding of the casual factors that lead to anti-social behaviour can help generate opportunities for youth-led consultation on proposed and existing criminal justice policies.

Youth Parliaments and Youth Advisory Groups can play a key role, but must (1) go beyond the usual suspects (2) be empowered to seek out legitimate democratically informed mandates from other young people (eg through direct election) and (3) be able to exert political influence to achieve substantive change.

The primary objective of Youth Parliaments and Youth Advisory Groups must be to advance the issues young people care about, rather than to provide an educative experience for a selected group of young people. There is also a need to think carefully about how Youth Parliaments can access procedural support and other key parliamentary facilities including research facilities, parliamentary privileges, powers and protections, which are particularly important when it comes to scrutinising government action or expenditure or proposing new laws or policies. For example, the UK Youth Parliament Youth Select Committee has the 'look and feel' of a standard Parliamentary Select Committee but is established as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding with the UK Parliament, rather than by Standing Orders. As a result, the Youth Select Committee has powers to invite for witnesses to give evidence but lacks compellable powers to require witnesses (such as government ministers or authorities) to appear before it to answer questions or share information. The Youth Select Committee also lacks access to parliament privilege, which has impacts on things like live broadcasting and protection for witnesses and committee members.

Investing in and developing a culture of institutional openness among parliamentarians and parliamentary staff supported by ongoing evaluation of the positive impacts of high quality public engagement with parliament and government.

UK Parliament has moved towards an institution-wide, integrated approach to public outreach, engagement following a number of important 'trigger points' including the publication of the *Modernisation: Public Bills Committees* Report in 2006, and the implementation of its key recommendations in 2007. This report led to important changes in the House of Commons and parliamentary services. After the *Modernisation Committee Report* there was a 'pilot' of community outreach programs in late 2007 and 2008. This saw the House of Commons Library broaden its role to

include a strong focus on the provision of materials and supports for public facing inquiries and other engagement activities. During this era the concept community outreach and engagement was largely driven by requests from community members or educators who were already familiar with some aspects of parliamentary business and a School Education Team was developed to meet this need. However, some years later, the UK Parliament recognised the need to extend its outreach programs to those who were *disengaged* with the work of parliament, and commissioned research to be conducted by the House of Commons Library to find out which communities and individuals were *least* likely to be engaged with Parliament. Particular attention was given to the need to reach out to communities that displayed some of the protected attributes in the *Equality Act 2010* (UK). Following the completion of this research, the UK Parliament Community Outreach team began to focus its work on those groups least likely to engage and these included disability, migrants, long term unemployed, those young people outside of tertiary education settings.

In 2017-18, the Community Outreach Team merged with the School Education Team to form the Education Service Team, which services House of Commons and House of Lords and coordinates a wide range of outreach services, supported by a range of other parliamentary offices including the House of Commons Library and the Digital Services Team. This saw an upskilling of staff to ensure that every member of the team can interact effectively with schools and communities. Now, this broader team conducts outreach with people of all ages and backgrounds, and they focus on asking the following three questions: *Are you aware of who your MPs is and how to contact them? Do you know how the work of Parliament impacts your lives? Do you know how the House of Lords make laws?*

In the Education Services Team there are three key focus areas: education; community outreach; resources and content. Teachers training fits into the education stream, and this includes facilitating programs in teachers' colleges and professional development sessions at Portcullis House. The teachers' training program is focused on identifying and qualifying individual teachers (described as 'Ambassadors') who can then support other teachers in the school to engage students with work of Parliament. The UK Parliament's school education program is designed to fit within the different School Curriculums that operate through out the UK, which are now controlled by the devolved nations. It is supported by a suite of child-friendly facilities at Portcullis House, as well as extensive digital resources. In addition to the Education Services Team, there is a separate Select Committee Engagement Team (established in 2016) designed to support Committees and Committee chairs to plan and implement effective engagement techniques in the context of committee inquiries.

The embrace of UK-wide events and experiences, such as UK Parliament Week, have been important awareness raising opportunities that can help individuals and communities get started on their engagement journey with parliament.

Positive, low-stakes, human to human encounters (eg those facilitated by UK Parliament week) can flow onto more formalised, substantive engagement with parliamentary business (eg online petitions or participation in parliamentary committee inquiries).

Support from Presiding Officers and Committee Chairs is really important. The previous Speaker of the House of Commons, the Hon John Bercow MP, was a big champion of engagement and helped secure funding including for things like UK Parliament Week. Champions with the broader parliamentary professional staff are also important. A number of elements of the *Modernisation Committee Report* have contributed to a stronger engagement culture, including changes that require Select Committee Chairs to be *elected* rather than appointed. Election of chairs helps ensure people with relevant skills and interest in convening public-facing committee inquiries are usually elected: people who know how to get things done and who have engagement experience.

This leadership, coupled with internal champions, assists in overcoming any potential institutional resistance, including, for example, perspectives among some staff that ‘engagement has to be *earned*’ and that systems are complex for good reason and should not be ‘dumbed down’ to reach different audiences. Some parliamentary staff and parliamentarians also express caution about raising expectations and disappointing people through increased engagement activity. The best way to counter these concerns is to *show that it can work* – when it works well, everyone else wants to be involved.

There is also a need for caution about appearing to be involved in ‘advocacy’ when undertaking outreach and engagement work. For this reason, the UK Parliament Education Service team works from a position of ‘informing the public’ or ‘demystifying the parliament’, rather than advancing specific positions in response to policy issues.

Building, retaining and attracting staff with specialist engagement skills and networks is critical, particularly when it comes to engaging the ‘unusual suspects’.

One of the most difficult to reach groups of traditionally marginalised citizens is the long term unemployed. The UK Parliament Engagement team have reached out this cohort by forging links with the adult education sector. Parliament community officers are employed with specific skills to help connect with these organisations and go out to locations to engage with small groups and learn how to develop more networks. Even small groups can be very useful to get insights into key issues that are important for these groups and how they want to engage. The need for this type of grass roots information gathering to inform future engagement is acute. These ‘bridge groups’ become important sources of information for the Select Committee Engagement Team and the Education Service. However, identifying these groups is a big challenge and often comes down to the networks and networking skills of individual community officers employed by the parliament. There is also a need to avoid a singular focus on ‘numbers of people reached’. These approaches are useful for schools, but less useful for measuring overall quality and impact of engagement, particularly when longer-term, higher intensity strategies are needed to identify, reach and engage with disengaged or seldom heard communities.

The UK Parliament’s Petition system, including the e-petitions model and the work of the Petitions Committee, has also been a highly effective catalyst for meaningful engagement, including with young people and previously disengaged groups.

Petitions have become by far the most common form of public engagement, with estimates that seven out of 10 adults in the UK have engaged with the petition system at some point. Under the UK Parliament petitions system a petition with 10,000 signatures gets a written response, and petitions attracting 100,000 signatures are referred to a Select Committee for inquiry. The Petitions Committee has also emerged as a leader in the area of public engagement and often enquires into issues raised in petitions with less than 100,000 signatures. The Petitions Committee has also become an important training ground for Members of Parliament interested in connecting with the public. It has played a leadership role in building skills and generates champions among Members and parliamentary staff who then go on to share these skills with other committees and colleagues. The work of the Petitions Committee has also been revolutionary for the Education Services Team, who drawn upon its work as examples and pathways for groups and individuals to be inspired to take the first step to get involved in the work of the UK Parliament. Engagement with petitions is also accessible for all ages, for persons who are British Citizens.

CASE STUDY 1: BRITISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT*

* For comprehensive information about the British Youth Parliament please visit <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/uk-youth-parliament>

The British Youth Parliament is a youth organisation, consisting of around 300 elected members aged 11 and 18, supplemented by a smaller number of partner-nominated members. It aims to generate a forum for youth voice, capture the priorities of young people, and create an agenda for change.



Photo Credit: British Youth Council, 2023

Every two years, each local authority across the UK hosts an British Youth Parliament election, and this sometimes occurs in partnership with school networks or youth group networks. All young people within the local constituency aged 11-18 are eligible to vote, but voting is not compulsory. Voting takes place in person at polling booths and is designed to emulate regular elections, encouraging young people to learn about the voting process and to enroll to vote in other elections. Over 500,000 young people vote in the elections each year.

Prospective and elected Youth MPs campaign on a range of policy issues but cannot be overtly politically aligned or formally endorsed by a political party. Elected Youth MPs are strongly encouraged to see their role as representation the views and priorities of the young people in their constituency.

At the same time the British Youth Parliament elections are conducted, the British Youth Council also conducts a detailed 'Make Your Mark' survey where young people are asked to identify policy areas of strongest interest or concern to them and their families. The responses received are delineated into local constituencies, providing a powerful source of information for incoming Youth MPs, local authorities, key government agencies and adult

parliamentarians seeking to better understand the policy issues impacting young people in their constituencies. Past surveys have had very strong response rates, generating up to one million responses. These surveys also feed into the British Youth Parliament manifesto that brings together a wide range of issues affecting young people.

Once elected or appointed the Youth MPs meet regularly to hold debates and plan campaigns at least three times a year locally, and twice on a national level, which includes the annual debate within the Chamber of the House of Commons every November. Youth MPs can also form Youth Select Committees and conduct inquiries into policy issues of interest to their constituencies. Youth Select Committees regularly call for submissions and examine witnesses, as well as requesting information from government departments and/or utilising research services available through the UK Parliament. They are also provided with access to Committee rooms within the UK Parliament and are supported by Parliamentary Hansard and broadcasting services. However, the Youth Select Committees cannot access parliamentary privilege, or exercise compellable powers to require witnesses to attend to give evidence. Despite this, their inquiries and reports can be compelling and influential, including the recent 2023 Youth Select Committee Inquiry into Cost of Living, which explored: the impact of intersecting inequalities on the lives of young people and their access to employment, housing, education and other key services; and the experiences of young people who are also heads of households or in caring responsibilities and who are paid significantly lower for the same work as adult co-workers.

Youth MPs have a strong track record of successfully advocating for policy change, particularly at the local level and within departmental service providers. These bodies regularly seek out and then respond to the views of Youth MPs on a range of policy issues, including education, transport, housing and mental health. It remains difficult, however, for Youth MPs to influence macro-economic issues, including those relating to climate change, taxation, wages and education funding.

CASE STUDY 2: UK PARLIAMENT WEEK*

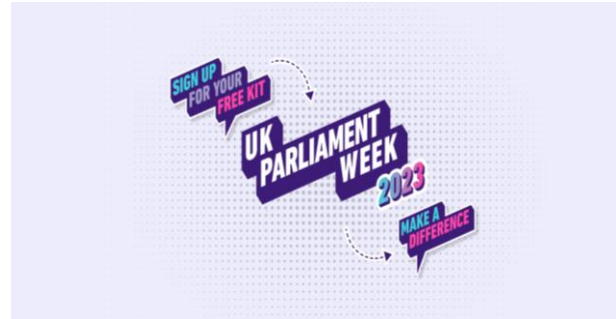
* For comprehensive information about the UK Parliament Week please visit <https://www.ukparliamentweek.org/en/>

UK Parliament Week is an annual series of events that take place across the UK each November that aim to inspire interest in parliament, politics and democracy and encourage young people and the public to engage with the UK's democratic system and institutions. In 2023, UK Parliament Week coincided with the State Opening of Parliament, and saw more than 11,000 events take place across the country, as well as in the Crown Dependencies and the British Overseas Territories.

UK Parliament Week aims to connect local communities with their elected representatives and encourages local events or workshops that spread awareness about the practices and processes of parliament and encourage civic participation. Interested individuals, community organisations, teachers or MPs can request a free UK Parliament Week resource kit, which is tailored to different audiences and available in different languages. The 2023 kits included a Parliamentary-themed board game, The Ayes Have It, that encourages students to learn more about decision making in parliament.



Picture Credit: UKParliamentWeek.org, 12 December 2023



Picture Credit: UKParliamentWeek.org, 2023

The first UK Parliament Week in 2011 was centred around encouraging the public to visit Westminster and learn about parliamentary processes through tours and formal events. However, over time it has evolved to be focused on local experiences, with community led activities and events that are supported by specialist parliamentary staff who have integrated UK Parliament Week into broader, more holistic public engagement and education strategies. Careful planning has been put into ensuring that UK Parliament Week is accessible and engaging for hard to reach or 'seldom heard' communities, with parliamentary staff and elected MPs building and supporting local networks and local champions to assist in co-designing activities and resources. Since 2017, the digital aspects of UK Parliament have also become increasingly important, with attention given to safe data collection from participants, as well as effective media engagement and promotion across a range of online platforms. This has in turn enabled high quality feedback to be received and supported the integration of UK Parliament Week into engagement activities including the online petitions system, teacher training programs and school visits.



PERSPECTIVES FROM MANCHESTER

19 September 2023

University of Manchester Student Union, Manchester

20 September 2023

Youth Participation Team, Manchester Youth Council, Manchester

22 September 2023

Young Manchester, Manchester

When travelling in England, I was keen to gain some insights into youth participation in and engagement with democratic activities and institutions outside of London. The Manchester area provided a useful case study and has a rich history of democratic innovation and inclusive participation (see e.g. Bainbridge, 2017). The Manchester region is governed by the Greater Manchester Authority, which comprises of constituent Local Councils for the local government areas of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, and Wigan (Greater Manchester Authority, 2023). The Greater Manchester Authority is responsible for a range of functions across the Combined Area, including: transport, economic development, regeneration and housing, strategic spatial planning, education, skills and training, police and crime, fire and rescue, public health and waste (Greater Manchester Authority, 2023).

The Greater Manchester region has a large student population, and 42% of Manchester's population is aged 25 or under (Young Manchester, 2023). The Greater Manchester region is also the third fastest growing economy in the UK - expected to reach a size of £71 billion by the end of 2023. However, there are significant disparities of wealth across the region, and 45% of children in Manchester are currently living in poverty (Young Manchester, 2023). This makes the Greater Manchester region a particularly compelling case study for my inquiry into youth engagement with democratic decision making and the work of parliaments.

When visiting Manchester, I was fortunate to meet with youth leaders and youth workers, each with valuable and unique perspectives on youth engagement with local and national governments. When reflecting on what pre-conditions are essential for meaningful youth-led democratic participation, I have summarised the key themes arising from these conversations in my own words below. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed above.

Building strong alliances across educational institutions and local and national government is resource-intensive, but worth the investment when it results in sustainable, evidence-based policy change and improvements in the lives of young people and their families and communities.

For example, the University of Manchester Student Union has been part of efforts to work towards creating a Greater Manchester Student Assembly, that would include elected officers from across the five Universities in the Manchester region, representing the 120,000 students in the Greater Manchester Area (Davies, 2018). If such an Assembly is achieved, the size of its constituency based will mean that it will have considerable political impact on local policy development and be well placed to maximise the impact

of the existing resources of the individual student unions. However, the ambition behind the Greater Manchester Student Assembly transcends local politics and policies. The proposed body would seek to speak directly to the UK Government and Parliament on *all* policy issues, not just those designated by others as ‘youth policy’ issues. It also points to a bigger picture vision among some student leaders to have a truly coordinated Student Union Movement across the UK that could help shift entrenched issues of inequity and respond to serious concerns about funding of Higher Education System in UK.

There is a strong focus at Manchester City Council on Youth Voice and Youth Participation, both of which are seen as key to overcoming a range of social and economic challenges for the City. There is a recognition within these institutions that young people in Manchester want to be involved in politics and change. This is supported by information gleaned from national data collection and surveys, which can help identify issues and advocacy priorities that are of common concern across the nation, particularly when the information obtained from these surveys is delineated not just by geography but also by other social indicators, including poverty indicators. This data helps engagement teams to better understand and identify some of the characteristics and priorities of excluded or disconnected communities. However, there is a tension when it comes to collecting data and gathering information from young people who are experiencing social exclusion or disadvantage and actually providing support and trauma informed care. It is absolutely critical for government officials, service providers and institutional engagement teams to move beyond ‘hearing from the seldom heard’ to *doing something to help change the situation on the ground*.

Manchester has committed to being a UN Child Friendly city. This means more than ‘children need to be heard’ in key governance and decision-making forums within the city. It also requires *action* to be taken to address children’s needs and to implement their ideas or calls for change. This commitment also extends to upskilling young people and children so that they can really clearly articulate their own goals and ambitions for themselves, their families and their communities.

Young people have economic and political value, and can exert economic and political influence on key decision makers, particularly when provided with a stable base of support from which to develop their own expertise and identify strategic priorities.

There is a need to think carefully about how we are viewing democratic participation. Older people and institution-led engagement approaches often assume that the only legitimate forms of democratic participation are formalised, rules-based, and controlled by adults (such as voting in elections, writing submissions, signing petitions or registering with political parties). There is often a lack of participation and engagement by young people in these processes. However, young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and communities are politically active in other ways, including by gathering in groups in the city, or creating online communities. The problem is that these less conventional forms of democratic expression often generate negative public responses, and sometimes result in criminal justice responses. These responses can misunderstand or misinterpret these activities as criminal, when they may be young people trying to express themselves or trying to challenge or reject the status quo. Antipathy towards conventional politics by young people can be a form of democratic expression. It can be a public communication that they feel completely abandoned and let down by conventional politics and systems, rather than a sign that young people ‘don’t care about anything’.

The University of Manchester’s Student Union has a strong internal structure that balances experience and strategic coordination with an inclusive, student-led approach to prioritising advocacy and activities. The Student Union is also a major employer of young people, employing around 95 full time Union Staff and approximately 400 students part time. It also manages a number of student services and facilities on behalf of students, including foodhalls, music venues, meeting rooms, support services, and media production centers. This stable membership and leadership base enables the Student Union to plan and

prosecute long term strategies for youth voice in policy making in Manchester, and to develop meaningful relationships with elected local officials, and members of parliament. Recently, the Student Union has focused its advocacy efforts on two inter-related projects concerning cost of living and transport. It worked with the Greater Manchester Authority to create a successful campaign for free bus fare for all students. The Union also wrote an open letter to the Mayor to come to the University of Manchester Student Fair and speak. This helped to build a relationship before the Union then made their 'ask' about free transport. This enabled the students to link their advocacy priorities with the Authority's shared interest in student retention, and the mutually beneficial objective of strong university sector as critical for economic growth in Manchester. The Union is also collaborating with other student and youth groups to develop a Student Manifesto ahead of the UK General Election. The Union has also recently established a Taskforce to provide urgent relief for cost of living pressures facing students.

Many institution-led youth engagement and participation experiences, including the Manchester Youth Council or Youth Voice programs, have strict requirements concerning political neutrality and non-partisan membership. The young people elected or appointed to serve in these roles must be non-politically aligned, and *issues* focused. There are many benefits of this approach, including a sustained focus on achieving practical outcomes that directly improve the lives of young people. But there is also a clear tension between the ambitions of Youth Council Members, which can only realistically be achieved through the exertion of *political* influence, and the implicit and explicit requirements to be *politically neutral*. As a result, often it is shifts in the political composition of the adult City Council that provide the most fertile spaces for the Youth Council or the Youth Voice to exert influence and reform. For example, the rise of Independent Council members within the Greater Manchester Authority is having a positive impact in terms of holding the dominant Labor members to account and helping to provide the right conditions for Youth Voice to be taken seriously.

Personal relationships are critical when seeking to engage with hard to reach or seldom heard communities. Establishing and maintaining trust takes time and resources, and often requires a place-based or one-on-one approach, particularly for individuals or communities facing complex trauma or experiencing the longer term impacts of adverse childhood experiences or poverty.

Working one on one with individuals who have experienced complex trauma, intergenerational poverty or social exclusion can have strong results, particularly when sustained over a longer-term period. Helping young people to identify positive role models in their lives and work on development plans for their future are key objectives for these approaches. This can include 'doorstep visits' with children and young people at risk, which can appear resource intensive but if conducted by appropriately trained staff can create conditions for relationships of trust which can in turn maximise the effectiveness of preventative strategies and save resources.

The key priority in this space is ensuring access to sustainable, long-term funding, so that the best people can be given enough time to connect with disadvantaged or seldom heard communities and focus on *quality* of services and representation.

Place based youth services are also critical for establishing, sustaining and broadening relationships of trust and meaningful engagement with democratic institutions like Parliament. Funding often presents a serious barrier for success when it comes to implementing place-based youth services. Long term, stable funding for skilled practitioners is required to ensure positive relationships can be sustained over time. This should be supported by the establishment and maintenance of service-based partnerships (including partnerships involving experts in health care service delivery, culturally appropriate practice, and trauma informed responses to domestic and family violence) which can ensure the staff responsible for delivering place-based services in vulnerable communities have the appropriate training and knowledge. The benefits of this approach are significant as once relationships of trust exist between key individuals or

families, you can begin to develop a stronger understanding of the strengths, needs and priorities of the broader community. This can in turn lead to the integration of range of programs, including those aimed at transitioning unemployed youth into informal education settings and then into adult education or employment.

Models based on *detached youth work* (see e.g. Batsleer, 2012; Anderssen, 2013), that encourage providers to look for 'bridges' to promote youth led social action, can also be an effective way to reach individuals or communities previously disconnected from the work of democratic institutions such as parliaments. These approaches can also help shift how success is measured when it comes to youth engagement programs away from measures that seek to reward programs that 'reach the most young people' or 'generate the most submissions or survey responses', towards the impact of the program or activity on a young person's life, identity or wellbeing. The focus of youth voice activities needs to be on whether the young person has built skills to model positive democratic behaviour and develop their own social connections and articulate their own goal, even if those goals are different from those of the service provider or funding body.

Poverty and socio-economic inequality are key drivers of youth involvement with the criminal justice system, and lead to disengagement with democratic institutions. Whole-of-family preventative approaches can help address the most acute manifestations of poverty and develop relationships of trust between communities and service providers – but there must be continuity of resources and staff.

In order to advance evidence-based engagement strategies that reach the disengaged or seldom heard communities it is important to consider both quantitative and qualitative data sources. However great care must be taken when planning how, when and why data is collected and what burden the data collection places on young people. The best data is that compiled across a range of agencies, authorities and services. An example is the Child Health Profiles Service produced by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities that enables community profiles and individual profiles to be generated that goes beyond demographics and includes information about engagement with government and non-government services.

Manchester City Council now has a statutory focus on prevention when it comes to the provision of child, youth and family services, which it hopes will translate into more meaningful engagement with democratic institutions and processes, as well as enhanced wellbeing, health and employment outcomes for children and their families. Current programs include a strong focus on very young children, (aged 0-5) and aim to provide holistic, wrap around services for families. At the same time, local authorities also recognize that reaching out to young people 11-19 who may be experiencing disadvantage or poverty is still critically important.

Points of crisis, including incidents involving criminal justice responses, provide opportunities for healing and connection if they are handled with care, and by utilising trauma-informed approaches. For example, skilled youth workers have been able to facilitate positive engagement with police officers and young people in response to incidents involving violence or youth crime in a range of settings, including utilising sporting events and other 'out of hours' social interactions. These human to human interactions can promote empathy and identify common goals and interests in making the community a good place to be.

There is a Youth Justice Team within the Manchester City Council and Public Health Directorates and a new initiative to create Family Hubs that provide services all the way up to 0-19. The idea behind these initiatives is to build trust and provide holistic services in deprived communities, but its success is likely to depend on the provision of consistent, long term funding and consistency of highly skilled staff. The 'success' of these initiatives must be measured by their ability to deliver tangible results for communities

and families at risk – it must extend beyond a ‘defining the problem’ type objective based on ‘consultation’ and data collection.

Developing relationships of trust between young people with lived experience of poverty or other forms for disadvantage and democratic institutions like Councils or Parliaments needs to confront the reality that the rules-based orders that secure the power of these institutions are the same structures that have led to exclusion and deprivations for young people and their families. This gives rise to a need to address the over policing of young peoples lives, both in terms of criminal justice but also in every single area including within educational settings, youth leadership settings, political discourse and public space. When institutions or service providers have the courage to ‘move the rules out the way’ you can generate sustainable, innovative and collaborate solutions to complex problems. Conversely, when you start with a heavy rules-orientated approach, you signal to young people that the upcoming experience will have features in common to those that have previously led to exclusion, disempowerment and loss.

Existing commissioning practices within the UK public service can be utilised to provide more direct sources of funding for young people to initiate and deliver their own engagement strategies and lead to truly collaborative practice between young people and key government decision makers or service providers.

This is evident in commissioning frames such as Youth Banks (YouthBank UK, 2023), which provide sources of funding that can be applied for directly by young people with lived experience of exclusion or social or economic disadvantage. Many of these Youth Banks are administered by youth services providers who meet prescribed criteria to become a Youth Bank. These organisations can then call for applications directly by young people seeking to engage in projects or programs to benefit their communities. When it works well, this model can provide access to funding for marginalised groups and young people can benefit a lot from the process. Providing sources of funding that can be direct accessed by and controlled by young people can generate youth led strategies and solutions in response to specific localised needs. For example, Young Manchester tries to ensure young people are directly involved in all aspects of the commissioning process, including strategy development, input into the application process, refining criteria for success for other grants and by including young people on panels to assess grant applications.

Youth-led and youth-controlled strategies can also lead to upskilling of key public decision makers and elected officials, so that older in positions of power have a greater understanding of the needs of young people, and their value as partners and co-designers in service deliver and policy design. For example, the Keeping Young People and Children Safe project (which was a partnered project funded by a large UK charity) was a chance for Young Manchester to upskill the senior leadership within the charity through training and modelling, to ensure that youth voices were taken seriously in governance structures as well as in project the design and delivery.

It can be challenging to get the balance right between youth-led and child-led approaches and ensuring accountability of outcomes back to funding bodies. One way approach this is to support young people in the decision making processes and provide them with a framework for decision making that they can help design and practice and become familiar with ahead of time. It also means ‘packaging up’ the outcomes for the funders in ways that honour the intellectual and strategic input from young people, in a transparent way. The best results come when the young people are able to directly upskill the funders or grant providers, and help them imbed youth voice in their own governance and oversight structures. This has a flow on impact for the design and implementation of future funding frameworks, and for the types of criteria used to evaluate completed projects.

CASE STUDY 3: SHARING POWER IN A PLACE, YOUNG MANCHESTER*

* For comprehensive information about the *Sharing Power in a Place* Report please visit <https://youngmanchester.org/entry/sharing-power-in-a-place>

Young Manchester is a youth-led partnership with over 120 members, all of which are non-profit organisations and groups supporting children and young people in Manchester. Young Manchester's mission is to strengthen, connect and champion opportunities for children and young people (aged 0-25), with a specific focus on reaching the most excluded children and young people within the Manchester region.

An example of Young Manchester's youth-led approach to engagement is the *Sharing Power in Place* report, written by Claire Muhlawako Madzura, a 19 year old changemaker from Manchester. The *Sharing Power in Place* report documents an investigation led by Claire and colleagues into

whether the socio-economic gap in youth social action participation has been reflected in Manchester and how we put power into its young people's hands.

The Report includes interviews from youth workers from across the city and feedback from young people and identifies a range of practical ways to ensure that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds can participate in youth social action. They include the following:

Be local: *Work directly in local communities for local communities. The first step to having generational trust is visibility! ... Strengthen partnerships with local organisations providing different services. This allows young people to get additional support for experts in their area.*

Be youth-led: *Find opportunities for young people to take ownership of solutions to issues that their community faces. Create activities and programmes that appeal to the needs of the community. Find time to debrief with young people. This time for quick reflections soon after completing parts of their work allows them to more easily see the benefits of*

their social action. Engage and consult with young people so they can design programmes that they want to be a part of.

Be holistic: *...Engage with families as young people do not exist in isolation. This allows you to better understand the barriers faced by each young person and work collaboratively with their legal guardians to overcome them. A place-based partnership allows organisations to access young people through a stepping-stone Find opportunities to have fun. Often, young people from deprived areas have less time to just be children. Give them that time.*

The Report also documents a range of practical strategies for involving young people in the funding Process, which have been modelled by Young Manchester's own approach to funding and governance. The following graphic is included in the Report as an example of youth-led grantmaking processes to make sure that young people are at the centre of each fund.



Image Credit, *Sharing Power in a Place* report, Young Manchester, 2023, p.16



PERSPECTIVES FROM SCOTLAND

25-27 September 2023 **Scottish Parliament, Research, Engagement and Outreach Teams, Edinburgh**

26 September 2023 **Youth Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament, Edinburgh**

28 September 2023 **Dr Mark Shepard, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow**

The origins of the Scottish Parliament can be traced to the historic events surrounding the Act of Union in 1707 (Devine, 2000) and more recently the demand for a Scottish Parliament that resurfaced in the late 20th century, driven by a resurgence of Scottish nationalism and a desire for greater autonomy (Lynch, 2002). Following decades of unsuccessful attempts to review the structures of the UK constitution and advance devolution the *Scotland Act 1998* was passed by the UK Parliament, and on 1 July 1999, the Scottish Parliament was officially reconvened. The *Scotland Act 1998* devolved certain legislative powers to the Scottish Parliament, granting it authority to legislate in areas such as health, education, and justice. Prior to the enactment of the Scotland Act, the Secretary of State for Scotland appointed a Consultative Steering Group comprising of major political parties in Scotland and other public groups and interest to develop proposals for how the new Parliament would operate. This Group produced a report entitled, 'Shaping Scotland's Parliament' which became a blueprint for the Parliament's initial set of procedural Rules and emphasised that public engagement and participation would play an important role in the new Parliament. The Scottish Parliament also includes a strong system of parliamentary committees and every single Bill introduced into the Scottish Parliament gets scrutinised by a subject committee (and each committee has proportionate representation across parties represented in parliament).

In Scotland, the Independence Referendum was a pivotal moment for all people in Scotland but particularly for young people – it became an identity issue. To be able to participate in that referendum as 16 and 17 year olds, and then see really substantial change, created an environment of trust and hope in democratic processes and politics in Scotland. This collective experience changed the boundaries of the possible, and the character of politics in Scotland and led to rapid reforms that secured these positive changes within the new Parliament. These included the established of the Scottish Youth Parliament, franchise for 16 and 17 year olds and the Members of Parliament who genuinely wanted to hear from young people in Scotland. The Scottish Independence referendum also led to changes in the public service, and a renewed commitment from policy makers and service providers to consult with (and employ) people living in poorer areas like Glasgow. Over time this has led to the creation of a Scottish public service that has genuine insights into people's lives. The Scottish referendum process has also been described as positively impacting the national psyche and helped to address the 'crisis of confidence' which is sometimes evident in otherwise ambitious young people from poorer and less privileged areas.



However, it appears that the relatively high rates of youth engagement with democratic institutions evident in the late 1990s and earlier 2000s may have begun to dissipate. For example, the levels of youth participation in Scottish Parliament elections have not increased over recent years, and some literature suggests that lowering voting ages may not be translating into high rates of democratic participation as young people move into their twenties and thirties.

When visiting Edinburgh and Glasgow, I was fortunate to meet with senior parliamentary staff, youth workers and academic experts, each with valuable and unique perspectives on youth engagement with parliament, and with local and national governments. When reflecting on what pre-conditions are essential for meaningful youth-led democratic participation, I have summarised the key themes arising from these conversations in my own words below. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed above.

‘Democracy by design’ is a powerful symbolic normative and practical concept that has underpinned the transformation of the engagement and participation strategies employed by the Scottish Parliament.

This is evident in the physical building and surrounds of the Scottish Parliament, which incorporate light and nature (symbolising transparency and connection to country and history) as well as circular chambers and meeting rooms (symbolising equality and collegiality).

The public entrance to the Scottish Parliament, and the building surrounds, are deliberately designed to be welcoming and accessible to community visitors and have become popular tourist destinations in their own right. Interactive digital displays documenting citizen’s positive experiences with parliamentary engagement are a key feature of the Parliamentary foyer area which are supplemented by multiple safe and welcoming spaces for visitors of all backgrounds. This helps to create an environment that is modern and inviting, and in stark contrast to the historic and austere surrounds of other parliaments in the UK.

A critical report in the development of the current Scottish approach to public parliamentary engagement was a Committee Report delivered in the 4th session of the Scottish Parliament. This Report led to the establishment of the Participation Team. This development was supported by incremental change already happening in committees space, which was then spearheaded by an embrace of innovative ways of connecting with people and the establishment of a dedicated Digital Services team. The combined result was enhanced *digital capacity* and *deliberative capacity*. The fact that these reforms were supported by the Members of the Scottish Parliament themselves (through the form of the parliamentary committee report) meant that they had more credibility and more sticking power than an internally-led reform agenda.

The next iteration of the Scottish Parliament’s approach to ‘mainstreaming’ participation values and strategies is likely to emerge from the 2022 and 2023 Citizen Participation and Public Petitions

Committee's inquiry into Public Participation in the Scottish Parliament. These Reports talk about the cross-parliament benefits of public engagement work but also acknowledges the challenge is achieving this within resource constraints and identifies a need to work creatively across different committee inquiries.

The Scottish Parliamentary values have been a really useful tool for driving internal cultural change towards embracing and valuing participatory approaches. In particular the values of inclusiveness and stewardship have been powerful for parliamentary staff and MSPs.

The Scottish Parliament is gradually moving from the idea of consultation for the benefit of members broadening their network and audience toward the idea of participation as empowering the public to understand more about the laws and decisions being made in their name. This is a fundamental normative and cultural shift that is also translating into resource investment orientated around meeting people where they are, rather than waiting until they interact with the Parliament. It can take the form of parliamentary staff travelling to regional areas and speaking to young people about a range of key policy issues and translating this information into materials that can be accessed and used by a range of parliamentary actors, including parliamentary committees. Under these models, the 'grunt work' is being done by the ones with the resources (that is, the *parliament* not the *young people*).

Imbedding participation specialists within parliamentary committee secretariats helps facilitate two-way learning and support targeted, effective and efficient engagement strategies that are responsive to the needs of Members.

In the Scottish Parliament each parliamentary committee has a member of the Participation Team as part of their secretariat. The Participation Team member will meet with the Clerk supporting the Committee and the Convenor of the Committee to learn about what the Committee needs to get out of the inquiry and to provide engagement advice and support. The Committee will then produce an Approach Paper for each inquiry that will include a framework for any research, plans for public inquiries or submission process and time lines, as well as engagement strategies.

Demographic data commissioned by the research teams can reveal the need for careful, expert, localised and partnered engagement strategies. In these cases, the Participation Team member will consult with their established network of partners to help develop the most effective and efficient public engagement strategy for the particular committee inquiry. Sometimes this will involve working with partner hosts.

One example of this approach is the work of Equal Opportunities Committee in its 2001 *Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies* where the voice of lived experience was given central place because the Committee wanted to better understand the perspectives of Gypsy Traveller communities in order to understand their housing and social security needs. Connecting with these communities necessitated reliance on skills of Participation Team as well as on established partnerships. Through this carefully planned engagement approach, Members of the Equality Committee developed important trusted relationships with Gypsy Travellers by visiting them where they were and have since become unofficial ambassadors of this approach.

The same rationale can be drawn upon to support participatory approaches to other aspects of parliamentary business, such as budgeting processes. Once Members appreciate the value of using qualitative research methods or lived experience focus groups to accurately assessing the on the ground impact of budgetary decisions, or to help work out if past Budget decisions have actually delivered the outcomes they had in mind, they often embrace these techniques in a range of thematic areas. This kind of approach also aligns with human rights informed practice, because it is orientated around transparency, equality and participation. It involves looking back at the type of evidence that has been

used before to make budgeting decisions and asking whether that type of evidence is still the best available information to understand the impact of budgeting in the future.

Institutions like Parliaments need to accept the reality that most people are not going to participate in parliamentary processes or parliamentary business.

This means the goal should not be to *engage everyone* but rather to providing pathways for people to understand the relevance of the work of parliament in their lives and to *sometimes* participate when the decisions or laws parliament is considering impact their lives the most.

Building and sustaining multidisciplinary and high skilled Participation Teams means that they can do the 'warm up work' with hard to reach groups that they know committees want to hear from, including young people. These teams can smooth the way for more diverse witnesses in parliamentary committee inquiries, for example, by providing wrap around care and support for witnesses, including providing spaces for preparation and de brief as well as options for giving evidence. Often this involves working with a partnered intermediary.

Public facing engagement interfaces, like websites and committee inquiry surveys, must be designed with input from engagement specialists and be frequently tested and reviewed by end users from those groups the parliament is trying to reach.

The Scottish Parliament has adopted evidence based approaches to website design and is now using a 'Your Priorities' online consultation tool in many committees inquiries, that provides participants with the potential to brainstorm solutions and ideas in response to particular issues, proposals or concerns and encourages engagement beyond the passive survey style response.

Overcoming the tension between parliament as an institution with its own identity and goals, and parliament as the seat of representative democracy, is critical when seeking to embrace and evaluate innovations in public engagement with parliaments, including of citizen's juries and youth parliaments.

There are genuine questions to be asked about the relationship between parliaments as institutions in their own right, and parliaments as forums for representative democracy. How these questions are answered can influence the way in which deliberative processes like citizen's juries are viewed. However, some of these tensions can be resolved by seeing citizen's juries as supplementary to other more conventional components of parliamentary practice or business. This means describing or understanding citizen's juries as a source of ready to use data, information or evidence for consideration within the framework of established parliamentary practice (such as during a parliamentary committee hearing) rather than serving as a secondary political forum where expectations are artificially raised.

There are also tensions and challenges associated with drawing the line between 'informal' and 'formal' evidence that is facilitated by Participation Teams working alongside parliamentary committees. Often positive relationships generate both forms of evidence and it can be hard to 'formalise' personal narratives shared by individuals with Participation Team members outside of formal witness settings. This is where the link between engagement and research can be critical. Qualitative research techniques, for example, can assist in providing frameworks and options for handling a range of different forms of information in ethical ways, that also meet the needs of the members.

There is often a challenge when it comes to expectation management for those participating in citizens juries or parliamentary committee processes. Ultimately what happens next involves *politics* and the *parties* and therefore is outside of the control of the Participation Team. For this reason, it can be useful to focus the messaging on 'joining in' rather than 'changing a law'.

The Scottish Parliament's Participation Team is also actively involved in broader discussions about democratic participation. For example, it participates in the Festival of Politics and often attends issued-based forums. The Team recognises that young people are motivated by issues not political ideologies.

Young people need to see change happen within institutions and action by decision makers and those in power. When this happens, young people can motivate others to engage and participate in authentic, sustainable ways.

It is possible to see this occurring in movements outside of conventional political settings. For example, the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* has been used to establish pathways and processes for youth and other community groups to assert control of public spaces and field spaces.

Facilitating direct engagement between young advocates and political leaders is also important, and often takes place via public events. The *Cash Back for Communities* programs are good examples of disadvantaged youth speaking directly with MSPs about critical issues. *CashBack for Communities* is a unique Scottish Government programme which uses the funds recovered from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) to expand young people's horizons and increase opportunities to develop their interests and skills. One of these programs, called 'Generation CashBack' aims to ensure that young people from areas of deprivation and those experiencing disadvantage can benefit from high quality community-based youth work and opportunities. The programme is delivered by a consortium of Youth Scotland, Scouts Scotland, Girlguiding Scotland, and the Boys' Brigade, and funded by *CashBack for Communities*.

Another strategy is to bring the political decision makers and senior public servants to the localities and public places where young people feel comfortable and have a two-way exchange where the adults adopt the 'learning position' and display curiosity about the perspectives and ambitions of the young people. These exchanges can develop relationships of trust, but only if they are accompanied by a genuine commitment by the political decision makers and senior public servants to provide thoughtful responses to any specific suggestions, concerns or recommendations made by the young people they interact with.

Youth-controlled localised campaigns – that seek to transfer ownership and power from centralized bodies to local communities – can have a range of positive impacts on democratic engagement and participation in previously disconnected or disengaged communities.

These campaigns are most effective when they are supported by data and evidence, and when they generate new and valuable information or data that can be used in subsequent democratic engagement. For example, the Young Scot National Entitlement Card, was itself the outcome of sustained youth-led social action relating to public transport but now also provides a source of data and can be used to poll all of the young people in Scotland on specific issues or proposals that may impact on their lives. The card is free to 11 to 26-year-olds living in Scotland and provides free access to transport and school lunches and discounts to thousands of retailers and venues across Scotland. It also provides young people with access to volunteering and social action activities through the YoungScot Hive porthole and related social media platforms.

Youth Scotland has worked hard over decades to entrench youth-led processes into its operations and programs. Some examples of these types of youth-led activities and programs include the Youth Islanders Network and the Inspire 2022 Program.

The Youth Islanders Network grew out of a 2021 pilot project called the Young Islanders Challenge. Working in partnership with the Scottish Government and the National Islands Plan, Youth Scotland's Young Islanders Challenge was created to represent the views and opinions of young people living and growing up in Scotland's island communities. This laid the foundations for the Young Islanders Network.

The Young Islanders Network is made up of young people in Representatives and Depute roles, supported by Youth Scotland staff. The Network has created a number of forums, surveys and activities designed to gather the views of young islanders and to implement strategies in response to priority issues centered around transport, housing, climate change and employment. The Network works closely with Members of Parliament and the Scottish Government and has received direct funding to implement their proposals for local change.

Inspire 2022 was a youth-led events-based social action programme which used national events as a springboard for young people to design positive activities for their own communities, designed to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It was delivered by UK Youth in partnership with British Red Cross, Youth Action Northern Ireland, Youth Cymru, Youth Scotland and regional youth organisations who support young people in their local communities. It was funded by £1.2m from Spirit of 2012 and £500,000 from the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport), and designed in partnership with Local Trust. Inspire 2022 took the form of a 'dragon's den' type approach to issuing small grants (800 pounds each) directly to young people to host their own events connecting the community around issues of pressing social concern. In the Scottish context, Youth Scotland used its existing membership networks to make sure these opportunities reached the most disadvantaged communities, and it has resulted in a diverse range of successful youth-led projects and programmes, some of which have since attracted further funding.

There needs to be a much strong element of *realism* (rather than idealism) when we describe what a health democracy or a strong democratic institution looks like.

When educating young people about democratic institutions or political participation, it is important to describe the experience as accurately as possible. This means using case studies that portray legitimate exercise of political power as the careful navigation of a series of complex policy options, rather than a binary experience of winning or beating an opponent. This is particularly important when reflecting on key democratic 'milestones' such as women's suffrage or the enactment of the minimum wage, or protections against racial discrimination. It is critical that young people are invited to reflect on these milestones as representing the end result of what was sometimes decades of multi-dimensional social and political action, involving complexities of compromise, negotiation, trade-offs and disappointments as well as celebrations and victories. The risk is that if we do not find ways to communicate these realities of democratic discourse to younger generations, we can add to the 'McDonaldisation' of democratic engagement, where individuals or groups see democratic institutions in transactional terms: they either get what they want immediately, or become disillusioned with democratic institutions, and turn to alternative platforms or spaces to express their disagreement or discontent.

CASE STUDY 4: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (SCOTLAND) ACT*

* For information about the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act please visit <https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-empowerment-scotland-act-summary/>

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is landmark legislation that seeks to encourage and promote community participation and engagement in local decision-making, by enshrining it as a right in law in a variety of different situations.

Part 3 of the Act facilitates the making of participation requests to allow a community body to enter into dialogue with public authorities about local issues and local services on their terms. Where a community body believes it could help to improve an outcome which is delivered by a public service, it can request to play a part in a process with the public service authority to improve that outcome. This could include suggesting how service providers could better meet the needs of users, offering volunteers to support a service or even proposing the community body could take over the delivery of the service themselves.



Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

Parts 4 and 5 of the Act concern community rights to own land or assets and provides for a right for community bodies to make requests to all local authorities, Scottish Ministers and a wide-ranging list of public bodies, for any land or buildings they feel they could make better use of. Community bodies can

request ownership, lease or other rights, as they wish. The Act requires those public authorities to assess requests transparently against a specified list of criteria, and to agree the request unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal. This shifts the balance of power clearly towards the community body, and ensures that asset transfer is available throughout Scotland.

A number of Scottish Government funds and policies exist to complement rights found in the Act and other legislation. These include:

- the Empowering Communities Fund, which funds community-led regeneration
- participatory budgeting, funded through the £1.5 million Community Choices Fund, to give people power to make decisions on local spending; and
- the creation of National Standards for Community Engagement to encourage best practice by public bodies.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has been used by young people in Scotland to raise their concerns and priorities with local government and to facilitate social action designed to reassert community control of public spaces including play spaces and field spaces of significance for children and young people.

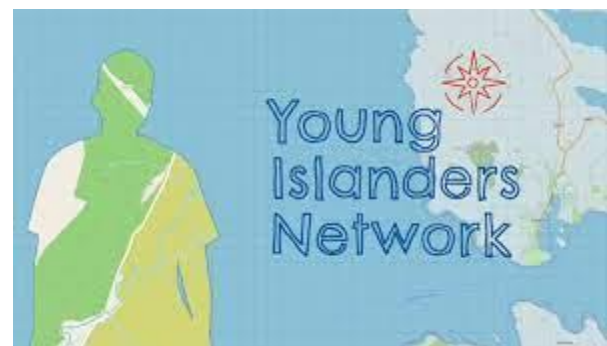


Image Credit, Young Islanders Network 2023, yinscot.com

CASE STUDY 5: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE, SCOTLAND *

* For information about the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee please visit <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/committees/current-and-previous-committees>



The Scottish Parliament has a dedicated Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee focused on exploring ways to engage the public in the business of parliament. The Committee considers all public petitions submitted to the parliament and determines if they meet the requisite thresholds to prompt the holding of a public inquiry or requiring a response from government. The Committee also undertakes other forms of public engagement, such as organising community dialogues and forums. In recent years, the Committee has also facilitated the formation of citizen's juries to consider and report on policy issues of relevance to the Scottish Parliament.

The committee consists of seven members from different political parties, and is currently chaired by Johann Lamont MSP. The committee meets regularly and publishes its agendas, papers, minutes, and reports on its website. The committee also broadcasts its meetings live and on demand on Scottish Parliament TV.

The committee is currently working on several topics, such as:

- Budget scrutiny 2024-25, which involves examining the Scottish Government's spending plans and priorities for the next financial year.
- Inquiry into A9 Dualling Project, which involves investigating the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the major road project that aims to upgrade the A9 between Perth and Inverness.

Public Participation Inquiry, which involves exploring how the parliament can improve its public engagement and participation practices and methods.

- Various public petitions on issues such as aftercare for care-experienced young people, falconry rights, British Sign Language education, abortion law, and student loan debts.

In September 2023 the Committee released a report entitled *Embedding Public Participation in the Work of the Parliament*. It includes key recommendations and initiatives following the Committee's extensive consultation process, which included the appointment of Citizens' Panel on Participation to look at how the Parliament can ensure that diverse voices and communities from all parts of Scotland influence its work.

To create the Citizens' Panel, invitation letters were sent to 4,800 randomly-selected households across Scotland. From the replies, the Committee selected a sample of people from all over Scotland who were broadly similar to the Scottish population, taking account of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and education. Of the 24 people we invited, 19 were able to participate. Panel members had their travel and accommodation costs covered, were paid £330 for their time and commitment, and were given IT training and support. They worked together for over 32 hours over two weekends and three remote online sessions in October and November 2022. The Citizen's Panel also heard from a wide range of people, including MSPs, members of the public who have experienced barriers to participation, political scientists, academics and community organisations. At the end of the process, the Panel made seventeen recommendations to improve how the Parliament engages with the people of Scotland. These were published in the Committee's interim report on 16 December 2022.

The key finding of the Committee's inquiry was that 'scrutiny and representative democracy can be supported and made better through the use of deliberative models'. The Committee explained that

this can be guided by overarching principles, rather requiring one-size-fits all processes or structures. The principles recommended were that:

- deliberative democracy should complement the existing model of representative democracy and be used to support the scrutiny process.
- the way in which deliberative methods are used, from recruitment through to reporting and feedback, should be transparent and subject to a governance and accountability framework.

- the deliberative methods used should be proportionate and relevant to the topic, and the scrutiny context.
- participants in deliberative democracy should be supported, empowered and given feedback on how their recommendations are used.

The Scottish Parliament Data Visualisation Team also published the following graphic summarizing the next steps in terms of implementing these principles, and other findings contained in the Report, into practice within the Scottish Parliament.

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

Embedding Public Participation in the Work of the Parliament: Summary version, 3rd Report, 2023 (Session 6)



CASE STUDY 6: SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT*

For comprehensive information about the Scottish Youth Parliament please visit <https://syp.org.uk/>

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is a youth-led, democratic organisation that aims to represent the young people of Scotland. Its primary objective is to advance positive policy change to improve the lives of young people. It also aims to provide an opportunity for young people to experience and interact with processes and traditions of parliament, and with elected Scottish Members of Parliament. The SYP first started in 1999 just before the formation of the Scottish Parliament and the first package of funding for the SYP was triggered by the devolution process.

The SYP is composed of around 166 representatives aged 14-25. National elections for members of the SYP are held every two years, and candidates run in each of the 73 Scottish electorates. In the last election of SYMPs 50,000 votes were cast. Two candidates from each electorate are elected and Members can also be elected from within voluntary sector, including from within organisations that represent minority groups/young people with special needs. This helps ensure genuine diversity in representation.



Elected members of the SYP are not paid, but careful thought is being given to developing a strategy to build in recognition and reward for participation that goes beyond tokenism. And, because members of the SYP are not paid, it is common for candidates to be supported in some other way including through scholarships enabling them to complete university, or through support from other charities. It is much less common to see members of the SYP who are full time employed or young parents, but this type of representation can be addressed through voluntary sector nominees.

The SYP is politically neutral, and elected SYP Members recognise the need to work with all political parties to effect change. Political neutrality is also important for the commissioning arrangement with government for the funding for the SYP, which is run as an independent non-political charity.

Since the establishment of the SYP, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government has been committed to a rights based approach, guided by the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and have undertaken to accept and directly respond to the views of young people, as shared through the SYP. The SYP is also part of the Scottish delegation to Geneva with respect to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The SYP has a formal partnership with the Scottish Parliament and has a series of national events, including sittings each term. The SYP also works closely with the Presiding Officer, and this has led to a range of opportunities for direct engagement between members of the SYP and the Parliamentary Chamber including members of the SYP leading Time for Reflection at opening of Scottish Parliament sittings.

The SYP has 10 subject committees, and a convenors group (modelled on Scottish Parliament) and works with the Clerks of the Parliament as it develops and implements its own procedures. The members of the SYP are regularly called to give evidence to parliamentary committees, however the SYP does not have any formal legal status within the Scottish Parliament. It cannot exercise powers under Standing Orders to call for witnesses or request documents from government, and it cannot access parliamentary privilege.

The SYP generally produces or contributes to the following policy outputs during its two year term:

- Manifesto - developed as a guiding strategic document for policy development and advocacy
- Member Motions – proposed by individual members of the SYP on points

of interest or in response to local or national issues, or international issues. These Motions provide a necessary policy position or statement from which further advocacy or media engagement can be advanced.

- Committee motions on thematic issues such as health or education. Often these positions are developed having engaged in research, interviewed expertise, conducted inquiries or focus groups or surveys.
- Consultation responses – which are developed following invitations or requests for views from government or Parliament.
- Rapid policy making – in response to media developments or requests, generally developed by the Executive but informed by the Manifesto. These rapid policy positions can then be endorsed or ratified by the SYP at a later date.

The members of the Scottish Youth Parliament have used their voice to campaign for positive change on various issues that affect Scotland's young people. Some of the activities and achievements of the SYP are:

- Campaigning for the right of 16 and 17 year olds to vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and in all Scottish elections since 2016.
- Launching the Right Here Right Now campaign in 2017-18, which successfully secured a commitment from the First Minister to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law .
- Running the All Aboard campaign in 2018-19, which sought to improve young people's experiences of public transport in Scotland .
- Choosing environmental protection and climate change as their national campaign in 2019-20, and naming it Pack it Up, Pack it In .
- Hosting the SYP Elections 2023, which took place in November 2023, and will

allow young people across Scotland to vote for their next SYP representatives.

The SYP also embraces peer to peer training with a focus on institutional and legal literacy and knowledge. It has also developed a Toolkit for training public servants, including a section on 'meaningless meetings', which has been utilised by a range of Scottish government departments to improve the quality and effectiveness of youth engagement strategies.



Photo Credit, Scottish Youth Parliament, <https://syp.org.uk/>



PERSPECTIVES FROM NORTHERN IRELAND

2 October 2023

Engagement and Education Teams, Northern Ireland Assembly,
Belfast

2 October 2023

Northern Ireland Youth Assembly Team, Northern Ireland Assembly,
Belfast

When visiting Northern Ireland as part of my fellowship I was acutely aware of the historical context in which public engagement with the Northern Ireland Assembly takes place, and the broader political landscape that continues to impact the lives and rights of young people in Northern Ireland.

This historical context includes the ‘Troubles’ period from the late 1960s to the late 1990s that saw violent conflict and sustained political antagonism in Northern Ireland between Catholic nationalists who wanted to join the Republic of Ireland and Protestant unionists who wanted to remain part of the UK. The Troubles claimed more than 3,600 lives and injured tens of thousands more and have had a profound and lasting impact on the lives of children and young people in Northern Ireland, both during and after the conflict. Some of the ongoing implications for young people include:

- Exposure to trauma, violence, loss and fear, which affected their mental health, well-being and development.
- Segregation, division and mistrust between communities, which limits their opportunities for social interaction, education and employment.
- Inheritance of sectarian attitudes, identities and grievances from their families and peers, which influenced their views and actions.
- Lack of adequate support, resources and services to address their needs and challenges, especially in working-class and conflict-affected areas.
- Uncertainty and instability in the political and economic situation, which affects their future prospects and aspirations.

The Troubles also inspired many young people to seek positive change, reconciliation and peace in their society, through various forms of activism, dialogue and creativity, and this optimism was also evident in the meetings and exchanges I was fortunate to be involved in as part of my travels in Northern Ireland.



Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Belfast

Added to this historical context is the particular experience of devolution that has unfolded in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has a unique history of devolution, dating back to 1921, when it was established as a separate entity within the UK, with its own parliament and prime minister. However, this parliament was abolished in 1972, following the outbreak of the Troubles, and for the next 26 years, Northern Ireland was directly ruled by Westminster, despite with various unsuccessful attempts to restore devolution led by Catholic nationalists.

In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed, which ended the Troubles and created a new devolved system for Northern Ireland, based on power-sharing between the main parties. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive were established, with legislative and executive powers over transferred matters, such as health, education, justice and policing. The Assembly also has the ability to legislate on reserved matters, such as broadcasting and gambling, with the consent of the Secretary of State. However, some matters remain excepted, such as defence, foreign affairs and taxation, which are reserved for the UK Parliament.

Devolution in Northern Ireland has been suspended and restored several times, due to political disagreements and crises. The most recent suspension lasted from 2017 to 2020, when the Assembly and Executive were not functioning. In January 2020, the New Decade, New Approach deal was agreed, which restored devolution and introduced some reforms, such as an Irish language act and a fiscal council. Devolution in Northern Ireland has also affected by the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, which has implications for the border, trade and identity issues and by the practical, legal and social challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA), Bills can be proposed by committees and the Speaker has an important role in determining the Assembly's jurisdictional competence to debate Bills. If the Attorney General disagrees with Speaker's view on competency, then they can refer the issue to the Supreme Court. The Speaker can also refer Bills to the UK Secretary for State if they fall outside the competency of the Assembly. A significant feature of the processes and procedures of the Northern Ireland Assembly is the legal requirement to ensure cross community support for proposed new laws. This is prescribed by section 4(5) of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* and it requires proposed new laws to receive the support of a majority of all Nationalists and majority of all Unionists within the Assembly, plus a majority of votes overall. The NIA also has a strong parliamentary committee system, with committees focusing on agriculture, community, education, finance, health, infrastructure, justice, economy and the Executive Office. However, at the time of my visit to the NIA, the Assembly was not sitting due to a political impasse relating to the appointment of the First Minister and Deputy Minister, triggered by broader political debates relating to the impact of Brexit and Northern Ireland Protocol.

When visiting Northern Ireland, I was fortunate to meet with senior parliamentary staff, youth workers and academic experts, each with valuable and unique perspectives on youth engagement with parliament, and with local and national governments. When reflecting on what pre-conditions are essential for meaningful youth-led democratic participation, I have summarised the key themes arising from these conversations in my own words below. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed above.

Structural features of the NIA that *prescribe* community consultation and engagement have led to investment in parliamentary staff with skills in facilitating engagement with a diverse communities.

This has in turn leads to innovation in the design and implementation of engagement strategies, including youth engagement strategies Parliamentary leaders can play an important role in championing the value of high quality institution-led youth engagement *and* in respecting youth-led social action that occurs *outside* of institutional settings.

Coordinated relationships between parliamentary research staff and committee clerks can lead to well-targeted, evidence-based engagement strategies.

This works particularly well when research teams undertake targeted qualitative research and focus groups coupled with stakeholder sessions to produced detailed reports for NIA Committees. In the Northern Ireland context, this is supported by a 's75 approach' to the selection of key participants.

Developing clear, shared priorities for education and engagement teams within parliament is important. In Northern Ireland, these shared priorities include showing a broad range of people why the NIA is relevant to their lives, and to teach people from inside and outside NI about the Peace Process.

Civics education is integrated into Northern Ireland education system from primary through to University and the NIA Education Service tries develops and delivers general and bespoke programs and sessions and materials to cater for all of these needs. Often the schools are explicitly looking for the NIA Education Service to sensitively and objectively navigate these historical sensitivities instead of teachers, who can be in challenging situations if in religious based schools (which is the majority of schools in Northern Ireland). The NIA Education Service website has been designed with the Northern Ireland Curriculum in mind and developed with a taskforce that includes teachers and education department officials. This is regularly reviewed so it remains currently for those studying for related exams. This approach is supported by regular engagement between the NIA Education Service and academics working in the political science and other related fields to ensure content remains relevant and research-informed.

Working collaboratively across institutions to provide civics education programs and activities for citizens of all ages and backgrounds can deliver positive long term outcomes and sustainable relationships with 'seldom heard' communities. This works most effectively when supported by skilled administrative teams who are able to utilise demographic and education-related data to help prioritise communities and tailor programs, as well being aware of particular historical or religious sensitivities that need to be taken into account when delivering civics education in Northern Ireland, in line with the NIA s75 framework. Co-designed approaches to engagement with different audiences are also critical – so assumptions are not relied upon that might have unintended negative consequences or leave out the most important voices.

Parliaments can and should do most of their proactive engagement work with seldom heard groups, which in the Northern Ireland context includes those with attributes described in *Northern Ireland Act s75*.

This is because the more privileged sectors of the community will already be able to make the most of existing engagement activities such as tours, open days, calls for written submission: they already value engagement with parliament and feel confident about how to do it. Those outside of these groups need multi-layered, often bespoke first experiences so that they can build trust and confidence in engaging with parliamentary processes and practices. This is particularly important for young people.

Small scale pilots can help drive innovation in public parliamentary engagement and build champions

However, evaluation of the success of engagement is challenging. It is important to look for more than just 'numbers of people engaged' and try and focus on quality and impact and culture change inside and outside parliament.

CASE STUDY 7: NORTHERN IRELAND YOUTH ASSEMBLY*

* For comprehensive information about the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly please visit <https://niyouthassembly.org/>

The Northern Ireland Youth Assembly (NIYA) began for the first time in 2020 and involved 90 youth members, aged 12-16. The key objective of the NIYA is ‘to make real change’ to improve the lives of young people in Northern Ireland. Related to this objective, the NIYA seeks to engage with the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly, including by providing input into legislation relevant to young people, undertake project work and develop positive partnerships with government departments.

When the first NIYA was announced, around 1200 young people applied. The process for selecting members of the NIYA was co-designed with young people and involved expert advice from the Northern Ireland Equality Commissioner and the Northern Ireland Children’s Commissioner, as well as specifically commissioned research about the demographic profile of young people in Northern Ireland. Appropriate and equitable representation across all communities in Northern Ireland was a key priority, and as result a relatively complex selection process was put in place involving a combination of random selection based on location (to ensure geographic diversity) and targeted selection to ensure equitable representation from communities of interest (such as those communities identified in the *Northern Ireland Act s75*). This selection process was also underpinned by a very careful approach to religious affiliation, to ensure an equal balance between Protestant and Catholic members, as well as ensuring non-religious communities and minority religions were also represented.



Photo Credit: Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, <https://niyouthassembly.org/>

One of the unexpected benefits of the large number of applications received in response to the first call for NIYA members was the creation of an already-engaged

group of young people who could be consulted with or surveyed to get a broader sense of the key issues and priorities affecting young people in Northern Ireland, or to gauge their views on particular policy or legal issues relevant to the work of the Assembly, such as the age of criminality.

Members of the NIYA serve for two years and engage at least twice a year with the Northern Ireland Assembly in plenary sitting arrangements, as well as participating in parliamentary committee hearings and inquiries. Strong reciprocal relationships have been established between the NIYA and senior parliamentary staff, providing access to Clerks, parliamentary researchers, parliamentary engagement officers and parliamentary committee secretariat staff. The Northern Ireland parliamentary staff and the Senior Clerks play an important role in supporting the NIYA to determine what reform priorities are possible from a jurisdictional and legal perspective, and also help to connect NIYA Members to specialist research services in order to access research into particularly complex policy issues including climate change. These staff also provide a link between the NIYA and government service providers and statutory officers, including the Education Department and the Children’s Commissioner. Critical to the success of the NIYA is the development of positive working relationships between the NIYA and government departments and senior public servants. This means that the NIYA is able to develop an independent, youth led policy agenda that was informed by evidence and within the scope of the Northern Ireland Parliament or Government to deliver.

The Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly has also played an important role in assisting the members of the NIYA to develop skills in (1) identifying and clearly articulating collective issues of concern (2) developing arguments to justify the prioritisation of these issues and to support any recommended actions (3) identifying and then engaging with key decisionmakers and stakeholders inside and outside of government and (4) developing skills and strategies to convince others to embrace reform. The Speaker chaired the plenary sessions of the first NIYA, but the procedures and processes were determined by the NIYA. In the follow up from the first NIYA, the Speaker has also been active in connecting NIYA members with senior bureaucrats and high profile public figures and providing them with

access to mentors who might help them with their future careers.

Training is a strong focus of the NIYA experience, and a core outcome is the preparation of a NIYA *Legacy Report* which serves as a blueprint for future action for incoming NIYA Members to consider and prosecute. The NIYA also had access to information gathered a part of the Big Youth Survey, which collects responses from young people across Northern Ireland about the key issues or priorities in their lives.

One of the key reflections following the first NIYA relates to the age range of members. Consideration is being given to lowering the age range slightly, having regard to the particular experience of those members who turned 17 or 18 during the NIYA term. Consideration is also being given to how to ensure the NIYA has a strong public profile and positive and powerful relationships with media, whilst also protecting individual NIYA members from partisan politics and challenging media environments. and individual members – to develop positive and powerful media profiles in safe/thoughtful ways.

It should also be noted that in addition to the NIYA, the Northern Ireland Assembly also convenes a Pensioner Parliament and Parliament representing people with disabilities, which provide forums for public parliamentary engagement and are used to help co-design strategies for future engagement with these demographic cohorts.



Photo Credit: Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, <https://niyouthassembly.org/>



PERSPECTIVES FROM THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

4 October 2023	Engagement and Education Teams, House of Oireachtas, Dublin
5 October 2023	Think Tank for Action on Social Change, Dublin
5 October 2023	National Youth Council of Ireland, North Dublin
5 October 2023	Office of the Ceann Comhairle, Houses of the Oireachtas, Dublin

The constitutional features of the Republic of Ireland and the processes and practices of the Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament) have combined to create a number of important catalysts for social and political change and youth participation in democratic discourse in Ireland over the last couple of decades (see e.g. Cahill, 2021; O’Conaill et al, 2021). The particular composition of the two House of the Oireachtas, the Dáil Éireann (the lower house) and Seanad Éireann (the upper house), also provide opportunities for scrutiny of government bills and policies that have some similarities to the bicameral constitution of many Australian Parliaments. The successive referendums that have taken place in Ireland over the last few decades have also created conditions for direct public participation in lawmaking, and resulted in significant shifts in social policy that mirror the shifts occurring with Irish society.

Some of the topics that have been subject to constitutional referendums in Ireland include the status of the Irish language, the role of women, the voting age, the relationship between Ireland and the European Union, abortion, same-sex marriage, and divorce. Whilst many of these referendums have sparked social divisions and tensions within communities, they have also demonstrated to young Irish people that collective political action and democratic engagement can deliver tangible results. And while levels of youth engagement with democratic institutions like parliaments have waned, these experiences can and have been drawn upon as examples of positive democratic engagement. These constitutional and social shifts have also created conditions for issues-based political action to emerge as particularly popular among young people, in contrast to previous generations’ strong connections to established political parties and ideologies, including those formed along religious lines.



When visiting Dublin, I was fortunate to meet with senior parliamentarians, senior parliamentary staff, and youth workers, each with valuable and unique perspectives on youth engagement with parliament, and with local and national governments. When reflecting on what pre-conditions are essential for meaningful youth-led democratic participation, I have summarised the key themes arising from these conversations in my own words below. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed above.

Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Dublin

Creating pathways for more young people to participate in formal expressions of democratic engagement, including voting in elections and running for office, requires sustained investment and cultural change within political parties and parliamentary settings.

Many young people in Ireland feel disconnected with institutions like Parliament. These institutions can be seen as austere, formal places, with an overly conservative *tone*. The type of conversations that politicians engage in do not seem relevant to the lives of young people, and the way elected members speak to each other and to others (eg witnesses in parliamentary inquiries) does not feel welcoming to young people.

Within the key democratic institutions there is a need for cultural change so that the rhetoric about things like family friendly workplaces, and promotion of diversity is actually evident in the public facing media reporting and public discourse surrounding these institutions. There have been some positives, including providing more options for young people to present to the Seannad on issues including Environment and Shared Ireland inquiries, and the parliamentary response to the Fridays for Future was also positive.

In modern democracies we are now in a situation where it is not enough to tell people 'what they need to know', you have to generate content that will be 'something people will want to watch and share'. Institutions are often very slow to follow new communication trends and then when they join they appear as false or trying too hard, rather than 'belonging' as natives to the platform.

Ireland now has a new improved process for voter registration that is helping to encourage young people to register to vote. It enables young people who are 16 or 17 to register online well ahead of elections (for example through processes facilitated by youth groups or university student unions) so they can be ready when an election is held.

There is also a need to think of practical ways to encourage young people to run for election in Ireland, but the reality is that you need access to significant financial resources to run for election, and this often severely limits the prospects of young people putting their hand up.

Access to independent sources of data and research about the state of society in Ireland can facilitate meaningful engagement between democratic institutions and communities and help address the power imbalance that often plagues this relationship.

For example, the Think Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) is focused on providing an alternative source of data and research about the state of society in Ireland. It is also undertaking research on young people and disinformation, with preliminary findings showing that young people are quite sophisticated consumers of online information but are also disinterested in conventional sources or styles of news reporting. TASC is also engaged in research on young people's perception of politics in Ireland, Policy, Hungary, Spain and France. This type of independent research can help create an evidence base for public policy and legislative change, as well as support the efforts of exiting youth-led organisations and youth-led social action.

Commissioning specific research that explores the impact of key economic developments on the lives of young people is critical to help address myths and assumptions about younger generations. For example, specific research has been used by the National Youth Council of Ireland to document the true impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the lives of younger people, and to counteract mainstream media accounts of their spending habits, priorities and experiences. This type of research helps to provide an evidence base to explain that, when compared with any other generation before it, the current generation of young people is doing it really tough. They are spending more on essentials and going without, as well as facing a really challenging economic future. The National Youth Council commissioned research also exposes the systematic challenges when it comes to the labour market and youth employment.

To ensure access to this type of independently commissioned research and evidence, it is critical that the not for profit sector be supported, not crippled by legislative or regulatory approaches that restrict or forbid advocacy or stifle independent research. Not for profit organisations must be in a position to *challenge* government policy, present alternative ideas, and publish independent assessments of need. This includes the provision of independent information about the different policy positions and priorities of political parties.

Effective engagement strategies have a sharp focus on closing the social distance between young people and their communities, and their elected representatives.

This means that politicians and those working within democratic institutions need to go *where the young people are*. This includes investing in programs and strategies where politicians visit youth detention centres or youth health services and build relationships with not for profits who have established and long term relationships with young people. Elected representatives and government officials need to spend time with people who have experience and skills in actually helping young people and their families solve and respond to problems. When this does not occur, the distance between parliaments and parliamentarians and the most disadvantaged young people is too great.

Young people don't want online-only engagement experiences. They want to feel like institutional actors, including elected representatives, understand their lives and *take action* in response to the needs or perspectives they articulate. Young people are driven by identifying solutions to problems, rather than by political ideologies. This means that institution-led engagement strategies such as citizen assemblies or petition processes can be effective, but only if they deliver tangible change quickly.

Grass roots approaches to community problem solving can also help move away from rules-based structures of institution led engagement and binary political standpoints of conventional politics.

One approach is to conduct workshops within local communities where members of parliament adopt a listening position, and communities brainstorm and problem solve. Young people will want to participate,

but only if they see the system deliver something for them. Young people need to see bold ambitions and solutions to social and economic problems. If they do not see this from the political class, they disengage and look elsewhere for motivation and inspiration. A good example of this type of approach is the *People's Transition Climate Justice Project*. This project involves the following key steps: (1) demographic mapping of a specific community; (2) hosting forums where community members can articulate and discuss high priority needs across a broad range of policy areas (including housing, transport, public spaces, employment, community-owned infrastructure); (3) facilitating discussions with experts to identify how climate-positive actions can be used to address these problems; (4) supporting these discussions with research or analysis documenting benefits of climate-positive approaches to community problem solving; and (5) working with local councils, service providers and private sector actors to implement and evaluate the recommendations.

Devolved approaches to basic service design and delivery are also essential to closing the social distance between service provider and service recipient and achieving a level of practical accountability for decision making and resource allocation. Currently, political parties are too distant from people's lives. Many individuals and communities do not have a clear understanding of their purpose other than as adversaries to other parties. Young people are not interested in getting trapped in this type of system. Young people are more interested in pragmatic democratic action where they can see a tangible outcome or response.

Well-funded, highly skilled communications and education teams within Parliaments can provide a strong foundation for innovation and success in public engagement, including with young people.

The Public Engagement and Education team within the Irish Parliament grew out of a successful and ambitious communications strategy that was underpinned by a well-funded Parliamentary Broadcasting Authority service, which has been a key part of the modern history of the Parliament and an important source of resources and funding for other forms of parliamentary engagement.

The employment of highly skilled staff to plan and deliver engagement and education activities is also central to success, particularly when it comes to engaging with teachers and students, and previously disengaged or ignored communities.

The production of transferrable, accessible and free resources about the work of parliament – that are co-designed with teachers and young people and connect seamlessly with school and university curriculums – also provide effective foundations for long-term engagement. For example, the Irish Parliament's Education team has developed detailed lesson plans and prompts for teachers, power point slides and other online resources, animations to explain key concepts and first person narratives from students. These resources supplement face to face schools and teacher programs that are tailored to respond to schools' specific needs and aligns with the Irish curriculum which now includes secondary school topic on Politics and Democracy. The Education team also hosts a three day intensive teachers conference each year and runs a series of events aimed at engaging young people including a Youth Ted Ex Event.

CASE STUDY 8: SHARED IRELAND UNIT*

*For comprehensive information about the Shared Ireland Unit please visit <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/645ff-shared-island-research/>

The Shared Ireland unit is a part of the Department of the Taoiseach that coordinates and drives the government's Shared Island initiative. The initiative aims to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island of Ireland, and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future. The Shared Ireland initiative is based on the spirit and intent of the Good Friday Agreement, which is the foundation of peace and reconciliation on the island.

One of the key activities of the Shared Ireland initiative has been the establishment of the Shared Island Youth Forum, which has hosted virtual event engaging over 400 young people from across the island on their vision and aspirations for a shared island. This Youth Forum is designed to bring young people and Members of Parliament together from the North and South of Ireland, and is supported by twinning arrangements for schools. Through this Forum – and related engagement efforts by the Department of the Taoiseach – there has been a notable increase in the young people who have appeared before committees to give evidence, and a growing political awareness of the primacy of engagement with young people.



Image Credit: iCommunity Hub,
<https://www.icommunityhub.org/shared-island-youth-forum-launched/>

Some of the other activities and achievements of the Shared Ireland unit include:

- Establishing the Shared Island Fund, which provides €500m in capital funding between 2021-25 for collaborative North/South projects in areas such as health, education, infrastructure, environment and research.
- Organising the Shared Island Dialogues, which are a series of online events that bring together diverse perspectives and voices to discuss key issues and opportunities for a shared island, such as climate action, civil society, education and culture.
- Commissioning and publishing Shared Island Research, which is a comprehensive programme of research to support the building of consensus around a shared future on the island, and to inform policy development and public debate. The research is conducted in partnership with the National Economic and Social Council, the Economic and Social Research Institute, the Irish Research Council, and other partners.
- Convening roundtable sessions with women's representatives and ethnic minority communities on the island, to hear their interests and priorities for a shared island, and to ensure the inclusion of often under-represented voices in the peace process.
- Hosting the Shared Island Forum, which was a high-level event that brought together political leaders, academics, civil society representatives and other stakeholders from across the island and beyond, to discuss the challenges and opportunities for a shared island in the context of Brexit, Covid-19 and global issues.

PERSPECTIVES FROM WALES

10 October 2023

Welsh Youth Parliament Team, Cardiff Bay

Plenary Sitting, Senned Crymu, Welsh Parliament, Cardiff Bay

10 October 2023

Democracy Box, Cardiff Bay

The devolved nation of Wales has a long history of parliamentary lawmaking which can be traced back to the mid 10th century, and although the concept of ‘home rule’ for the people of Wales was contemplated many times during the period 1880 to 1979, (Sherlock, 2015; Welsh Parliament, 2022) it was not until 1997 that the people of Wales voted in favour of devolution at a referendum, and the Westminster Parliament responded by passing the *Government of Wales Act 1998*. This Act provided the legal basis for the creation of the National Assembly for Wales, to be located in Cardiff Bay. The Act embodied a number of core values including a commitment to equality, sustainable development, partnership working and parity of treatment for both the Welsh and English languages (Sherlock, 2015; Welsh Parliament, 2022). The National Assembly for Wales met for the first time on 12 May 1999. The Senedd Building was opened by the Queen on St David’s day 2006.



The Senedd Crymu building ‘embodies in physical form the values that underpinned the National Assembly, including environmental sustainability and transparency’ (Welsh Parliament, 2022). In 2011 the Welsh electorate voted in a further devolution referendum, this time on the question of whether or not full primary law-making powers should be extended to the National Assembly in those areas over which it had responsibility. This referendum was strongly supported – ‘home rule’ had come of age (Sherlock, 2015; Welsh Parliament, 2022).

In 2017 the *Wales Act* established the National Assembly on a new constitutional basis, making it a permanent part of the UK constitution. As a result, the Welsh Parliament has the power to prescribe its own rules about franchise in local elections, enabling 16 and 17 year olds to vote. This context is important for understanding the priority given to youth engagement by the Welsh Parliament, and the way engagement is facilitated,

evaluated and continuously improved.

Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Cardiff

When visiting Cardiff, I was fortunate to experience a tour of the Senedd building and to see both a Plenary Session in action, as well as an Education Tour. I also met with senior parliamentary staff responsible for facilitating the Welsh Youth Parliament, as well as arts/democracy practitioners. These meetings and experiences provided me with valuable and unique perspectives on how to create the best conditions for youth-led engagement with parliament. I have attempted to summarise these reflections in my own words below. Please note, these are *my* reflections, and should be attributed to me rather than the individuals or organisations listed in the above itinerary.

Culture of engagement within democratic institutions, including the Welsh Parliament, means that planning and implementing engagement and participation strategies are part of the 'normal way of things' rather than an 'add on' to usual parliamentary business.

The physical infrastructure housing the Welsh Parliament is a constant and powerful reminder of the value and centrality of public engagement in the work of the parliament. The Welsh Parliament building has become a popular tourist attraction in its own right, and a regular location for school visits from students across Wales and beyond, including an increasingly strong program of visits from schools across Europe. The Welsh Parliament is also bilingual, which serves as a powerful reminder about access and inclusion.

Cultural change within the institution is embracing a range of engagement strategies designed to facilitate diversity of participation. For example, committees and Members are now anticipating engagement with Youth Parliament Members and are keen to respond to the views and outputs of the Youth Parliament. Many Members now factor in effective engagement with the Youth Parliament as part of their work planning and articulating direct benefits of engaging with young people.

Parliamentary staff are also facilitating active engagement with the work of the Welsh Parliament by people of all ages including young people and have a strong focus on community empowerment. However they also recognised that there are limits to what the institution can do to effect the type of social change many communities and individuals are looking for.

Reimagining the 'entry points' to democratic participation including through arts, culture and community education. Access to a rich and empowering *social and cultural life* is a prerequisite to meaningful engagement with *political and democratic* institutions.

An example of this approach is the 'Democracy Box' and 'Talking Shop' prototypes developed by Yvonne Murphy to promote democratic discussion and access to creative arts in Cardiff. These prototypes were informed through arts practice, and co-creation experiences of theatre production with young people. Using story telling and theatre to explore concepts of democratic decision making as well as ruptures in social cohesion, is an approach that societies have employed for centuries. This model was used to develop workshops for school children that started with a play, followed by an open discussion about what democracy looks like in the UK. This arts-led approach tapped into a really strong need among young people, teachers, families and general public to have forums where they can learn more about the 'basics' of UK democracy, and safe spaces to talk about political identity.

There is a strong parallel between those excluded or externalised from arts and cultural experiences and those excluded or externalised from democratic institutions. In both instances, there is a serious disconnect between the minority who have privilege, knowledge and access to these public institutions and those that do not. This leads to the dialogue between the two groups being broken, which in turn leads to false assumptions being made about the experiences, needs and capacity of each of these groups.

By shifting the entry point for access to democratic institutions *away* from conventional institution-led processes *towards* pathways based around artistic and cultural express and narrative storytelling, we can begin to address existing social divides, and encourage human to human connections around common

goals. These approaches reorientate the focus towards ‘what kind of society we want to have, and how do we get it’, and create spaces for people to find out what they do not know first, and then start to fill the gaps in their knowledge together, motivated by achieving a tangible and shared social goal. These approaches also recognise that ‘education’ or ‘information’ about institutional practices and processes need to be localised and directed at social ‘problem solving’. They present a powerful alternative to many conventional approaches to civics education which often result in an abstract socially-distant discussion about politics that continues to preference the needs and perspectives of the minority of people who already experience privilege and power within these institutions.

CASE STUDY 9: WELSH YOUTH PARLIAMENT

*For comprehensive information about the Welsh Youth Parliament please visit <https://youthparliament.senedd.wales/>



Image Credit: Welsh Youth Parliament, <https://youthparliament.senedd.wales/>

The Welsh Youth Parliament (WYP) is a youth model legislature established in 2018 by the Senedd in Wales. The WYP aims to provide a forum for the voice of young people in Wales, and to bring together young people who want to make Wales a better place for young people. The WYP also aims to provide young people with the opportunity to experience aspects of parliamentary practice and procedure.

The establishment of the WYP occurred within the context of devolution and increasing Welsh independence from Westminster, as well as reforms that enabled 16 and 17 year olds to vote in local elections in Wales. The WYP is a carefully planned model, co-designed with young people, and includes input from experts, schools, and members of parliament themselves. It is also supported by a careful approach to evaluation, that includes independent academic evaluation and 360 degree feedback from the full range of actors involved.

The WYP consists of 60 members, aged 11 to 18. Eighty per cent of WYP Members are elected by their peers in online elections and 20% are appointed by partner organisations that represent various groups and interests of young people in Wales. The appointed WYP Members are encouraged to work closely with the partner organisations to ensure they reflect the views and perspectives of young people from relevant communities, including persons with disabilities, or ethnic minorities.

The election cycles for the WYP Members are designed to coincide with broader education campaigns about democratic engagement for young people, including those orientated around enrolling to vote. WYP elections are also accompanied by a Wales-wide survey of key youth priorities, and are supported by schools-based programs, youth engagement and outreach programs also facilitated by the Senedd.

The WYP members meet three times during their two-year term at the Senedd building in Cardiff Bay, where they debate and vote on issues that matter to them and their constituents. They also hold regional meetings and events to engage with other young people and stakeholders across Wales.



Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Welsh Parliament, Cardiff

When meeting in the Senedd building, the WYP sits in the Main Chamber, with the President of the Senedd presiding over procedural rules that have been agreed to by the WYP and generally mirror that of the Senedd. During these sessions, Youth MPs have access to other members of parliament, senior clerks, and parliamentary researchers, as well as data collected by the Welsh Parliament about matters of interest or priority for young people in Wales. The WYP also often works closely with the Children's Commissioner and Future Generations Commissioner, who can also support WYP policy priorities and assist in the provision of relevant research or data. However, the

WYP does not have access to the same powers and privileges as the Senedd, for example, its proceedings are not protected by parliamentary privilege and it does not have powers to compel government Ministers or public servants to appear before it to provide evidence. It can, however, make use of the Senedd's broadcast services, publish reports, prepare media releases and other official statements, produce online content, and host events.

The WYP regularly contributes to policy development in areas such as education, mental health, environment, and children's rights, and supports local social action in line with WYP Member's key priorities for change. Increasingly, government departments and other bodies seek to engage WYP Members for focus groups, or to assist in the co-design of policies, or to serve on panels for recruitment of senior public servants or statutory office holders. There has also been positive engagement between the Welsh Parliament's Finance Committee and the Youth Parliament, that included the establishment of a focus

group that helped inform the oversight and budgeting work of the Finance Committee, but also enabled the Youth Parliament to gain insights into the balancing required when distributing funding to different priorities.

Staff at the Senedd responsible for supporting and facilitating the WYP have specialist skills and experience working with young people, and take particular care to try and limit the 'representation burden' placed on Youth Members, some of whom are only 11. They do what they can to protect members from exposure to partisan politics, and safeguard against WYP members being seen as 'case managers' or dispute resolvers for others in their communities. However, the Senedd staff also support WYP Members to actively consult with their constituencies in a range of formal and informal ways, particularly when prioritising issues to focus on, and when providing input into parliamentary inquiries or policy reform agenda.

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING YOUTH DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

The insights and experiences described above, coupled with the global mapping and research being undertaken by IPEN, IPU and others, suggests that it is time to reconceptualise what youth democratic engagement looks like in Australia. This reconceptualisation is a necessary pre-cursor to identifying what interventions or actions we can collectively take to improve the quality of youth engagement with Australian Parliaments.



Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

As the Bennett Institute for Public Policy has observed, if we want to improve the quality of the connection between the governed and the governors, we must:

move ‘away from a fixation on the here and now, and beyond the who and what of democratic politics – who is going to get elected, what are they going to do? – to look at the how. How do democratic decisions get made and how can they be made differently? How can the consent of losers and outsiders be achieved? How can new social divisions be bridged? How can the use of technology be brought under democratic control? And if we can’t do these things, how will democracy not merely survive but flourish in the future? (Foa et al, Preface).

In the context of engaging young people with democratic institutions like parliament, this means that we need to move beyond the conventionally dominant ‘teacher/student’ frame. This framing positions the adult or older person in the position of power, and the holder of knowledge and expertise, while the young person is conceptualised as a passive recipient of information or instruction. This is limiting our ability to see and value the experiences and expertise held by young people, and skewing our view of the possible when it comes to youth-led democratic engagement. As Shephard and Patrikios observed in their 2013 research on youth parliaments (at p. 767):

[I]nstitutions rarely translate youth preferences and grievances into tangible and applicable policy outcomes. So, on the whole, Youth Parliaments do not fulfill their potential as direct channels that aggregate youth voice and transfer it to policy-makers (democratic function).

Instead, activities are invariably focused upon socializing adolescents and young adults in the workings of a democratic polity (civic education).

Institution-controlled and led engagement activities also run the risk of what Pease has described as members of privileged groups ‘reproducing privilege’ (2022, at p 15). Pease explains:

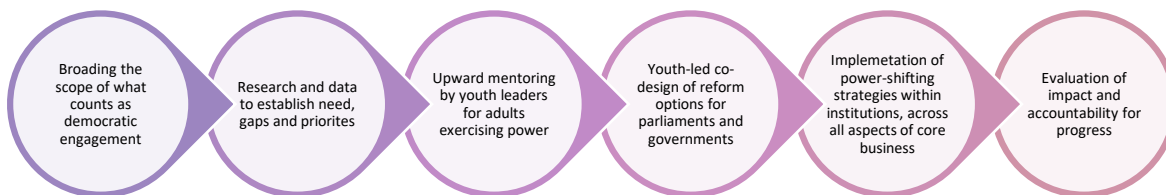
Members of dominant groups who have started to develop some awareness of their privileged position often look to oppressed groups to educate them. In doing so, however, they reproduce their dominant position and do not take responsibility for their own learning. While it is important that members of dominant groups make their practice accountable to oppressed groups, they need to take initiative in challenging their own and others’ privilege. (Pease, 2022, p.27)

These risks demand that we centre the key principles of youth-led, evidence-based, human rights informed approaches to youth engagement when we invest in public engagement activities in parliamentary settings. This approach helps to address marginalisation and social distance and models a shift in power away from those experiencing privilege to those experiencing exclusion.

The above examples and insights also bring into sharp focus the need to accept that, as a community, we cannot separate democratic engagement from the substantive issues confronting young people, and the intergenerational inequalities that plague our political discourse and decision-making systems. In other words, public institutions and public decision-makers need to demonstrate that they are prepared to engage in the type of power or privilege shifting that can bring about substantive policy change.

The experiences of overseas jurisdictions also underscore the benefits of using evidence and data to target precious resources to maximum effect. Good people and good programs around Australia are also already prioritising resources on those groups least likely to have access to parliamentary processes or practices, and those most at risk of marginalisation and isolation. But they face an uphill battle if we continue to take a fragmented, silo-ed approach that is often artificially circumscribed by government portfolios, short term funding models and jurisdictional eccentricities. We need a multi-institutional, cross-jurisdictional investment in human and digital resources within parliaments, and data collection and research outside of parliament, to make the most of the pockets of best practice already happening on the ground in Australia. Finally, we need to support youth-led movements in Australia to ensure equality of access to our political system, and to incentivise elected representatives to take the views and demands of young people seriously.

I have attempted to outline how these components of a reconceptualized approach to democratic engagement fit together. These concepts align closely with the guiding principles and key objectives outlined at the beginning of this Report and help inform the actions and toolkit indicators set out below.



GETTING STARTED ... *NOW!*

In this section of the Report, I highlight some of the actions parliaments governments, research institutions and community organisations can take now to create catalysts for change and make progress towards reimagining youth engagement with parliaments in Australia.

Many of these actions are already being undertaken, developed or reviewed by highly skilled and experienced youth service experts, Commissioners, government agencies and parliamentary engagement staff in Australia. It is hoped that by identifying and categorising these actions with reference to the key guiding principles and catalysts for change identified during my fellowship, this Report can help spearhead further investment and energy towards strategic approaches to reconceptualising youth engagement with parliaments. Institutional and non-institutional actors have a shared responsibility for implementing the below actions, which are designed to deliver shared, and long-lasting benefits and positive partnering opportunities. However, the actions coloured in purple fall within the particular domain of parliamentary services. Many of these actions also align with the Connecting Youth to Parliament Toolkits set out below.



Photo Credit: Sarah Moulds, 2023, Adelaide

The actions identified below have also been selected having regard to the need to preserve the important representative and legislative functions of parliaments, and the independence and professionalism of parliamentary staff. These actions are also designed to be achieved without requiring the allocation of substantial additional new resources, although they do envisage the leverage of win-win partnerships between parliaments, governments, local councils, research bodies and community organisations.

Guiding Principle	Key Objective	Catalyst for change	Action we can take NOW
Youth-led	Shift Inequality Rebuild Trust	Institutional disruption <i>More young MPs</i>	Endorse and profile the work of youth-led advocacy including Run for It and Make it 16 by tracking progress towards minimum of 12.5% representation of under 35s in local councils and federal, state and territory parliaments Facilitate upward mentoring for key political figures at State and Federal level. Engage in partnered research to evaluate existing approaches to improving youth representation in elected positions Survey existing political parties for initial responses to the idea of developing targets or quotas for young people in pre-selection processes
Youth-led	Shift Inequality Rebuild Trust	Institutional disruption <i>Lower voting age to 16 years</i>	Endorse and profile the work of youth-led advocacy including <i>Run for It</i> and <i>Make it 16</i> including through co-hosting forums with Australian Electoral Commission and Local Government Associations Draft legislative amendments to existing Electoral Acts, having regard to recent efforts eg Electoral (Lowering Voting Age for Local Elections and Polls) Legislation Bill (NZ) 2023, Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering Voting Age and Increasing Voter Participation) Bill 2018 (Cth)
Youth led Evidence-based	Shift Inequality	Institutional disruption <i>Prompt consideration of impact of laws, policies and public decisions on lives of young people</i>	Utilise existing Youth Councils in each Australian jurisdiction to co-design a <i>Future Generation Act</i> , informed by the Welsh model Use the recent <i>Intergenerational Report (2023)</i> to identify key policy priorities for reform, and co-design ‘dashboard’ to monitor progress. Support independent research into drivers of inequality in Australia similar to TASC <i>The State we are in: inequality in Ireland 2023 Report</i> Pilot ‘micro-loans’ projects administered by local councils to facilitate youth-led consultation in marginalised communities to identify key policy and legislative priorities Invest in Australia-wide youth surveys (such as Mission Australia Youth Survey) to prompt collection of depth of data similar to <i>Make Your Mark</i> and <i>The Big Ask Survey</i>

Human Rights, Respect First Nations	Shift Inequality Broaden what counts as democratic engagement	Institutional disruption <i>Adopt effective human rights frameworks</i>	Facilitate youth access to public inquiries into human rights frameworks at local, state and federal level including current parliamentary inquiries taken place at federal level and in South Australia Co-host youth-led workshops on human rights issues in local constituencies Consult with Australian Human Rights Commission and state and territory counterparts about existing and proposed youth engagement strategies
Evidence-based	Shift Inequality Rebuild Trust	Internal cultural shift <i>Know more about who is disconnected and why</i>	Partner with existing networks and research centers to better understand whose voices are not being heard and why (e.g. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 2021, Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged?) Research partners could include: International Parliamentary Engagement Network; Aboriginal Research Centres; Youth Advisory Councils; University based centres for Democratic Governance or Parliamentary Studies; Australasian Study of Parliament Group
Youth-led Inclusive & Empowering Respect First Nations	Shift Inequality Rebuild Trust	Internal cultural shift <i>Know how to reach disengaged groups and be seen as a legitimate, trusted partner</i>	Utilise existing networks of Parliamentary Education, Outreach and Engagement Officers in Australia to map best practice and identify areas in need of future investment. Partner with demographic researchers to identify local constituencies experiencing multiple barriers to engagement with parliamentary practices and processes Co-host forums with peak social service bodies (including ACOSS) and Aboriginal and First Nations bodies to identify potential partners for developing safe relationships with marginalised communities Partner with youth-led organisations to develop training materials and guidance for parliamentary staff and engagement teams, e.g. Young Manchester, Sharing Power in a Place Report 2023 Create opportunities to celebrate and invest in positive relationships between community organisations, experts and institutions, e.g. Scottish Parliament's Third Sector Partners and Parliament Event
Evidence-based Inclusive & Empowering	Rebuild Trust	Internal cultural shift <i>All staff think about how to include diverse range of voices in parliamentary</i>	Integrate direct participation in social action within civics education and parliamentary outreach programs e.g. Democracy Box Project, Wales Pilot (or review existing) 'Parliament Week' events that are focused on 'in place' engagement between local members and communities, including young people.

		<i>practices and procedures</i>	Incentivise and resource all parliamentary committees to develop public engagement plans for each public inquiry they undertake, informed by Toolkit set out below. Review opportunities to use existing committee and petitions systems to track and encourage further engagement with other parliamentary practice and processes eg Scottish Parliament’s Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee Report 2023
Evidence-based	Rebuild Trust	Internal cultural shift <i>Set strategic goals to improve quality of public parliamentary engagement</i>	Include public engagement as a core strategic goal in strategic planning documents and key performance indicators Develop institution-wide benchmarks and targets for improving the quality and diversity of public engagement Develop (or review) specific Public Engagement Strategies eg Scottish Parliament’s Public Engagement Strategy, 2021
Youth-led Human Rights, Evidence-based Inclusive & Empowering	Broaden what counts as democratic engagement	Social disruption <i>Open curiosity about different forms of democratic engagement</i>	Undertake an audit of protest laws and laws restricting access to public space building on work already undertaken by Australian Democracy Network and Human Rights Law Centre Co-host forum with First Nations and Aboriginal Organisations, Youth-led organisations, Youth Councils and federal, state and territory statutory bodies and local councils on the theme ‘what does democracy look like for young Australians’
Youth-led Inclusive & Empowering Respect First Nations	Shift Inequality	Internal cultural shift <i>Use demographic data to create conditions for democratically representative youth parliaments</i>	Work with existing Youth Parliaments to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of current models Invest in generating or accessing delineated demographic data to identify needs and engagement profiles of young people in each Australian electorate Pilot a demographically representative and democratically elected Youth Parliament with design input from existing Youth Parliaments and Youth Advisory Councils Utilise existing treaty processes and First Nations Voice forums to advance self-determined youth engagement



CONNECTING YOUTH WITH PARLIAMENT *TOOLKIT*

This section of the Report is designed to be used as ‘toolkit’ or checklist for those involved in designing, implementing or evaluating youth engagement strategies within parliamentary settings. It is informed by the insights and experiences gained from my fellowship, but also from the work advanced by the International Parliamentary Engagement Network in 2021-2022 (the IPEN Toolkit) and the significant contribution to scholarship in this space made by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira, from the University of Leeds.

The toolkit comprises of two tables. The first table sets out the preconditions for meaningful engagement with young people in a parliamentary setting. These preconditions and ‘first step’ actions have been informed by the catalysts for change identified above. They are designed to include actions that are within reach *now* and have a direct impact on institutional capacity to improve the quality of engagement with young people.

The second table is designed to assist with engagement planning and evaluation and draws from the indicators of ‘good’ public engagement identified in the IPEN toolkit, including: inclusivity; diversity of participation; empowering; flexible; meaningful; open and transparent and collaborative. These themes are also reflected in the findings of the IPU’s *Global Parliamentary Report 2022* which described effective engagement as being strategic, inclusive, participatory, innovative and responsive. The second table also draws heavily on the work of the Leston-Bandeira (2022) who has identified ten factors to ensure effective public engagement which are reflected as success factors in the table below.

Like all toolkits or checklists, these tables should be thought of as a prompt, rather than a prescription, and as a work in progress that will benefit from ongoing critique and feedback from practitioners.

Table 1: Preconditions for Meaningful Engagement with Young People

Precondition	‘First step’ actions
<i>Senior leadership recognises and values public parliamentary engagement and commits to improving the quality of engagement with young people</i>	Include public engagement as a core strategic goal in strategic planning documents and Key Performance Indicators
	Create specific targets for engaging with young people in all aspects of parliamentary business (including recruitment, training, evaluation as well as democratic lawmaking or policy making functions)
	Develop institution-wide benchmarks and targets for improving the quality and diversity of public engagement
	Evaluate existing outreach and education programs, and celebration of positive outcomes
<i>Positive institutional culture where staff feel valued and safe to explore new approaches to public engagement</i>	Survey existing staff to identify skills and strengths
	Co-design activities with existing staff to identify strategies that are working well, and barriers to meaningful engagement with marginalised groups
<i>Appropriate skills and resources within the institution to design, implement and evaluate engagements strategies</i>	Audit existing resources and processes employed to build or support public engagement.
	Host workshops with participants from inside and outside the institution to refine and consolidate existing engagement resources and strategies
<i>Relationships of trust with marginalised or disconnected communities</i>	Commission in-house research to develop evidence-based profiles of those individuals and communities experiencing marginalization from parliamentary processes and practices
	Identify and acknowledge existing relationships with community organisations forged by education and outreach teams
	Set targets for building relationships with marginalised communities, including through the identification of trusted bridge organisations or individuals.
	Allocate human and other resources to developing and sustaining relationships with marginalised communities
<i>Understanding of self-determined approaches to engagement by Aboriginal peoples</i>	Audit institutional capacity to understand and access Aboriginal concepts of parliamentary engagement
	Develop benchmarks and targets with respect to increasing institutional knowledge of Aboriginal concepts of parliamentary engagement in consultation with existing treaty bodies or Voice forums

Experience utilising human rights concepts and principles

- Audit existing processes, practices and skills to identify level of familiarity with or incorporation of human rights concepts and principles
- Develop benchmarks and targets with respect to increasing institutional knowledge of how to integrate human rights concepts and principles within parliamentary processes and practices
- Exchange experiences between staff of different institutions to build peer support for integration of human rights concepts and principles with parliamentary processes and practices

Access to comprehensive and current data about the lives of young people

- Utilise existing education and outreach programs to identify relevant information shared about the lives of young people, and their priorities or preferences with respect to different forms of parliamentary engagement
- Partner with existing youth councils and/or children’s commissioners to consolidate data about the lives of young people within the jurisdiction
- Partner with research institutions to undertake further qualitative research to address gaps in existing data and/or to create accessible profiles of young people across electoral constituencies

Access to youth leaders and youth co-design partners from with marginalised or disconnected communities

- Partner with existing youth councils and/or children’s commissioners to identify youth leaders and youth-led organisations within the jurisdiction
- Establish ‘upward mentoring’ opportunities within the institution, pairing youth leaders with senior parliamentary staff.
- Co-design forums or workshops with young leaders to identify strengths within existing outreach and education programs, and document areas in need of further investment or innovation

Capacity to identify or support policy and legislative priorities that address intergenerational inequality

- Partner with research organisations or existing youth representative council or bodies to identify key issues or factors contributing to intergenerational inequality and/or other experiences of marginalisation among young people
- Consider opportunities to orientate existing outreach and education programs, activities and events around the policy issues or priorities identified as important by young people, with a particular focus on those issues of most pressing concern to marginalised communities

Institutional safeguards to protect against corruption, misfeasance or inappropriate conduct

- Review existing policies and procedures with input from youth leaders or youth representatives.

Table 2: Evaluating Public Engagement Activities*

**Drawn from the ten key success factors identified by Leston-Bandeira (2022)*

Success Factor	Indicator
<p>Accessibility <i>Language and mechanisms used to engage successfully conveys ideas to a diverse range of potential participants</i></p>	Resources in multiple languages, styles or formats
	Different modes of communication used to share information with different audiences
	Feedback sought from young people or youth services about accessibility of materials and resources
<p>Rates of Participation <i>Actively seeking input from those not otherwise engaged with the processes and practices of parliament.</i></p>	Increased rates of participation
	Increased geographical diversity of participants
	Increased demographic diversity of participants
<p>Diversity of the audience <i>Facilitating participation beyond those already familiar with parliamentary processes</i></p>	Participation beyond those individuals and groups with intersecting privileges and high levels of familiarity with parliamentary processes and practices
	Explicit encouragement for diverse groups to participate, including through hearings ‘in place’
	Practical barriers to diverse participation are identified and explicitly addressed
<p>Identifying and addressing existing ‘divides’ <i>Explicit efforts to understand and overcome existing political, social, economic, digital or other divides</i></p> <p>Diverse communication techniques <i>A multiplicity of communication techniques have been employed</i></p>	Evidence of multiple communication techniques e.g. text, audio, video, visual, infographics
	Evidence of procedural innovation or flexibility in response to issue-orientated engagement
<p>Issue-led rather than process-led <i>Ordinary people are more likely to engage because they care about an issue, not because they know how a process works</i></p>	Evidence of two-way communication where institutional actors respond to ideas or suggestions by other participants
	Opportunity for participants to share lived experience in safe environments
<p>Listening rather than broadcasting <i>Institutional actors demonstrate active listening techniques and explicitly respond to ideas or input from others</i></p>	Appropriate acknowledgement of inputs submitted
	Evidence of clear communication with participants about how their inputs informed parliamentary business
	Evidence that someone did listen, even if not to accommodate the exact demands made
<p>Closing the feedback loop <i>Effective explanation of how inputs collected informed parliamentary business</i></p>	

Linking engagement with parliamentary business

Views of the participants are formally and actively linked to the process of considering the bill or policy

Evidence of involvement or acknowledgement by diverse range of Members of Parliament.

Evidence that participant views are formally and actively linked to the process of considering the bill

Evaluation and reporting of activities

Parliaments regularly seek feedback and report on engagement performance

Evidence of internal reflection and opportunities for public to provide feedback and reflection on specific and general engagement experiences

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