

Young People and Participation: Making it Real

Monday 15th – Tuesday 16th December 2025

Summary

In December 2025, the consultation at St George's House met to discuss 'Young People and Participation: Making It Real'. Rather than tackling specific issues and solutions, the group focused on honest, uncomfortable conversations about the current effectiveness of their organisations and how to better include young people. CEOs, funders, policymakers, governance leads, participation specialists, practitioners, researchers and advocates shared their struggles and wisdom.

Key issues mentioned regarding youth participation:

1. 'Youthwashing' on trustee boards where young people are given separate boards and used as spokespeople rather than included as equal partners and selected for their specialist skills.
2. Secrecy within the sector leads to wasted resources through competition and a lack of shared wisdom.
3. Youth participation is not yet integrated into most organisations. This is reflected in attitudes towards it as 'repetitive' and 'messy' rather than a consistent requirement (like marketing or fundraising). Young people feel unwanted as a result.
4. Professionalising of young people when the same groups are selected. This could lead to mirroring and neglects the needs of young people (such as enjoyment and prioritisation of other aspects of their schedules).

The main conclusion of the consultation was that collaboration across the sector offers exceptional opportunities for improvement and prevents organisations from wasting resources both for supporting young people and for productive youth participation. This collaboration should be defined by mutual honesty, vulnerability, accountability, and an appreciation that those across the sector want to make the world a better place. It could look like creating more spaces for protected, open sharing, shared databases, sharing successful processes, and informing each other about bids to prevent wasted resources through competition.

Other actionable steps to improve youth participation included, integrating trustee boards that prioritise age diversity and recognise the skills of young people; reframing youth participation as a legal rights requirement that is also vital for efficiency rather than simply a "nice thing to do"; and decision-making that puts young people and decision-makers in the same space.

The consultation plans to meet again with young people. They invite those who read this report to use it to improve their youth participation and contribute to the discussion.



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