

**REPORT OF FIRST YOUNG PARLIAMENT (11 - 16 YEARS)
JULY 9 2010
Bath Spa University**

**IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS
BETWEEN ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

Stefan Di-Finizio, UK Youth Representative and members of DAFBY (Democratic Action for B&NES Youth) outlined their respective roles and also introduced the idea of connecting democratic processes.

THE MORNING SESSION

Each school and youth organisation was asked to bring a proposal to the parliament around the overall theme of 'Improving Communications Between Adults and Young People.' Having listened to each motion and asked questions, young people voted for two. The unsuccessful groups joined forces with the successful ones to develop the presentation for the afternoon's assembly.

Group A	Proposals Winners in bold
Culverhay School St Gregory's School Black Families Project 28	Intergenerational Mentoring Student Voice. Confidential On Line Counselling Forums for Meeting between Young People and MPs. Better Communication Skills Between Adults and Young People

Group B	Proposals Winners in bold
Foseway School Norton Hill School Somervale School Writhlington School YAGA	Young People should be Heard and Helped Confidential Website Communication between The School and Community The Children's Charter – Why Have It? 'The Swap' Event Days for Adults and Young People Swapping Roles Creating Quality Time between Adults and Young People

Group C	Proposals Winners in bold
Three Ways School Broadlands School Wellsway School Off the Record Young Carers Chew Valley School	Everyone Should Learn to Sign The Younger Generation and Older Generation Should Connect in Different Ways Intergenerational Community Music Project Adults should use Age Appropriate Language in Hospital/Care Settings Community Youth Councils

Group D	Proposals Winners in bold
Beechen Cliff School	More Youth Representation..... Let's Get Heavy!
Mentoring Plus	How to Prevent Bullying
Hayesfield School	Bridging the Gap
Ralph Allen School	Improving Communications – some ideas
Youth For Christ	Entering One Another's World

THE AFTERNOON SESSION

The assembly heard from Don Foster (MP for Bath), Cllr Chris Watt, (Lead Cabinet Member for Education) Cllr Sarah Bevan, (Chair of Council) about democratic processes and ways in which adults and young people could improve communications. The young people presented their ideas and took questions from the floor. A final vote was taken on the top favourites for the parliament.

THE WINNERS

1st Place	Everyone Should Learn to Sign
2nd Place	Intergenerational Mentoring
3rd Place	More youth representation..... Let's get heavy!

The Adults' Forum

While the young people debated their proposals and developed their presentations, the adult co-ordinators attended a participatory workshop that also engaged with the theme "improving communication between young people and adults". The workshop was facilitated by Graham Baker from the Youth Service and initially broadly examined the degree to which the schools and youth organisations actively create opportunities for young people's participation and then, through more detailed self assessment, explored some specific areas, e.g. young people's involvement in recruitment.

Although primarily working in three groups a general consensus emerged that if genuine participatory opportunities were to emerge, particularly in mainstream school situations, there needed to be the chance to..." actively create the time, space and support for effective communication between workers and young people". It was felt that in a school environment there were significant benefits to classroom relationships when staff worked residentially, after school activities, etc, however, this was usually based on the goodwill of staff and not embedded as "important" within the organisations culture. It was briefly explored how within many youth service projects there was a focus on developing more participatory approaches that significantly enhance the lines of communication between adults and young people including those young people who may have been marginalised from the mainstream. It was generally welcomed that such approaches were now beginning to be transferred to mainstream school situations through programmes such as Learning to Lead.

Comments from Young Parliament Co-ordinators:

The students really enjoyed it and want to do it again! They are keen to put their proposal forward to the whole school.

There needs to be the same number of young people coming from each organisation to allow it to be fairer and less intimidating for young people

Voting rules need to be explained before parliament starts

There was a feeling that not all facilitators really listened. They tended to favour more articulate young people.

The pupils returned to school in very good spirits. They had a fantastic time and were very stimulated by the discussions. When can they do it all again?

They really seemed to benefit from working together with other schools and groups. I think this was one of the unexpected outcomes of the morning – the amount of good will that was generated.

Comments from facilitators

The young people really rose to the challenge!

All the young people in the group were very generous and keen to support the winning two groups in developing their presentations and, in turn, the winning groups acknowledged this support - making the topics feel like real team efforts. Timing was about right.

There were varying degrees of preparation by the young people in schools. Those schools/organisations who did not come with a presentation expressed a sadness that they were not able to make an opening presentation, but threw themselves into developing the winning ones.

There was some debate about whether the young people should be able to vote for their own school. The facilitators asked them to decide whether to adopt a 'Eurovision' style (you can't vote for yourself) or a free style of voting. The decision was to have a 'free' vote. This potentially disadvantaged community groups who brought 2 not 4 young people, but in practice I'm not sure if it made any difference to the results.

To support the above, it might have been helpful for all the facilitators to meet in advance and agree responsibilities. the DAFBY rep also didn't seem quite clear on her role but took a key role in the development phase of the presentations. For my part, we could have been a bit more creative with introductions etc. All facilitators were able to ask questions and be affirming about the young people's presentations - which they thoroughly deserved.

My group really benefited from the input of Amber and Tom from DAFBY who were magnificent and coped brilliantly with all the roles we adults asked to take on at short notice - running the introductions and facilitating the groups preparing for the afternoon presentations. They also handled comments and questions about DAFBY and Youth Parliament very well and some of these questions and comments were quite critical (unfairly so I felt).

I feel it worked well to have a mix of backgrounds for the adult facilitators - I have quite a relaxed non-school way of working but on occasions a more direct teacher approach was needed, particularly with some of the stronger characters in the group (and we had quite a number of those!) There was a high energy in the room and the time invested in the introductions felt like time well spent.

- Learning points - I think a fuller briefing to facilitators on the principles of yp participation. Part of the downside of having teaching professions there as facilitators was their natural inclination to want to run the morning session like a lesson and not giving the yp enough opportunity to speak - of course, they retreat and feel less able to talk.
- Issues for the yp in my group were around a real feel for inter-generational work and wanting to make simple steps to fully embrace that- a lot of which did not need money. A good example was an inter-generational choir - this was from the Wellsway group whose main issue was they had not been communicated with and did a good presentation on the hoof.
- My other thinking was about how "mixed" groups need more watching to ensure facilitation was inclusive of different needs, abilities and confidence. My email congratulating Three Ways on their winning entry, and their skill in presentation, was read out in assembly!

Comments from the winners:

Uriel Renton –

I liked discussing our idea about signing. Our idea could go further to reach out to other young people who don't know how to sign and to improve disability rights. I think that the Young Parliament would benefit from some more games so that pupils from different schools get to know each other before they start talking.

Damien Mead –

It was a good day in nice surroundings, we liked the fishing lakes. It was a bit frightening to start with but then I got used to it. I felt very happy and excited when our communication chart about Makaton was shared with the group. Other people in the group thought our idea was fabulous and that made me feel really proud of myself and my friends at Three Ways who had thought of the ideas.

Evaluation comments (Young People and Adults)

There was a 100% positive response from all delegates regarding the question of whether a Young Parliament was a good idea. There was a feeling that the parliament could be influential in democratic processes, could lead to change, open up possibilities for community cohesion, allow young people to be heard and have influence in developing ideas. It was seen to be an empowering process but needed to be a regular event with outcomes that could be followed up.

Some of the learning points included a recognition that young people are innovative and have good ideas and they benefited from working with other schools; finding other young people who want to make a difference; hearing about how DAFBY can give young people a voice; that everyone has an opinion but to be heard requires confidence; that politics is not just an adult thing; learning how democratic agreements are hard to come by, discovering that not all adults are boring!

It was felt that young people and adults could work together better by having more respect for each other, improving their communication skills, taking part in extra-curricular activities together (teacher/pupil), developing a better understanding and realising that the generations are not so different. The intergenerational mentoring scheme was popular.

It was commented that the adults and young people should not have been divided up into separate groups although others felt they benefited from the Teacher's Forum. There was generally a feeling that the voting procedure needed to be explicit and transparent.

Comments from the Organisers

It was evident that the young people enjoyed being at Bath Spa University, listening to each other's proposals and working together. There was a terrific engagement in the debates with lots of detailed questioning. Some of the presentations were technically skilled although the best ones relied on young people being able to communicate well-thought through ideas clearly and effectively.

One of the outcomes we wanted to achieve was that young people have a role to play in democratic processes and that by working together with adults, they can achieve change. We hope that there was a sense of the interconnectedness of politics, from individual to community, to local and national governments. Adults and young people must now try to work together to translate some of the key ideas of the first Young Parliament into effecting constructive change.

The Parliament was attended by 75 young people, 21 adult co-ordinators, and 15 visitors. Thanks to all participants for their contributions.

Thanks also to Bath Spa University for hosting the day and for their tremendous support throughout the organisation of the event.