



National Youth
Council to the UK
What the Future Holds
Future Recommendations Report





“Without a strong and influential National Youth Council in the UK, young people across the UK will likely miss out on opportunities to learn and experience from and grow, and influence youth policy in both the domestic and international community.”



Introduction

The British Youth Council (BYC) was established in 1948 by the UK Foreign Office as part of a global post-war initiative for the first World Assembly of Youth ([Home | WorldAssemblyOfYouth](#)). Its original aim was to unite young people in Britain against the forces of communism following World War II. Similar organisations were established worldwide, affiliated with regional federations such as the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the Pan-African Youth Forum (PAYU), and the Foro Latinoamericano de Juventud (FLAJ).

In 1963, the BYC gained independence from the UK Government and became an independent charity that champions the voices of young people. Towards the end of the decade, the BYC evolved to convene and support youth councils across the UK.

In 1971, the UK hosted the World Assembly of Youth in Manchester, featuring the then-Prime Minister Edward Heath as the keynote speaker.

By the late 1980s, funding cuts tested the sustainability of the BYC, including the withdrawal of funding from the Foreign Office. Despite these challenges, BYC remained resolute and continued to operate, playing a key role in the UK signing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UN Convention on Rights of a Child \(UNCRC\) - UNICEF UK](#)).

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the BYC continued to create opportunities for young people to voice their opinions and exert influence. Large-scale consultations led to the publication of research papers within the UK and for the YFJ.

Over the years, the BYC has faced the threat of disbandment twice and has required restructuring of its legal framework.

In March 2024, after 76 years of operation, the BYC ceased its activities. A series of influential internal and external decisions led to an untenable situation, resulting in the immediate closure of the organisation. In May 2024, the National Youth Agency purchased the remaining assets and began investing resources into a UK-wide listening exercise and review to explore potential solutions for reinstating a sustainable and long-term future for national youth councils. This effort includes support for the remaining operational elements of the organisation related to the UK Young Ambassador (UKYA) programmes.

This report outlines the methodology used for gathering data and insights as part of the review. It also identifies thematic learnings from the data capture and analysis. Within each thematic chapter, the report will present co-produced recommendations, subject to scrutiny by various stakeholders, for consideration. For purposes of this report we will be referring to the organisation as the National Youth Council to the UK (NYCUK)

Benefits of a National Youth Council

As a founder member of the European Youth Forum (UK, Germany, France, Italy and Belgium) the UK has more often than not been looked upon as the beacon for excellence within the field of democratic youth voice and influence.

The primary aim of a national youth council is to represent young people on the international and national stage. It exists to support young people as individuals and those connected to local youth voice vehicles and national youth organisations. Over time the National Youth Council has evolved to become a diverse, representative and inclusive space, ensuring that the voices of all young people and their wide ranging needs and contexts are represented.

The National Youth Council to the UK serves as the main infrastructure organisation for youth voice and influence. It creates innovative, inclusive, culturally representative, and relevant spaces for young people, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, cultures, communities, or experiences. The council creates opportunities for young people to have a say in decisions that directly impact them, ensuring their voices are heard in the decision-making process. A National Youth Council to the UK can be flexible in its engagement and participatory approaches, being free from restrictive formal structures as seen in UKYP.

Without a strong and influential National Youth Council in the UK, young people across the UK will likely miss out on opportunities to learn and experience from and grow, and influence youth policy in both the domestic and international community.



Review Process

In September 2024, the National Youth Agency allocated funding from its reserves to commission a UK-wide review into the future of the functions and programmes delivered by the BYC. This review sought to gather comprehensive insights from a broad range of stakeholders through multiple research methodologies.

Data Collection Methods

The review utilised four primary data collection methods:

- Online consultation – 350 respondents participated in a structured consultation process.
- Youth-led focus groups – Co-produced with over 30 young people and organisations, resulting in eight focus group submissions.
- Desk research – A literature review and observations of UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) activity.
- Semi-structured interviews – Over 40 individual and organisational stakeholders from across the UK contributed.

The online consultation was informed by preliminary discussions with sector colleagues across the UK. It followed a structured framework focusing on governance, activity, sustainability, and need.

The youth-led focus group activities were co-designed with cross-sector and UK-wide stakeholders through two online workshops. Resources were then made available for young people to download and facilitate discussions in their local areas.

Details of the online consultation and focus group resources were published on the BYC page on the NYA website. This page received 2,495 visits during the consultation period, which ran from 4th November (Youth Work Week 2024) to 31st December 2024.

Desk research was conducted from September to December 2024, analysing domestic and international models of youth governance and organisational structures. Stakeholder interviews (both one-to-one and group discussions) took place from September 2024 to January 2025, enabling in-depth exploration of stakeholder experiences and existing relationships.

Identified Themes

1. Governance – pg 7
2. Membership Models – pg 9
3. Stakeholder Engagement (across the UK) – pg 11
4. Delivery Model – pg 12
5. Service Delivery – pg 15
6. Funding Model – pg 17
7. Equality Equity Diversity Inclusion and Belonging – pg 18
8. International Work – pg 21
9. Academic Research Collaborations and Opportunities – pg 24



1. Governance

The BYC was governed by a board of trustees and guided by a Chief Executive Officer. The board comprised of 13 members, 11 were 'ordinary' trustees and two were officers (the Chair and Treasurer). Six trustees were elected from the membership and five were appointed by the board. During their three-year term the Chair and Treasurer also acted as trustees. The entire board of trustees were aged between 16 – 25 years of age.

On the 18 March 2024 the then elected Chair of BYC contacted PKF Littlejohn Advisory Limited to explore options available to the organisation given the financial situation.

As part of this review process, organisational governance was explored via survey and interviews (There was an open question related to the future governance structure of the NYCUK, with a 56% response rate). There were diverse answers, as expected, and data gathered from the online consultation suggests that young people wanted leadership roles and acknowledged that the previous structure had some benefits. Many responses related to a desire to see young people in democratically elected leadership roles, supported by well-equipped adult structures to provide additional leadership and guidance, and governance.

A common theme from feedback was the need for a separate board to handle legal issues, comprising experts or young people with evidenced experience of organisational governance and leadership, with steering groups for the whole organisation or each of its programmes being youth-led, this approach will help to mitigate associated business risks.

Diversity, regional representation and greater involvement of regional youth councils were recurring themes. These suggestions indicate a desire for a stronger connection between the board and its members, with secured spaces for various groups. Some proposed reserving seats for Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs), Youth Ambassadors, former youth representatives, or even Members of Parliament (MPs). A more detailed suggestion included having pillars for different demographics and regions with designated seat numbers. This would help achieve the ambition of being a better representative body for all young people across the UK.



Several comments recommended raising the board's age limit to 30 to allow young people to acquire governance skills. Some comments suggested that organisations or structures like the National Youth Agency or the Children's Commissioner for England should have a role in running the council

Across Europe there are many examples of varied governance structures within the national youth councils. Each structure has been developed to meet the needs of the nation it represents. Whilst it is good practice to research what exists and learn from our international partners, we must ascertain what works best for the UK as a whole.

A final note to consider is that an authentic youth led organisation has to acknowledge the power dynamic issues that exist. A governance model needs to recognise this, address this and install mechanisms to respond appropriately.

Recommendations:

- **Establish a robust and effective governance model** that upholds the principles of youth leadership while ensuring appropriate structures are in place to provide necessary support and guidance. This model should actively mitigate risks, drawing on lessons learned from past experiences, and creating a sustainable framework that empowers young leaders to make informed decisions.
- **Facilitate the election of a youth-led executive board** that operates with a strong mandate to lead and make decisions grounded in evidence. This board should be equipped with the necessary resources and support to critically assess and scrutinise strategic decisions, ensuring accountability, transparency, and alignment with the organisation's overarching mission. Furthermore, it should be recognised and valued by all key stakeholders as a credible and authoritative voice for young people.
- **Develop and implement a comprehensive Terms of Reference for a UK-wide advisory expert board**, ensuring representation from all four nations of the UK. This board will play a crucial role in supporting youth-led governance structures by offering expert insights, strategic guidance, and ensuring that youth leadership mechanisms are well-informed, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse experiences of young people across the country. Through this approach, the advisory board will serve as a truly representative and influential body, strengthening youth participation in decision-making at a national level.

2. Membership Models

At the time of insolvency the British Youth Council had just over 200 membership organisations, each paying a membership fee. Fees were assigned on a sliding scale (£72 - £1245) based on reach of young people within their membership.

The membership offer was conflated with membership to the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). Most local authority members paid for a membership that gave them access to UKYP resources and programmes which is separate to BYC membership.

The generic membership offer consisted of discounted training, resources, advice and guidance, the opportunity to nominate a young person to the board and to nominate a young person for a UK Young Ambassadors position. There were six protected seats on the board of trustees ringfenced for elected membership organisations, these seats disseminated information from leadership tables to the membership network, whilst ensuring the board reflected the members' needs.

Membership was restricted to organisations, as this was seen as the most effective way to elevate and amplify the voice of individual young people through specific networks. This model was effective and promoted local and regional engagement opportunities.



“A national youth council is not simply a national version of a local youth council. It operates very differently in terms of its structure and purpose. Despite its name, it is not possible for an individual young person to apply directly to a national youth council without being part of an affiliated organisation.”

- Lloyd Russell-Moyle, ex MP for Brighton Kemptown and alumni of the British Youth Council



Recommendations:

- **Design and implement a comprehensive membership framework** that clearly outlines the benefits available to member organisations, ensuring a compelling value proposition. This framework should offer a diverse range of additional benefits, such as subsidised training opportunities to enhance skills and capacity-building, access to discounted resources that support youth engagement initiatives, exclusive networking opportunities to foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing, and other tailored incentives that add meaningful value to membership. The aim is to create a structure that is both attractive and beneficial, encouraging UK wide participation and long-term engagement.
- **Establish a fair and transparent fee structure within the membership framework** that promotes equity and inclusivity across all member organisations. The framework should ensure that every organisation, regardless of size or financial capacity, feels valued, supported, and empowered to contribute effectively. Membership fees should be determined based on a standardised model that upholds fairness, ensuring equitable access to opportunities, resources, and benefits. By maintaining consistency in the distribution of benefits and aligning fees with organisational capacity, the framework will foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose among all members.
- **Develop and strengthen a UK-wide network that amplifies youth voice leadership and influence**, creating a platform that brings together organisations, leaders, and practitioners from across the four nations. This network should serve as a hub for sharing expertise, best practices and innovative approaches to youth participation and representation. By facilitating ongoing dialogue, learning and collaboration, the network will help to harness the collective experience of diverse stakeholders, ensuring that young people across all parts of the UK have a powerful and unified voice in shaping policies, initiatives, and decision-making processes.

3. Stakeholder Engagement

The UK is a nation of four nations, with both individual and collective national identities. Conversations with stakeholders across the UK identified that, historically, partners felt an inequity in leadership roles for the British Youth Council, with a consensus that the organisation had become Westminster/London centric, in turn dismissive of opportunities and good practice in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions.

Partners felt that opportunities to engage in wider work was often restricted to an elite few and that the door to discussions on how to improve these practices was firmly shut.

The leadership structure of a National Youth Council to the UK needs to be equally balanced, giving a voice and platform for all young people across the UK to drive the work forward. The issues of devolved and restricted matters will help to identify effective ways to improve stakeholder engagement. We know that Scottish Youth Parliament, Welsh Youth Parliament, and NI Youth Assembly are all embedded in policy development within their nations, however, a UK wide policy development approach to ensuring equity would be very much welcomed. Avenues to explore include geographic hosting of forums, discussion tables, Annual General Meetings and more.

The National Youth Council to the UK should acknowledge the [role of devolution](#), not just within the four nations, but also regionally within England. See the English Devolution White Paper, [Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth \(Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, December 2024\)](#).

The Regional Youth Work Units or alternative structures in England could play a role in co-ordinating a regional response, and disseminating information to ensure youth voice is representative of all young people, not just those already engaged. Read [Devolution Factsheet produced by the Civil Service](#) as context.

A notion of a renewed National Youth Council is endorsed by all UK nations.



“At YouthLink Scotland we support the development of a renewed National Youth Council for the UK. In an international context, where we work and collaborate in ways which are both devolved and for the UK as a whole, we want to work together to be part of a NYC that is connected and representative across the 4 nations and works collaboratively with existing infrastructure, such as the national agencies for youth work and the youth parliaments, to bring youth representation and international opportunities closer to home for young people and youth work across the UK.”

– Liz Green, Workforce and Practice Manager, Youth Link Scotland

4. Delivery Model

It is important to understand the role and place of a NYCUK within the wider context of the participation ecosystem that exists across the UK. (Fig 1) The UK participation ecosystem is a complex space that consists of a variety of organisations, systems and structures, bridging sectors, professions and geographical boundaries. The role of a National Youth Council to the UK is to hold a space where all youth voice and influence across the UK can come together to network, amplify voices/messages, create broader opportunities for more young people and bring stability to a disparate sector.

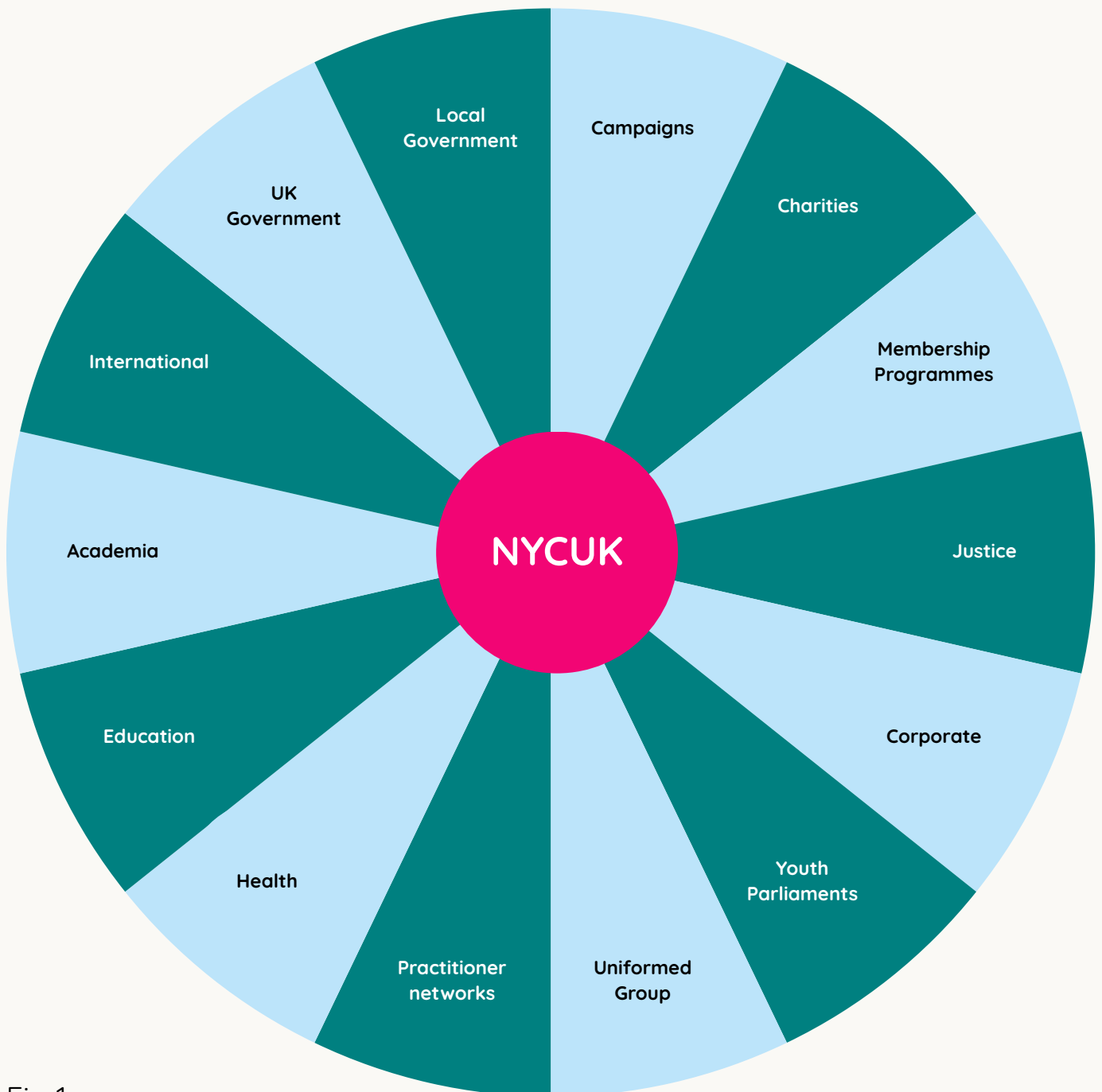


Fig 1

Governance and Structure Considerations

The four nations of the UK each have distinct frameworks for facilitating youth voice and influence. While these structures are effective domestically, they can create complexity for both UK-based and international partners.

A NYCUK led by an executive committee with equal representation from all four nations would provide a strong foundation. However, large cross-border institutions and membership organisations (such as the Scouts, Guides, and NUS) require direct membership status. The proposed model outlines a governance structure that incorporates five key leadership stakeholder components to ensure balanced representation. (Fig 2)

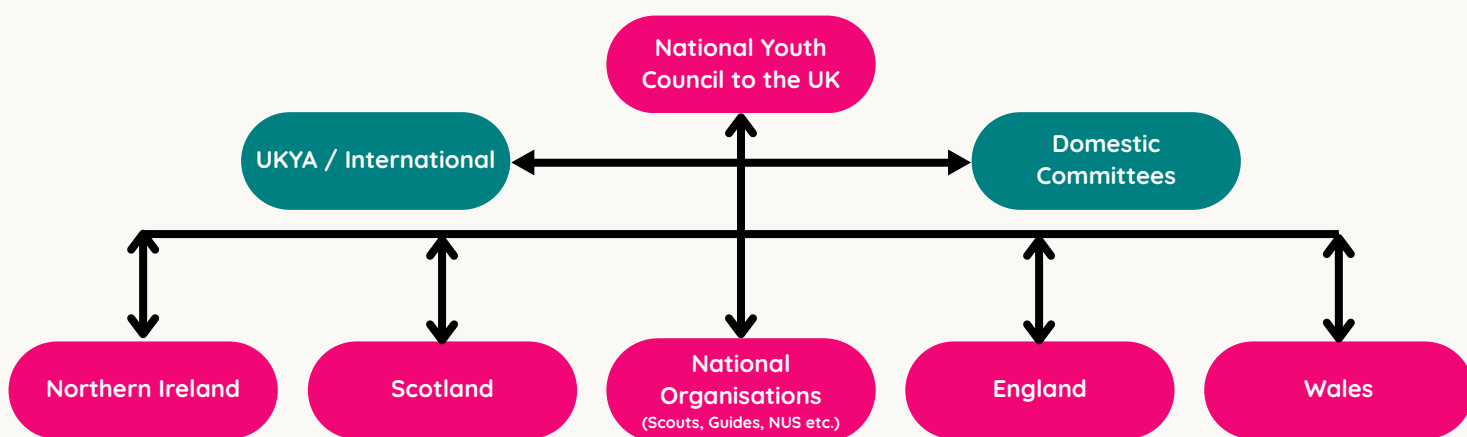


Fig 2

Throughout the review, stakeholders highlighted the need for further consideration of NYCUK’s constitutional structure, specifically whether it should operate as an assembly or a council. A reimagined NYCUK must be flexible, inclusive, and responsive to its members’ needs, serving as a central hub for the youth voice sector while supporting independent and innovative approaches to youth participation.

A youth assembly model would allow for diverse systems and structures to operate effectively within a unified framework, ensuring representation while maintaining the integrity of individual national and organisational approaches.



“The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) has been engaging with the National Youth Agency on the development of a United Kingdom Youth Council/Assembly following the closure of the British Youth Council. It is clear that there’s a need to develop a framework to look at what the best model is going forward, recognising the wealth of experience and distinct work happening in the devolved nations whilst identifying the gaps that a youth voice platform could support. SYP looks forward to continuing the engagement and looking at the recommendations made by NYA to understand next steps and further development needed.”

– Jamie Dunlop CEO Scottish Youth Parliament.

Recommendations:

- **Design and implement a structured framework that integrates the five key stakeholder leadership components**, ensuring a balanced and effective approach to youth representation across the UK. This structure will specifically address the challenges faced by larger UK-wide organisations when working across different nations with varying policies, priorities, and governance structures. Through this framework, young people’s voices will not only be heard locally and regionally, within devolved nations and across the UK, but also, the full spectrum of issues affecting young people across different geographical, social, and economic backgrounds will be acknowledged and actively discussed. This will create a more inclusive and representative platform that effectively responds to the diverse needs of young people throughout the UK.
- **Develop and implement clear, standardised criteria for national organisations seeking representation within NYCUK/NYAUK**, ensuring fair and equitable access to youth voice opportunities at a national level. This process should guarantee that all national organisations, regardless of their size or sector, have an equal opportunity to engage, contribute and represent young people in meaningful decision-making spaces. The selection and representation criteria should be developed in consultation with key stakeholder groups to ensure broad consensus, transparency, and accountability. By adopting a fair and standardised approach, the new National Youth Council’s governance structure will reflect the true diversity of young people’s experiences and perspectives while maintaining consistency in representation.
- **Develop a comprehensive five-year strategic plan** that serves as a clear roadmap for achieving long-term success, ensuring alignment with the organisation’s overarching mission, vision, and core objectives. This strategy should outline key milestones, set measurable goals, and establish clear evaluation and review mechanisms to track progress over time. By committing to a structured, well-defined strategy, the efforts of the new National Youth Council will remain focused, impactful, and responsive to the evolving needs of young people and the organisations that support them.

5. Service Delivery

Data analysis identified that young people consistently stated they want to be involved, to have a voice, to have influence, and to make a difference in their own lives and in their communities (locally and nationally). There was general concern that other formal structures do not represent broad views but provide limited opportunities for the few. Focus groups evidenced a limited knowledge of a NYCUK, but there was a clear desire to bring together, a diverse range of inclusive voices from different spaces with national coordination, to make a collective impact.

60% of survey respondents answered the question on whether there should be an England specific Youth Council alongside the NYCUK. Of these, over three quarters of responses suggested that there should be an England specific forum, because there is a need for a national participation platform for England in the same way as there is for devolved nations. This would provide the opportunity for young people to work together on issues that are uniquely important or priorities for them in England and which relate specifically to policies that affect England and its nine regions. This group(s) should have equal opportunity to be a member of the NYCUK in the same way as devolved nations.

There were limited responses (7%) suggesting that there should not be an English forum, because the NYCUK should ensure there is appropriate representation from all nations within the UK, and that the current regional and devolved mechanisms provide a function to ensure that the voices of young people from all nations are included.

Most responses were not strictly English or UK-specific but instead addressed what they would want a general Youth Council to look like, regardless of geography.

Respondents felt that a NYCUK should not duplicate existing mechanisms and should remain focused on youth voice and influence beyond party politics. There was a clear consensus that a NYCUK should remain focused on the mission and not get distracted by other activities or things that detract from the core purposeful activity. Respondents felt that a NYCUK should remain focused on issues that are integral to the lives of young people beyond political campaigning, specifically responses related to programmatic activities and training that might detract from the National Youth Council's mission, purpose and jeopardise its sustainability.

Respondents were unified that a NYCUK should focus on UK issues, but also ensure that UK young people are represented internationally through existing and broadening opportunities (eg European Youth Forum/Commonwealth Youth Council).

Regarding how well young people understood the role and purpose of the former British Youth Council and the opportunities it made available, the young people who were engaged through the focus group activity felt that they wanted more awareness and advertising. Young people felt that in future social media could be utilised better and that links with schools and with organisations needs improving.

Young people felt that it was important to have voices heard and to have a body to coordinate that at the national level, something they considered an essential role for a NYCUK.



“A National Youth Council for the UK would be a powerful force in ensuring that children and young people across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are not only heard but truly listened to. It should provide a space for young people to come together, discuss the issues that matter to them, and amplify their voices to the right audiences. Most importantly, it must empower them with the influence needed to shape decisions that directly impact their lives.”

– Professor Laura Lundy, Queens University Belfast

Recommendations:

- **Ensure that all service delivery areas are strategically aligned with the overarching business plan**, in order to create a cohesive and well-structured approach that maximises efficiency, optimises resources, and secures sustainable funding. This alignment will be essential to maintain a streamlined operation, ensuring that organisational priorities are consistently met, and that resources are allocated effectively to achieve the greatest impact. Any deviation from the agreed-upon strategic plans and objectives could compromise the organisation’s long-term stability, potentially leading to financial strain, operational inefficiencies, and a dilution of core mission-driven activities.

6. Funding Model

The financial difficulties that led to BYC entering administration were attributed to a variety of factors. BYC originated from the Foreign Office and was funded by Government. As the government funding dwindled over the 75 years, it became necessary to diversify income generation. This led to contracted work (such as UK Youth Parliament), which took precedence over less lucrative areas of service delivery (UK Youth Ambassadors). Campaign work, such as the campaign for Votes at 16, relied heavily on corporate funding from TheBody Shop with core costs funded through major grant givers. This story is not unfamiliar - we know that third sector organisations are all fighting to survive, with local authority funded youth services in particular feeling the brunt following more than a decade of austerity cuts amounting to a £1.1bn real-terms loss in expenditure since 2010-11. (according to [YMCA: On the ropes. The impact of local authority cuts to youth services over the past 12 years.](#) (Feb 2024).

What is clear from the review, is that the BYC fell into financial difficulties due to a number of reasons, some of which were beyond the control of the organisation.

It also sought to understand the experiences of the stakeholders involved and their thoughts and ideas on future funding opportunities.

Through the online consultation, respondents were asked to prioritise different funding sources for a future National Youth Council UK. They ranked these sources based on importance, with the first being the most preferred and the sixth being the least. On average, national government funding was seen as the most important. This was followed by funding from organisations such as the National Lottery Community Fund, which ranked slightly lower. Local government funding was also considered a key source, positioned close behind. Corporate partnerships were rated as a lower priority, while membership fees and income from traded services were seen as the least preferred options.

Recommendations:

- **Develop and secure long term (5 year) sustainable blended funding models** that utilise the flexibility of grant trust funds, corporate partners, membership organisations and the government. This approach will help to mitigate financial risk and organisational failure, spreading the core costs across different revenue streams that will have aligned priorities.
- **Secure UK government commitment** to delivery, core costs and mission, building on the legacy of government support since 1948 and sending a clear message to domestic and international democratic partners that the UK values their young people.

7. Equality Equity Diversity Inclusion and Belonging

When considering the role of a National Youth Council to the UK regarding Equality, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, it is essential to understand the key role it plays in effective, authentic youth democracy and influence.

We should aspire to facilitate a NYCUK that devolves equal ownership of the organisation across the whole of the UK. No one domestic nation or organisation should be holding a majority stakeholder position. Regardless of youth population, a NYCUK should be governed equally across the four nations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England). (Fig 3)

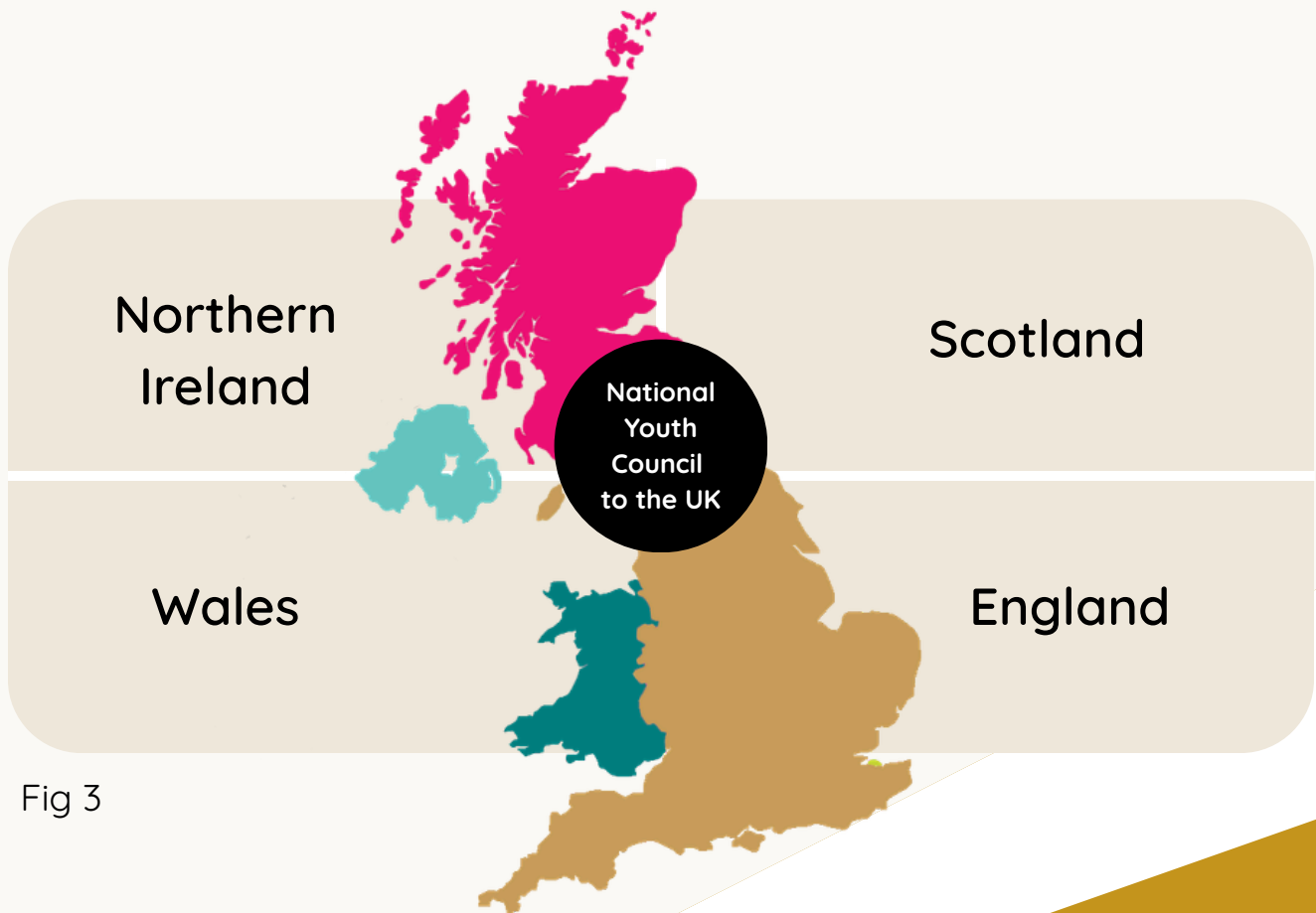


Fig 3

Externally a NYCUK must respond to the needs of a variety of communities, providing equitable and accessible opportunities for **all** young people to feel represented at a national and internal level.

Acknowledging that barriers exist to engagement, across demographics, economic status, situational environments and understanding that it is intersectional, is the starting point for exploring what needs to be addressed to ensure ALL young people are served by their NYCUK. Focus group activity found that common themes for not engaging in participatory opportunities were the timing of meetings; travel to and location of meetings; institutional barriers (young people in care and in the youth justice system); lack of confidence; feeling unsafe in groups; and a lack of knowledge on the issues being discussed. Some felt that online spaces were not safe, while others wanted more online opportunities. Some felt that they ought to be paid to remunerate their time and expertise in engaging in the work.

When asked how individuals overcame barriers there were examples of peer support, flexibility and an understanding that adults were there to help. There were mixed responses as to whether barriers prevented individuals from engaging completely.

It was acknowledged that youth councils and school councils are not always fully representative. It is recommended that they make a concerted effort to engage with smaller organizations and diverse communities, paying particular attention to factors such as geography, culture, identity, and other key demographics.

From the online consultation, just over fifty people, or about one in six respondents, shared additional comments. Some wanted the consultation to reach more people, while others focused on the need for better regional representation across England. A similar number highlighted the importance of including young people with disabilities. A few people mentioned young people in care, and some raised other diversity issues. There was also a call to involve more youth organisations, including faith-based groups and other community groups. Conversations with stakeholders highlighted the importance of being innovative, flexible, open, and proactive when considering changes needed to strengthen an effective EEDIB approach.



“...how do we challenge ourselves around strategic participation without the system dismissing strategic voice because they are not reflective of our communities, even though systems do not reflect our communities either...There needs to be an understanding that people communicate in various ways.”

– Kath Bromsfield, National Representative, National Network of Parent Carer Forums

Recommendations:

- **Develop and implement a comprehensive Equity, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EEDIB) strategy** that serves as the foundation for all UK-wide initiatives, ensuring that these principles are fully integrated into both strategic planning and day-to-day operational activities. This strategy should be designed to reflect and uphold the core values, ethics, and commitments of NYCUK, ensuring alignment with the diverse needs, perspectives and lived experiences of its broad and varied membership base.



8. International Work

Evolution of Youth Councils in Europe

Youth councils across Europe have developed through three distinct waves. The first wave, beginning in 1945, was closely linked to the World Youth Festivals and World Assembly of Youth meetings. These organisations primarily focused on sending delegations of young people to international events and exchanges, often within the wider context of Cold War diplomacy. It was during this period that the British Youth Council (BYC) was established.

The second wave emerged in the 1960s, influenced by student protest movements and the rise of youth culture. This era marked a significant shift, with BYC gaining independence and establishing a formal membership base.

The third and most recent wave followed the end of the Cold War and coincided with the development of global participation and rights frameworks. During this time, BYC expanded its reach by developing a local youth council network and youth participation initiatives such as the Bank of England Youth Forum.

Across Europe, there are numerous examples of good practice in the structures and systems supporting national youth councils. These models provide valuable insights into developing an effective and sustainable National Youth Council to the UK.



Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC): A Model for Youth Engagement

The Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) serves as the official representative voice for over 1.2 billion young people across the Commonwealth. Established in 2013 with support from the Commonwealth Secretariat's Commonwealth Youth Programme, the CYC was endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government as an autonomous, youth-led organisation. Its core mission is to integrate young people into national, regional, and Pan-Commonwealth development efforts, while also advocating for meaningful engagement between governments and young people. The CYC provides a sustainable platform for youth-led development and ensures that young voices are mobilised in decision-making processes.



UK Young Ambassadors: Strengthening Representation

The UK Young Ambassadors (UKYAs) to Europe and the Commonwealth play a vital role in advocating for young people across the UK on issues impacting them within the European and Commonwealth youth communities. However, during the final 6–12 months of operation under the existing BYC framework, sitting UKYAs expressed concerns that their roles were undervalued, underutilised, and often overlooked.



A key challenge has been the absence of dedicated funding to support the mandate of UKYAs. Without financial resources, much of the policy development and communications work has fallen to individuals, limiting the effectiveness and sustainability of their roles.

It is widely recognised that, with appropriate resourcing and commitment, a National Youth Council to the UK could effectively manage the devolution of European funding to enable a coordinated national response. This approach would:

- Expand youth democratic engagement beyond existing networks, ensuring broader representation.
- Strengthen workforce development opportunities across the UK youth sector.
- Enhance the overall capacity and impact of youth participation initiatives.

Learning from European and Commonwealth Partners

Domestically, there is much to learn from our European and Commonwealth counterparts. Key areas of development that can inform UK youth policy and practice include:

- Votes at16 – Examining legislative progress and engagement strategies
- Youth Mobility – Facilitating opportunities for young people to gain international experiences
- Peacebuilding – Strengthening youth-led initiatives in conflict resolution and community cohesion
- Climate Action – Supporting youth involvement in sustainability and environmental advocacy

A well-resourced and strategically developed National Youth Council to the UK has the potential to transform youth engagement at both a national and international level. By learning from existing models and ensuring sustainable funding, the UK can create a more inclusive, representative and impactful youth sector that empowers young people to lead and influence change.



"While it's often said that 'all politics is local,' young people in the UK increasingly understand the need for international engagement. Democratic backsliding trends and the growing distrust in politics demands a holistic approach that connects local issues to national and global contexts. It is vital for young people to have a platform for their international concerns through a democratic, youth-led, and independent National Youth Council. This need was recognised when the British Youth Council was founded during the Cold War, and it remains crucial in today's complex global landscape."

- Maurizio Cuttin, UK Young Ambassador to the European Youth Forum

Recommendations:

- **Ensure the full and effective delivery of the UK Young Ambassador (UKYA) programme** to establish a sustainable and well-structured support system. This requires developing a comprehensive strategy and operational plan, ensuring the program's long-term viability. A dedicated team of skilled professionals must be in place to provide essential guidance and support to young ambassadors, enabling them to fulfil their mandated commitments successfully. Additionally, robust safeguarding systems and processes must be implemented to mitigate risks and protect all participants, reinforcing the credibility and sustainability of the programme.
- **Safeguard the UK's presence and influence in global youth governance** by maintaining active membership in the European Youth Forum and the Commonwealth Youth Council. It is crucial that membership fees remain current and that young ambassadors have access to the necessary resources to fully participate in international events, meetings, and policy development processes.

9. Academic Research Collaborations and Opportunities

On 28 January 2025, an academic roundtable was convened with representation from across the four nations of the UK. The discussion focused on exploring opportunities for collaborative working as the National Youth Council to the UK (NYCUK) enters a new phase of development.

It was acknowledged that youth voice and influence take many forms across the UK, with numerous models of good practice in place. As the new NYCUK evolves, it is essential to recognise, embrace and learn from these diverse approaches to ensure meaningful and inclusive representation.

While youth voice and influence are widely recognised as cross-sector priorities, they can sometimes lack a clear and consistent home. By establishing a multi-disciplinary academic group, we aim to address the challenges practitioners face, foster collaboration, and enhance cohesion in youth engagement efforts -ultimately benefiting young people across the UK.





“Youth participation, voice and influence are key priorities across multiple youth-focused sectors. Underserved communities are often unheard, and through academic collaboration, we can better understand how to address this and create meaningful change.”

– Professor Hannah Smithson, Manchester Metropolitan University

Recommendations:

- **Establishing and sustaining a dedicated network of academics** to critically examine the impact of youth voice initiatives across the UK and on an international scale. This includes developing a formal Terms of Reference to ensure transparency, prevent conflicts of interest, and mitigate the risk of monopolisation within the academic group, fostering a collaborative and equitable research environment.
- **Investigating opportunities for young researchers within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** by leveraging ring-fenced institutional funding to develop, train, and support young people in undertaking rigorous academic research. This initiative aims to equip young researchers with the necessary skills to conduct, analyse, and present credible research.
- **Examining the role of constitutional democracy in youth political engagement** and the extent to which young people can influence policy issues affecting all four UK nations. Despite being directly impacted by devolved political decision-making, young people are rarely consulted on whether these systems serve their interests effectively. Engaging young people in research on this topic could generate new insights and contribute to broader discussions on democratic reform and youth inclusion in governance.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this report are based on evidence and input from stakeholders. As we enter a new phase for the National Youth Council of the UK, it is crucial that partners unite to create a sustainable and self-sufficient organisation, offering young people across the UK equal opportunities for youth voice and influence. To implement these recommendations, the review must inform a comprehensive business plan outlining the steps needed to rebuild the National Youth Council (NYCUK). As we progress this significant work, it is essential that our key partners remain committed to supporting the reimagination of NYCUK. Funders will need to recognise the value in investing in development efforts and help establish sustainable foundations on which the new systems, processes and service delivery can be built.

In conclusion, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to this review and the creation of this recommendations report. This has been a true collaboration, involving colleagues, practitioners, and young people from across the UK. We would like to extend our special appreciation to the young people from Young Lives Foundation Medway, The Scouts, National Citizenship Service, Sheffield Youth Council, Be Well, Berkshire Youth, Kinetic Youth, and Ground Works UK, whose invaluable input in the focus group activities has shaped this report. We are excited about the opportunity to continue working together as we move forward in rebuilding a National Youth Council to the UK.



Acronym Glossary

- BYC** – British Youth Council
- UKYP** – United Kingdom Youth Parliament
- NYCUK** – National Youth Council to the UK
- NYAUK** – National Youth Assembly to the UK
- YFJ** – European Youth Forum
- PAYU** – Pan-African Youth Forum
- FLAJ** – Foro Latinoamericano de Juventud
- NYA** – National Youth Agency
- NCVYS** – National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
- UKYA** – UK Young Ambassador
- WAY** – World Assembly of Youth

Supported by



Notes

For more information visit: [nya.org.uk/byc](https://www.nya.org.uk/byc)

National Youth Agency

9 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SN

Company registration no. 2912597

Register charity in England and Wales no. 1035804

[nya.org.uk](https://www.nya.org.uk)