



EU and UK relationship: Education, Vocational Training and Youth

Findings from the British Youth Council's focus groups for the Cabinet Office

June 2014



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Introduction

The British Youth Council (BYC) is the National Youth Council of the UK. As a youth-led charity, we empower young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. We support young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.

BYC runs a number of youth-led networks and programmes - including the UK Youth Parliament, Young Mayor Network, Local Youth Council Network, National Scrutiny Group and Youth Select Committee - which encourage young people to get involved in democracy and campaign to bring about change.

On behalf of the Cabinet Office, BYC conducted a focus group consultation in June 2014 with 70 young people aged between 11 and 18 from the regions of London, South East and East of England (LSEEE) and Yorkshire & Humber, in order to investigate what young people think about the powers of law and policy making between the UK and the European Union (EU), specifically in relation to Education, Vocational Training and Youth.

The results of these focus groups will be incorporated into a wider piece of work, the EU Balance of Competence Review, being carried out by the UK Government, which is examining the balance of competences between the UK and the European Union. This review will provide an analysis of what the UK's membership of the EU means for the UK national interest. It aims to deepen public and Parliamentary understanding of the nature of our EU membership and provide a constructive and serious contribution to the national and wider European debate about modernising, reforming and improving the EU in the face of collective challenges.

What relationship do you think the UK should have with the EU on matters of education, training and youth?

The majority of the young people across both focus groups believed that the UK should work more **closely with the EU**, and that we should both learn and listen to the EU, but ultimately the UK should be able to decide whether or not to follow the EU. Some of the young people also stated that there should be some form of **shared education curriculum**, a **minimum set of education standards** and that **all qualifications should be equally recognised across the EU**.

Quotes from the young people:

'EU should have some influence in the UK otherwise there would be no point being in the EU, however the country itself should have the final say'.

'Learn from successful systems in other countries'.

'Minimum education rate is maintained across the EU, but up to separate countries to decide how to meet it'.

'Education links established between schools in the UK and EU to help broaden the horizons of young people'.

However, a small number of young people did argue that the UK should work on its own, this was largely driven by a concern that working together would cause more competition and this could lead to more employment problems in individual countries.

Are you aware of any specific EU education, training or youth activities or programmes which affect young people in the UK, either positively or negatively? Has anyone heard of the Erasmus+ programme?

Very few of the young people across both focus groups **had heard of the Erasmus+ programme**. Of those that did know of other EU programmes, they were only able to name 'Friends Out There' and

‘The World Challenge’. Some of the young people thought that DfID might fund programmes and they also mentioned town twinning.

Now you know more about the aims of Erasmus+ (to provide opportunities to young people and help young people develop their skills), what sort of activities do you think the Erasmus+ programme should provide or fund?

Several of the young people from across both focus groups thought that the **Erasmus+ programme should provide a range of activities which would help young people develop vital work and non academic skills and provide them with valuable work experience opportunities**. This included providing and funding exchange programmes, apprenticeships, work experience across Europe, affordable volunteering opportunities abroad, educational and field trips.

In addition to this, some of the young people believed that the **programme should enable more teaching about the EU**.

14.7 billion Euros over seven years is a big investment in education, training and youth. If the programme could spend this money in any way, how would you want it to be spent?

Again many of the young people argued that the **money should be spent on** providing young people with **work experience, skills training, apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities, vocational training and creating job opportunities**.

Quotes from the young people:

‘Offer incentives to employers and support young people to start-up their own businesses’.

‘Teach people how to utilise their own skills’.

‘Schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh are good investments, as they develop life skills’.

Some of the young people would like to see **more financial support for young people to continue to study**, with grants, scholarships and EMA for young people, as well as Tuition fee subsidies.

A quote from a young person:

‘Should fund education scholarships, because if we are all to be European Citizens...there should be funding for studying abroad as it can be more expensive than studying at home’.

A few of the young people also argued that the **money should be spent on more political education/participation activities** and youth voice activities at a local, national and international level.

Quotes from the young people:

‘Teach about the facts of the EU, it shouldn’t be left up to the Media’.

‘More youth interaction with other EU countries’.

In addition to this, some of the young people believed that money should be spent on tackling issues such as; child poverty, mental health, climate change, sustainable development and helping countries to develop a green economy.

Did you know that Erasmus+ only provides programmes for transnational activities – activities which involve interacting with at least one other European country, rather than things happening in the UK only? Do you think that’s right? Or should it be arranged differently?

Most of the young people in the LSEEE based focus group agreed that Erasmus+ should fund transnational activities.

Quotes from the young people:

‘It is a good idea to work with another country to unite and breakdown cultural barriers.’

‘Good for unification and helping each other out, which is what the EU is all about’.

However, some of the young people from both focus groups expressed concern that all the projects being transnational might prohibit some young people from taking part.

What do you think should be the aims or priorities of EU action in education, training and youth? What are the things you think they should focus on? Why?

The young people across both focus groups seemed to agree that the **main priorities should focus on improving and providing more non academic education, employment opportunities and apprenticeship schemes across the countries.**

As well as this, some young people talked about more funding for young people to learn about the EU, to learn more languages and to enable connections with people in Europe.

Quotes from the young people:

‘Provide funding for young people to actually go abroad and participate in opportunities’.

‘More political education about the EU’.

‘More options of languages to learn’.

Do you think it’s important for young people in the UK and across Europe to be able to share their views to EU decision makers? How do you think this affects young people, and the EU?

The majority of the young people across both focus groups agreed that it is **important for young people to share their views with EU decision makers.**

A few of the young people felt that it was important for young people to have a collective voice, so that the decision-makers would take note of their opinions. They suggested possible conferences and conventions, so that young people could engage with MEP's.

Some also felt that there should be more opportunities for young people to take on roles such as BYC ambassadors and be involved in EU Youth Groups.

Appendix 1. Equal Opportunities Data

Total Sample Size – 70

- London South East and East of England (LSEEE) - **49**
- Yorkshire and Humber - **21**

The young people who took part in the focus groups were **between the ages of 11 and 18**. The mode age was **15 years old**.

53% of the young people were **male**, **46%** were **female** and 1% preferred not to say.

64% of the young people were from **White British backgrounds**, 4% were from a white other background. **31%** were from **Black and Minority Ethnic** backgrounds and 1% preferred not to say.

90% of the young people were in education, learning or training. 4% were employed, 7% were not employed and 2% preferred not to say.

87% of the young people identified themselves as heterosexual, 3% bisexual and 4% as gay men.

90% of the young people **did not believe they had a disability**. **6%** said they did and 4% said they would prefer not to say. Of those who identify themselves as having a disability, **50% had a learning disability**, **25% had mental issues** and the remaining 25% preferred not to say.

Appendix 2. Responses from London, South-East and East of England regions

1. What relationship do you think the UK should have with the EU on matters of education, training and youth?

For example *(to prompt discussion if needed)*:

- The UK should be completely free to decide how to manage education, training and youth policies and activities in the UK
- The UK should listen and learn from the EU, but should be able to decide whether or not to follow EU ideas
- The UK should work more closely with the EU so we can all become European citizens
- The UK should follow what the EU thinks and decides on these matters

Education and Training:

- Qualifications
- UK in control over its own Education system, separate to the EU but recognise other qualifications
- Minimum Education rate/level is maintained across the EU, but is it up to the separate countries to decide how to meet it?
- Education links established between schools in the UK and EU to broaden peoples horizons
- Academies should have to follow some government decisions
- EU should have some influence in UK otherwise there would be no point in being in the EU, however the country itself should have the final say
- Qualifications should be recognised in other countries
- Opportunity to standardise education standards and ensure equality and fairness
- Shouldn't compare education systems between countries
- Build on our own strengthen and our own industries
- Shouldn't link in on education, could lead to more competition and could lead to problems in all countries.
- None
- Learn from successful systems in other countries
- UK should work on their own
- Should hand over power to Gove.
- UK and EU should work together – make allies because we'll eventually need their help to help us and others
- Work with EU because our educational stats and numbers are bad
- Social integration and curriculum for life
- Social and political awareness through social training and learning through play (like Finland).
- Should be a shared foundation for curriculum and education
- Common language – English
- Sometimes language barrier
- We need to be funded to be more aware of job opportunities
- Easier training for international work

Youth:

- Youth should be a priority
- Consultations regularly between youth and EU parliament members
- EU youth parliament
- Twinning Associations

2. Are you aware of any specific EU education, training or youth activities or programmes which affect young people in the UK, either positively or negatively?

Has anyone heard of the Erasmus+ programme?

- Very few of the young people had heard of the Erasmus+ programme
- Some sort of exchange programmes
- DfID fund many programmes
- The world challenge – although too expensive, unrealistic to fundraise
- Town twinning
- We don't know any schemes
- Friends out there –Nigeria – shared experiences – positive work

3. Now you know more about the aims of Erasmus+ (to provide opportunities to young people and help young people develop their skills), what sort of activities do you think the Erasmus+ programme should provide or fund?

- Field trips
- Educational Trips
- Visits
- Outings
- Exchange programmes
- Apprenticeships
- Skills development
- Semesters for University students in other countries
- Work experience
- Identity problems
- Promote curriculum for life across Europe
- Sharing knowledge and skills
- Make volunteering affordable and create opportunities aboard

4. 14.7 billion Euros over seven years is a big investment in education, training and youth. If the programme could spend this money in any way, how would you want it to be spent? For example (to prompt discussion if needed): Let local people around the country decide how it's spent, build more schools, provide better equipment and more staff for schools, build more youth clubs, provide more support for vulnerable young people in the UK, for more intercultural exchange so we can learn about other EU countries and become European citizens.

- Vocational training
- Job opportunities
- Work experience
- Funding for mission trips
- Volunteering charities
- Classroom links
- Encourage education in youth provision – such as for young offenders
- Mental health services
- Political education
- Sports, physical health
- Youth participation
- Curriculum for life
- Build youth clubs
- Apprenticeships
- Subsidise University fees

- Teach people how to utilise their own skills
 - Schemes such as Duke of Edinburgh are good investments as they develop life skills
 - Free university places like Sweden
 - Political reform
 - Work skills
 - Grants for students
 - Some form of EMA for young people at college
 - Tackling poverty
 - Sport which is character building and builds relationships with other countries
 - Sustainable development
 - Environment/climate change
 - Helping countries to develop a green economy
 - Child poverty
 - Creating opportunities for young people to work
 - Make volunteering affordable and create opportunities abroad – life changing experiences
 - Youth unemployment – offer incentives to employers and support young people to start up their own businesses
 - Transport subsidies
 - Energy costs subsidised
 - Fund communication course to communicate with people in other countries
 - Youth voice activities at local, national and EU level
5. **Did you know that Erasmus+ only provides programmes for transnational activities – activities which involve interacting with at least one other European country, rather than things happening in the UK only? Do you think that's right? Or should it be arranged differently?**
- It is a good idea to work with another country to unite and breakdown cultural barriers
 - Good for unification and helping each other out which is what the EU is all about
 - Split up the money to each country, then the young people in the UK have the choice to be just in the UK or with an another country
 - The majority of the young people 15 voted that money should be spent across the EU, 2 young people abstained and 2 voted that it should stay in the UK.
 - Agree with the plan – use the money across the EU countries
 - Youth boards to delegate money
 - UK Youth Parliament and EU sister schemes along with EU ambassadors and BYC to make decisions on how money is spent
 - Gain knowledge to challenge the stereotypes e.g. about war and government decisions
6. **What do you think should be the aims or priorities of EU action in education, training and youth? (What are the things you think they should focus on? Why?)**
- Funding for residential training
 - The main priority should first of all be at a local level, there is no point in taking continent wide, unless you've made a difference locally.
 - Helping young people write CVs
 - Equal opportunities for everyone
 - Guaranteed employment/apprenticeship schemes for everyone
 - Opportunities for young people in Europe to connect
 - Make languages we learn in school real
 - More options of languages to learn
 - Teachers to use foreign schools to access teaching methods
 - Apprenticeship schemes between countries

- 7. Do you think it's important for young people in the UK and across Europe to be able to share their views to EU decision makers? How do you think this affects young people, and the EU?**
- Create an EU Youth Group – needs more publicity as didn't know that one currently existed
 - Have a convention
 - Young people campaign on important issues
 - Youth democracy, structures/participation, youth conference to look at things like gay rights and anti-discrimination
 - MEP's should be more accountable
 - Hold youth conferences to speak to MEP's
 - More organisations like BYC ambassadors – e.g.: UKYP across Europe
 - EU in control, how is it accountable – it isn't with current systems
 - Use your vote to support someone who will represent you
 - EU members should be equal, but they aren't
 - Sharing of knowledge and help resolve issues and promote positive outcomes
 - Share experiences about human values

Appendix 3. Responses from the Yorkshire and Humber region

- 1. What relationship do you think the UK should have with the EU on matters of education, training and youth?**
- The UK should listen and learn from the EU, but should be able to decide whether or not to follow EU ideas.
 - The UK should work more closely with the EU, having its own education system, but learning from the policies of other countries around the EU.
 - Think we should work with the EU & other EU countries.
 - The UK should work more closely with the EU, but should disagree or agree on the EU statements and laws, as well as other countries; - we should all have an input in the EU somehow at least.
 - The UK should work more closely with the EU, but not be tied to following its judgement (however, should have a very good reason for not doing so)
 - I believe that the UK should listen and learn from the EU, but should be able to decide whether or not to follow EU ideas, but also that the UK should work more closely with the EU so we can all become European citizens.
- 2. Are you aware of any specific EU education, training or youth activities or programmes which affect young people in the UK, either positively or negatively?**
- Nobody aware of any specific programmes
 - 3 had heard of Erasmus
- 3. Now you know a little more about the aims of Erasmus+ (to provide opportunities to young people and help young people develop their skills), what sort of activities do you think the Erasmus+ programme should provide or fund?**
- There should be activities on vital work skills;
 - They could fund a start-up for some sort of European youth forum.

- Try and make more work experience/shadowing opportunities across Europe.
 - More teaching about the EU in PHSE and Citizenship education.
 - It should fund the development of non-academic skills focussing on topics that are covered in PSHE, so political education, sex and relationships education etc
- 4. 14.7 billion Euros over seven years is a big investment in education, training and youth. If the programme could spend this money in any way, how would you want it to be spent?**
- Should fund more education scholarships because if we are to all be European citizens and have greater communication and links with one another than there should be funding for studying abroad as it can be more expensive than studying at home.
 - More spent on the development of resources in schools, as I've only heard of Erasmus with relation to Universities, which is only some of the population?
 - Teach people about the facts of the EU – it shouldn't be left up to the media
 - More youth interaction with other EU countries
- 5. Did you know that Erasmus+ only provides programmes for transnational activities – activities which involve interacting with at least one other European country, rather than things happening in the UK only? Do you think that's right? Or should it be arranged differently?**
- I think for more needed funding areas they could fund for UK only programmes but I do think that it is important for there to be more transnational opportunities
 - If the aim is to encourage European citizenship, then whilst some activities should be transnational, it is unfeasible for every activity to be transnational, and perhaps prohibits some young people from taking part in activities.
- 6. What do you think should be the aims or priorities of EU action in education, training and youth?**
- More connectivity so more opportunities for young people to engage in training, education and youth forums by
 - Providing funding for young people to actually go abroad and participate in the opportunities that are there
 - They should focus on: improving the non-academic education of EU citizens, helping young people understand how the EU works, and why being an active EU citizen is important.
 - More political education about the EU
 - Information about the different electoral systems
- 7. Do you think it's important for young people in the UK and across Europe to be able to share their views to EU decision makers? How do you think this affects young people, and the EU?**
- It is vitally important because if the young people of Europe are united then there is a greater chance the key decision makers will take more notice and actually fix the issues that we are campaigning for.
 - It is essential for young people to be able to share their views to EU decision makers. To be honest, it affects young people little, as they don't realise they can contact decision makers, or if they do, what issues they should contact them about, as they have MPs, Councillors etc., who they could also write to.

Also posted on the Facebook group after the Convention:

The UK should work more closely with the EU so we can promote not only British interest but European too. The idea of nation states is completely arbitrary, the lines created to define and divide ourselves have been created by corrupt despots to protect their land, or simply the way maps have been drawn after centuries of conflict. Nation states and our 'nationality' means nothing, I'm further away from Hull in Grimsby than Devon is from France. The more we see ourselves as one people, with great struggles, we should be facing together, whether that is climate change, education or unemployment the better off we will be. We can harness our economies of scale and comparative or absolute advantages much greater together. A greater people with the underlining view that it doesn't matter the land that you are born on, we are all brothers and sisters. Why should we allow such arbitrary lines as nationality and nation states get in the way of this? Surely our moral obligations are directed to all human beings rather than those within certain political, geographic or social arrangements.