

## **Labour Party consultation on involving young people in the political process, 2013.**

This document is a personal response from Dr John Rose.

**WE WANT TO KNOW HOW BEST WE CAN:**

### **Engage more young people in the political process and show how politics counts for them and issues they care about**

Develop 'political projects' that reflect the identified interests of young people. These could initially be short or medium-term activities focused on specific priorities that young people relate to e.g. employment, unemployment, transport, housing, welfare, education, environment, sport, music, social networking. This approach would be part of a wider community response to the identified needs of young people, which are most often linked to educational, emotional, welfare and social needs. It would be underpinned by a complementary form of education seen as part of the response to society's moral obligation to young people carried out in partnership with school, employment, local community, and family endeavours

Young people would become involved through this process with real life situations in which choices have to be made on the basis of ethical considerations. It should become a process underpinned by the importance of young people developing interests and being passionate about them. From such interests' other initiatives can be developed within the broad themes of 'Social Projects' and 'Education'. These could be concerned for example with diminishing the gap between youth and adult society, working in schools to improve the social climate and managing occasions where large groups of young people meet at sporting events, cultural events and festivals. Strategies could also be developed to guide young people into adulthood through a range of activities such as residential activities, study visits and charity work. The role of the adult in these programmes would be critical in that it clearly recognises that young people need to mix with adults in order to participate, contribute and to learn. It would be a process concerned with real life politics not the politics of the powerful.

### **Change the way politics works so it is more inclusive and better communicates with young people**

Make it a more inclusive process by developing short or medium-term activities linked to the identified passions of young people. Rebrand the process. Change the term politics to 'community involvement' or 'community action' or something else that young people feel comfortable with. Provide positive role models from the world of politics who are less adversarial and more inclusive in fundamental ways. Make a much more effective link between young people's participation and decision making and action. Stop using the political process to demonise young people. Start using the political process to encourage and motivate young people. Publicly tell all young people about their potential

## **POLICY CHALLENGES:**

### **1. Why do some young people feel that mainstream politics is not relevant to their concerns?**

Most young people feel that mainstream politics are not relevant to their concerns because too often it is not. Mechanisms need to be set up to engage young people from all sectors of society in the decisions that affect what goes on in their lives. These mechanisms need to involve young people in a flexible and creative way to reflect their varying interests, aspirations and current abilities. It is a process that requires the intervention and support of specialist educationalists.

### **2. How can we better engage young people in the decision-making processes that affect them?**

First, through a process that is participative and empowering and linked to real life situations. Involve young people in all aspects of a particular issue or event. Second, through the development and use of a range of specific communication methods that is used most often by young people. A recent survey of 426 young people across Wales aged 14-19 identified that 87% of them used Social Networking sites several times a day 91% indicated that they could not imagine life without a mobile phone. 76.9% of respondents said they spent most of their leisure time alone online. This is not to suggest an easy answer, but to indicate the possibility of new approaches particularly when the approach is linked to specific interests of young people.

### **3. What are the barriers to involvement faced by young people?**

Young people too often feel subservient, disinterested and distant from political processes that they have no part in developing or delivering. Young people too often see the political process as undermining their status as young people.

There are a number of examples of School Councils and Youth Forums, some of which have links to Funky Dragon, that are replicas of the procedure-driven way politicians appear to carry out their work. These have generally been imposed from above rather than through a participative process. They are too often seen as conservative, sterile and predetermined and failing to act too often on the decision made by young people. There is, as a consequence, a rejection by them of their involvement in the traditional political process as can be evidenced by the low numbers of 18-25-year olds voting, or even bothering to register to vote. More creative ways need to be identified about how the estimated £5 million spent over the last decade on such ineffective methods could be improved in the future.

### **4. What role should schools, colleges and universities have in educating young people about politics and wider citizenship issues?**

Schools do not have enough time to effectively manage all of the responsibilities they are being given. Only 9 minutes of every waking hour of a young person of compulsory school age is spent in school. 51 minutes is spent in the community.

Rowan Williams recognised this in his Dimbleby Lecture in 2002 when he said *“school bears an impossible burden of trying to create a ‘culture’ practically on its own, because the institutions that help shape a story for life are not around. Family continuity is rare; conventional religious practice is minimal; shared public activity is unusual. Those who are taught come from and go to a social environment in which common life, in the simplest sense, has often become problematic. Work and relationships tend to be equally transient”*. Consideration needs to be given to maximising out of school time for the benefit of young people and as part of an empowering and participative process involving them in the lives of their communities. This could be achieved by using the estimated £40 million per year (an estimated £300million during the last decade or so) in a more creative way to promote active citizenship and the social empowerment of young people during their leisure time. This approach would be concerned with getting young people more active, developing citizenship skills and supporting personal citizenship. Active citizenship would require voluntary participation in economic, social, cultural and political activities delivered in an outcome driven non-formal education learning framework outside of school. Learning would be seen as part of an activity not necessarily the main point of the activity.

The answer to developing young people’s growth and development in a way that encourages active citizenship and personal citizenship requires a more holistic approach to education and learning than that found in school. Non-formal education and informal learning outside of school should be primarily concerned with supporting growth into citizenship and developing skills for active citizenship by;

1. promoting participation in the labour market, cultural life, education and public decision making;
2. creating opportunities for discussing topics such as identity, knowledge and moral issues;
3. practicing and developing participatory pedagogy;
4. developing participation skills in practice

To maintain at least parity with educational developments in many other countries, consideration needs to be given to developing a complementary education approach that uses methods used in many elite British schools. This approach would be concerned to achieve the bullet points above through simple but effective strategies linked to young people’s passions. For example, young-people-managed societies, sports clubs and music events are easily identified possibilities. This approach would be about not discouraging individualism or the pursuit of dreams and aspirations. Dissent would also be tolerated as a helpful learning process for leadership.

## **5. How should we change the way we communicate political ideas and policies in order to increase young people’s participation in politics?**

Political ideas need to reflect the reality of young people’s lives and what they are passionate about. If it is the intention to empower young people and as a consequence increase their participation, they need to be included in creating, designing, deciding on, implementing and evaluating projects. However, this can not be done without support and as part of a process where participation is seen as both a process and an opportunity for learning. Underpinning this approach is a

commitment to a collaborative approach between the young person and the educator who is a key element of the process.

## **6. What experience and knowledge do you have of getting young people involved – what works and what does not?**

### **Previous Strategic Responsibilities**

Head of Youth Work Strategy Welsh Assembly Government  
Acting Chief Executive Wales Youth Agency  
Training Manager/Assistant Chief Executive Wales Youth Agency  
Chairman YMCA Community College  
Training Manager Wales Youth Work Partnership

### **Previous Practice Experience**

Community Education Officer Ely Cardiff  
Project Leader City Centre Youth Project Cardiff (Grassroots)  
Specialist Youth Officer Tottenham College London  
Assistant Leader Treherbert Boys Club  
Chairman North Ely Expeditions

### **Academic Responsibilities**

Lecturer University of Wales Trinity and Saint David Carmarthen  
Lecturer Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Lecturer Open University  
External Examiner MA/BA Durham University  
External Examiner MA/BA University of Ulster  
Associate Editor Youth and Policy  
e. Library Co-ordinator  
PhD research concerned with the effectiveness of the Youth Service in contributing to the agenda of government while meeting the needs of young people.  
MPhil research concerned with the relationship between the Youth Work Policy of a Local Education Authority and the management and delivery of Youth Work provision  
Part of the research team involving University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the National Foundation for Education Research reviewing local authority Youth Service provision at Merthyr Tydfil and Gwynedd during 2011/2012

### **What does not work?**

The existing model of involving young people in active citizenship during their leisure time leading to their social empowerment is not effective. Young people are too often offered the opportunity to make choices and decisions but very little opportunity to enact them.

Believing that school is the only effective place where young people can be educated or where they learn.

## **What does work? What could work?**

1. A strategic approach over a five year or ten-year period using existing resources with clear goals and outcomes linked to the promotion of active citizenship and the social empowerment of young people during their leisure time. Active citizenship would require a programme of real-life activities through participation in economic, social, cultural and political life. This would need to be done in a way that not only increased the knowledge and understanding of young people but also created enthusiasm, motivation and skills as well as practical experiences in active citizenship.
2. The availability of a well qualified workforce committed to the delivery of the strategic plan
3. That the national system is developed in a way that is not dependent on its organisation, management and delivery being within 22 local authorities, where there is a potential to dilute its collective ability to adhere to a core philosophical position which can often be subsumed by competing political and managerial priorities.
4. That the national system develops a network of existing physical resources across Wales which into centres of excellence concerned to involve young people in a wide range of non-formal community-based learning through, for example, the performing arts, sport, outdoor activities and the visual arts.
5. That the work of the national system focuses on an agreed priority age range, of young people aged 13 to 19 years.
6. That a national structure ensures the continuation of local delivery of agreed programmes. Strategic management and the management of corporate activities such as training, quality standards and quality assurance systems, and programme development could, however, be carried out on a regional or national basis.
7. That the national system develops strategies to more appropriately meet the needs of young people by maximising the times their service is accessible to young people by opening more often at weekends and during school holidays.
8. That those working within the national system be directed to link the skills development of young people to an intentional learning process that is voluntarily entered into, through a broad spectrum of activities that young people find enjoyable, challenging and appealing.

## **7. How can political parties, elected representatives and other democratic institutions better engage with young people, including with groups and bodies in which young people are already organised or politically active?**

Consider existing models of good practice in this country and elsewhere. Be concerned to become world leaders in the field of non-formal education and

informal learning as a means of increasing young people's activity, developing citizenship skills and supporting personal citizenship.

A new model is required with a 'Made in Wales' approach.

**John Rose**

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