

EU Balance of Competence Review of education, vocational training and youth
Individual youth stakeholder meeting between Cabinet Office – British Youth Council

Meeting note

Date: 4 June 2014

Attendees:

James Edleston – Head of International, British Youth Council
Helen Tabiner – Deputy Director of Youth Policy, Cabinet Office
Ada Simpson – Policy Adviser, Cabinet Office

Introduction to this note

This note is to capture the main observations and assessments shared by the British Youth Council (BYC) regarding EU competence in the field of youth at this meeting. The note has been agreed as a record of the meeting and submitted to the Call for Evidence on this Review led by the Department for Education. The points are presented in the order they were raised and discussed during the meeting.

For more information about the Review please visit HM Government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/education-vocational-training-and-youth-review-of-the-balance-of-competences>.

For more information about the programmes, policy co-ordination and other EU terminology used in this note please visit the European Commission website:

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm.

BYC said they would also be submitting a separate response to the Call for Evidence to provide further detail on some areas and that they would encourage their members to contribute, and we welcomed this.

Structured Dialogue

- BYC's focus and involvement in EU activity in the field of youth was largely related to Structured Dialogue. BYC has worked to improve international participation of young people in decision making and policy making and welcomed Structured Dialogue.
- BYC recognised Structure Dialogue (SD) as a genuine attempt to involve young people in EU youth policy making and that although the title of SD seemed clumsy that it was essentially a good thing to have a structure and a shared set of questions for use with young people in all Member States.
- BYC were keen though to improve how the SD approach worked. BYC said it was difficult to understand how SD and young peoples' views and ideas really fed in to the conclusions and resolutions made by the EU.
- BYC said more national level flexibility was needed in SD, specifically on the level and detail of questions that needed to be included in the consultations with young people. Sometimes the questions had not been applicable for young people in the UK but there was pressure from EU to conform and to use these questions anyway.
- BYC reflected that the document produced as the outcome of the SD process, bringing together the views of young people from all Member States at the Youth Conference, was not a powerful or effective document. Particularly as it was hard to know where the paper then went.
- BYC thought EU reporting requirements were cumbersome and more space would be beneficial.

- BYC wanted to ensure SD was useful at a national level, even if it could not or did not have significant impact at EU level, and BYC would work with Cabinet Office to try and achieve that.

Policy co-ordination

- BYC thought the focus should be on best practice sharing and cooperation. BYC highlighted the importance of flexibility for Member States.

Other European and EU activity

- BYC thought the European Youth Forum was useful and well-supported by the EU. The Youth Forum acted as a membership body for National Youth Councils and provided training, learning and exchange opportunities for a small number of young people in the UK and other European countries. BYC members elected a UK young person to the Forum.
- BYC was the UK branch of the League of Young Voters, a coalition of 150 organisations working to increase the numbers of young people voting within two years. BYC saw this as another way young people in the UK were supported by EU activity.

Youth in Action and Erasmus+ funding programmes

- BYC saw the programmes as a valuable source of funding for the UK youth sector.
- BYC expressed major concerns about the funding criteria:
 - That the programmes would not provide funding for staff;
 - That applicants had to find match funding;
 - That there was a lack of flexibility;
 - That these issues made it hard for organisations to cover their costs; and,
 - That there is no UK-only funding under Erasmus+ and so you need to find a international partner
- BYC said the latter point from the above list would make it difficult for them to get funding under Erasmus+ and that they previously received a significant amount of their funding from Youth in Action so there was uncertainty on how this would play out for them as an organisation. BYC thought it would be useful if a brokering service was provided to help organisations find international partners to work with. BYC thought this would emerge as a real issue for UK organisations once Erasmus+ had been running for a year. BYC wanted to be proactive in trying to overcome this centrally driven challenge.
- BYC felt the process of applying for funding was overly bureaucratic and made it harder for cash-strapped organisations to use their resources to secure EU funding. For instance, the difficulty of all Member States having to use the same form meant it could not be tailored.
- BYC also felt that the reporting was overly burdensome. Though they recognised improvements in the new Erasmus+ programme compared to Youth in Action, such as not needing to submit all receipts under the new programme.

Balance of power between EU and UK

- BYC thought the problem for the UK youth sector was not about the balance of power, but more about ensuring end users in UK and other Member States got value out of EU initiatives.
- BYC called for a clearer pathway to help the youth sector understand how the EU operates and how young people and youth organisations can play a role.

EU aims and priorities

- BYC questioned whether the EU focused on the right aims and priorities. BYC felt that EU youth policy was driven too much by employment concerns and so it could seem as though getting a job was the only aim underlying all activities.
- BYC felt that EU youth policy should be driven by inclusion, participation, empowerment, citizenship and youth rights and responsibilities. BYC said the EU had been a defender of these issues and did not want them to move away from that in favour of focusing on employment. The youth sector and youth workers could offer a great deal in terms of broader education and empowerment of young people and EU youth policy needed to focus on that.

Issues affecting young people which are outside the remit of this review

- BYC wanted to emphasise the impact of zero hours contracts on young people. BYC recognised that for some young people and young students the flexibility of zero hours contracts could be very appealing, but that young people's labour rights should be protected to ensure young people got a fair deal in employment.
- The EU offered an attractive proposition for many young people who might want to move around and would be supported in doing so in the EU as they could claim their rights and get greater access to housing.
- BYC saw the EU has having an important role in environmental issues and protecting the environment. Young people are the next generation and we would want to protect the environment for them and help them become citizens who will be environmentally-minded.

END