



The response of the National Youth Agency (NYA) to the Key findings and recommendations from the Participation Strategy Review Group report of April 2010

The staff and Trustees of the NYA are indebted to the various people who gave us their time and expertise in early 2010 to help us to review and refresh the NYA's work on young people's active participation. We are particularly indebted to the LG Association, whose guidance and long standing funding has helped us develop Hear by Right (HbR) from small beginnings into a highly valued, sector wide improvement tool, used to good effect in the vast majority of local authorities and in many third sector organisations.

Whilst we are clear about – and proud of – the impact of this work over the last decade, the LG Association in funding this Review of all the NYA participation work (from their top-slicing programme for children and young people) reminded us that we cannot afford to be complacent in such rapidly changing circumstances. We owe it to young people to keep abreast of their aspirations for influence and push harder to ensure their individual and collective voices are heard, seriously considered and, wherever possible, acted upon.

We believe that the intentions and actions outlined below will improve our work on this cornerstone issue and help further promote the right to participation that young people undoubtedly have.

This document is a shorthand version of the fuller report "Participation Strategy Review Report" (April 2010), and that larger document does more to articulate the value of young people's participation and why this is important to organisations,

In this addendum, the NYA deals with the recommendations made in the full report and outlines its intended activity as a result. In the text below, we present each of the key recommendations (without the fuller context) and these are given in *black/italics*. These recommendations came mainly from the Review Group itself, but were also gathered in from a range of sources, including focus groups with staff, partners and - most importantly - young people. This therefore is the NYA's final response - following a period of discussion and consultation since producing the first recommendations draft - and is given in blue/standard font.

Recommendation 1.1

Hear by Right is a successful brand for the NYA and for participation so should continue to feature in the future NYA contribution.

This recommendation – made by an informed and influential group of partners and (on occasion) competitors - is a welcome endorsement for the work to date and an encouragement to continue the direction of travel established over the last decade. But this will not mean just “more of the same”, as the proposed developments, funded in the main by the LGA, mean the biggest changes to participation activity at the NYA in a decade.

We **will** be renewing tried and trusted partnerships with the LG Association, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Partnership (MLA), Participation Works (PW) and many local authorities and third sector groups. We are committed to the maxim that “if it’s not broken – why fix it?” especially in difficult economic times.

But we will also look to take the trusted and tested approach of Hear by Right (HbR) into new areas of young people’s lives, since the process of enhanced voice and influence is a continuous journey rather than a final destination. And that trusted approach will be given a real overhaul to help improve the participation we do, and how to demonstrate its value.

Recommendation 2.1

The NYA should find additional ways of publicising the broader participation work that it is involved in, especially where it is leading the field

The Participation Review has brought home the depth of this issue, which has become more evident since NYA re-organisation in mid 2009. We are committed to reviewing how we best join up internally the existing and innovative work represented by newer projects such as the Young Researchers Network with the exciting development work planned in the youth justice sector and the long standing success and profile of the HbR stable. In doing this, we will re-affirm our focus on young people rather than other groups and set about linking up several disparate strands across work areas. Our new Communications team will be charged with getting a more integrated and representative message across to the public, to professionals and to young people. New branding and internal information management systems will help with this task.

Recommendation 3.1

Access to Hear by Right could be improved by developing the tool specifically for different sectors e.g. Hear by Right for the Police, and for broader partnerships such as Children’s Trusts.

This recommendation in part anticipates the increased push we are making in 2010-11 to introduce a range of briefings, case studies and tools on youth participation in the area of local government and young people’s critical role in a healthy local democracy; we will also break new ground in terms of youth justice and participation.

Further work with housing providers and museums will also be accelerated with the support of relevant partners. We are sufficiently encouraged by this

recommendation to re-consider earlier plans to create materials for use in schools and colleges, although some funding uplift will be needed to make this more than an aspiration. In all of this we stand by the existing iteration of HbR, updated last in January 2010, which continues to be very well regarded as a flexible and relevant guide to improving participation across a wide range of organisations. However, whilst we are satisfied with the integrity and clarity that this self assessment tool still offers to so many different professions, we will be developing “translation” resources which help staff contextualise the tool in more diverse and specific sectors, including within integrated youth support services which exist in every locality.

Recommendation 3.2

Hear by Right could be improved by reworking as a staged tool with a simple access point building to a comprehensive and aspirational system

AND

Recommendation 4.1

The NYA could write a business case for a participation standard tool as a way of testing the market and assessing the impact on the Hear by Right offer.

We know that – in the Participation Review Group itself - there were some requests for Hear by Right to be accredited and there were also some voices requesting that it should stay as a self assessment tool. The work of the Review Group and the feedback from the field in focus groups and on line surveys has reflected what is perceived as a difficult choice. We are pleased to be able to satisfy both arguments – and both of the recommendations - by developing a simple award scheme for those individuals and groups who feel that external validation is useful and rewarding, as well as maintaining the current self assessment focus of HbR. We do not see this in terms of “one or the other” but as a “best of both worlds” offer. We intend to try and increase user choice, rather than restrict it.

Above all else, this is about listening and making a helpful response to the field, and accommodating a range of organisations working with HbR in different ways. We will add to the options and benefits of the existing HbR tool by introducing a simple award framework with external validation by the NYA, made available to help the many excellent front line practitioners and services to capture and celebrate the lifeblood of participation: young people being heard, taking action with supportive staff and organisations, and introducing positive change for themselves and their communities. We will design this on the lines suggested by the Review – a simple starting point which can be built upon towards a more complex and comprehensive participation offer to local young people. The award will be incremental where necessary, but also offer the many long standing providers in local authorities and VCS groups a chance to work at a deeper level, and capture progress already made.

By basing this award on the existing HbR framework, we will also be able to leave existing uses of the tool in place, particularly as a strategic template, ensuring a greater spread of use and a wider range of engaged users.

Recommendation 5.1

The consultancy role offered by the NYA could be more clearly shaped up as an offer or product which could support the field as they develop their own locally based tools with young people.

The work required to shape and deliver a new, award based tool will automatically take the NYA into new territory and require it to respond more imaginatively to this type of request from the field. For example, we know from our e-survey that one of the most popular uses of HbR is as a process for helping to involve young people in recruitment, and we would hope to work with existing youth groups who have already created bespoke recruitment resources to share these with the rest of the field. Linking the creativity and energy of young people with those agencies operating influentially at a national level will also be part of our mission. We would therefore hope to work with CWDC, for example, to support and develop such approaches, and with the Department of Public Health to link local participation activity with the roll out of the “You’re Welcome” criteria for young people friendly services.

Recommendation 6.1

The NYA should continue to work with partners to lead the national participation contribution. As part of that role the NYA should encourage different agencies to specialise and focus on different aspects so that the best use is made of resources available for improving participation, particularly in the current economic climate

- The NYA will seek to develop a closer relationship with the LG Association, with LG Improvement and Development (formerly IDeA) and with the 150 plus local authorities doing so much work in local communities - much of it relatively unsung. We will therefore be looking for ways in which the quality, scope and added value of this work can be better celebrated. We will also focus on demonstrating the impact and cost effectiveness of this work, and its contribution to a robust local democracy
- Ultimately, local authorities will be amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the Award, as it will enable (but not compel) them to seek accreditation for pre-existing work, which can then support them in achieving further endorsements for work with young people - including both the NYA Quality Mark and the new IYSS quality standards. For this reason, we would like to achieve an explicit endorsement for this work from the LG Association, to try to achieve consistency in this part of the field.
- The NYA will continue to be an active member of the Participation Works consortium alongside NCB, NCVYS, CRAE, BYC and others, promoting the case for youth participation at all levels of national life and working with the third sector to push the agenda forward in difficult times.
- Discussions with private sector partners will continue to explore how the NYA and Hear by Right might be used in that sector to improve and demonstrate the quality and cost effectiveness of youth voice and influence.

- Whilst we cannot dictate the future position of any partner, developing a greater dialogue with major national players will increase the chances of avoiding duplication of effort and resources. We have also committed ourselves above to a specific focus on young people's participation and will be discussing with others how to avoid any duplication and work more effectively over the next period.

Recommendation 7.1

The NYA should work with the government to raise the understanding and awareness of the impact of participation on young people and service delivery. In this work the NYA should avail itself of the offers of other partners who have regional and national experience.

Given the new political arrangements now in place nationally, we will be seeking to brief new post holders on the importance of young people's voice and influence, both alone and with others. Whilst we do not perceive any significant movement away from the positive view of participation now held in government generally, we will need to make new efforts to translate the case for its continuation and extension to chime with the new agendas. Electoral reform, for example, should include a thorough debate about votes at 16, with young people fully involved in that debate.

We already have established working partnerships with a range of national and regional organisations - particularly through the Participation Works consortium and the Regional Youth Work units - and will be looking to build on these to improve information flow and best practice recognition from the ground up. A revived working relationship with LG Improvement and Development, for example, would enable greater synergy in terms of generic youth participation and the specific area of youth involvement in democratic and other local governance structures.

In the future we will do more to form stronger alliances on participation with organisations such as the Confederation of Heads of Youth People's Services (CHYPS) who especially recognise recommendations 7.1, 9.1 and 12.1 as "important areas and these would be activities that CHYPS would want to be associated and to play an active role with the NYA and partners."

We will also take up the offer from the U.K. Youth Parliament to be more involved with their national activity.

Recommendation 8.1

The NYA could undertake some work and possibly develop tools and working practice, to assess the impact of young people's participation.

One of the major issues discussed in the Review process concerned the lack of a suitable range of measures for impact assessment in youth participation. We will add this as a priority to our research programme – as an issue for adult and young researchers alike - for the next year and continue to develop further approaches with partners in PW who also have an interest in collectively demonstrating evidence of impact. A new piece of work undertaken by NfER and funded by LG Association will focus specifically on the uptake - or otherwise - of the new HbR award, and the reasons for this. The new award scheme will also keep the importance of demonstrable

change at the forefront of the issue of assessment of progress, through the continuing use and extension of the “What’s Changed” template.

But the most obvious route to success in this area is for young people themselves to confront the issue and find solutions that are workable and credible, not only for professional purposes, but for young people most of all. We will therefore continue to develop and seek to strengthen the work of young people in the Young Researcher Network, both in terms of the methodology and the valuable experience it provides for teenagers.

Recommendation 9.1

In addition to the NYA’s advocacy role for the rights of young people, the agency could develop a strong case to show how participation offers organisations ways to ensure value for money by developing effective services.

It is self evident, given where we are in a delicate post - recession economy that we will need to be both pragmatic and principled in moving forward. This does not mean that we will shy away from our belief that youth participation is a right enshrined in international convention which must be routinely assured to improve young people’s prospects. Our work in youth justice, for example, will require pragmatic approaches and will need to carefully balance the relative emphasis we place on rights and responsibilities, the cost effectiveness of ensuring preventive youth voice versus expensive interventions, and the mind set of both young people and staff within this sector.

Major partners in the youth sector also tell us that that the award will have currency both as a process for improving young people's participation but also as an opportunity to translate this into evidence of more effective organisational working; a "quality mark" in effect. There is clearly an opportunity for HbR to be an award that organisations can use to evidence their commitment to young people's involvement - like a Charter mark or LiP. What the HBR standards - plus award - will do is to badge an organisation's commitment **and** quality.

We will also look to add impact measures and value for money questions to the research brief identified in Recommendation 8.1 above.

Recommendation 10.1

The NYA could develop additional resources to help organisations who have a strong record of young people’s involvement to stretch to excellent or beacon practice.

We intend to build upon the new award – which will be primarily concerned with capturing a “good” level of practice – to identify and recognise excellent practice. Partners in government, both local and national, and voluntary sector organisations can all play a part in providing the encouragement and opportunities to celebrate some of the very high quality participation work that

is increasingly important to public as well as personal life. As an exemplar, the work of the U.K. Youth Parliament in tipping the debate on statutory PSHE merits acknowledgement and recognition. A beacon scheme has had some credence already in the public service sector and we would be keen to investigate how to implement such an innovation through our existing system of collecting 'What's Changed' examples to highlight really excellent practice to which others can aspire.(see also recommendation 6.1 above)

Recommendation 11.1

The NYA could have a role, alongside regions, in assessing and developing ways to help participation workers with their Continuing Professional Development.

We note the pivotal role that both PW and the regional units – and Government Offices - have in helping maintain and develop networks which support local participation workers. We would be happy to discuss with these brokers what they feel – and know – about the CPD needs of local participation staff, and provide suitable support where necessary. We will, for example, be providing both Hear by Right and Act by Right training based on the successful formats offered previously as part of the PW offer. We will be using the continuing PW partnership and its Gateway facility to promote and advertise this participation offer in the coming year.

However, we are minded to provide a more innovative, accessible and flexible development package by utilising our growing interest in e-learning, providing high quality, interactive participation training programmes across the whole of England in a cost effective way, optimising our role as a national body serving a widely dispersed field. In line with our growing interest in local democracy and the work of local authorities, we would also like to develop a supportive approach for elected members in terms of a greater and more accessible understanding of youth participation and its benefits. New monies will need to be found for this, however.

Recommendation 12.1

The NYA has a continuing role as an advocate for excellent participation work, for collecting information on good practice and playing a key role in supporting this development.

AND

Recommendation 13.1

The NYA could work with partner organisations to facilitate a networking / training experience for young people working at national levels.

These are roles we currently fulfil in different ways, and we will continue to support both staff and young people in these areas. In terms of information collection and advocacy, we have decided to change the current arrangements for our on-line participation presence. For several years we have worked with our partners Practical Participation who have successfully hosted and developed the Hear by Right shared learning web site as a satellite to the main NYA arrangements. We now intend to bring the HbR space in house, to recognise its importance and durability, to invest in its

maintenance and develop new areas for use by all interested parties. This will also hopefully ensure its future sustainability.

We are also keen to develop our current work on skills development for young leaders through partnerships with sector relevant bodies and by harnessing the drive, focus and input from major national private sector companies such as O2. The “Think Big” programme, funded by O2 and delivered through a wide partnership, is concerned with building up those skills that assist young people’s participation in civil and commercial society. We will also review and refresh the “Act by Right” training resource and seek to extend its application to new contexts (including youth leadership on environmental issues) and make it more widely available.

Recommendation 14.1

The NYA could undertake an internal audit to check the level and quality of participation of young people in its internal organisation and work. The previous approach and strategy of the NYA could be revised to embrace the new ways of working with young people in the wider working of the agency and the wider spread of participation activity across all operations.

See the answer to Recommendation 8.1 above. We are very aware that as an Agency operating as one of a number of guardians of standards on young people’s participation, we must practice what we preach. Our goal is to ensure that young people’s participation is not regarded as the responsibility of one team or one individual but that it is our very modus operandi. We will need to re-double our efforts to improve the joining up of initiatives and young people across the NYA, and make more headway on those areas we have identified as weaker after an internal scoping exercise. Like all organisations who undergo the HbR mapping and planning process, we are better aware that we have made strides forward on issues such as recruitment, staff training, governance, systems and styles of leadership, and need to ensure this is embedded for the future and give greater voice and more influence in the running and future direction of NYA to those young people who are increasingly driving forward our work as mentors, interns, associates and volunteers.

Recommendation 15.1

The participation review process was endorsed by the Partner Review Group

The momentum for this review came from a legitimate and constructive challenge by the LG Association that - rather than complacently accepting our current position of influence in the participation sector - we should seek out views from those most able to critique and improve our vision and our practice, and suggest how we might respond to a changing landscape. The recommendations from the various parts of the Review process have helped us to feel valued and valuable, at the same time as having old wisdoms questioned and new directions sign posted. We are therefore grateful to the LG Association for that impetus, and to all of the contributors who have made this such a positive experience for the NYA.

RMc
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