



Young People & Governance

Findings from research carried out
by the British Youth Council
on behalf of Participation Works

Report compiled by Sophie Wellings
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Children's Rights Alliance
for England



The National Youth Agency
Getting it right for young people



LOTTERY FUNDED

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INTRODUCTION

The British Youth Council (BYC) believes that young people should be involved in decisions that affect their lives, and participate in wider society and civic life. It is this belief that underpins BYC's work to support and encourage the involvement of children and young people at all levels of an organisation, from decision-making through to day to day activities and projects.

To take this forward, the British Youth Council received funding as one of the founding partners of Participation Works; a consortium of six national children and young people's agencies that enables organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives.

The vision of Participation Works is that all organisations, agencies and services that affect children and young people will have structures and systems in place to respond to their ideas and priorities, and to work with them to bring about positive change. Participation Works recognises that the benefits of listening to children and young people are widely acknowledged, however, involving them more meaningfully within an organisation can be hard.

Two of the key questions posed by Participation Works are:

'How do organisations involve young people in decision-making at all levels?'

'What involvement is appropriate?'

This report details the findings of two online surveys carried out by the British Youth Council (BYC) in March and April 2009.

Previous research, 'Involved or Ignored'; (BYC, 2004) consisted of two reports, which provide baseline information on the level and nature of young people's involvement in organisational decision-making, based on consultation with both young people and organisations. This report seeks to build on these findings and draw comparisons, five years on.

The context as highlighted by Participation Works:

Adults and children and young people can struggle at times to fully understand governance, what it means and how to apply it to the everyday running of an organisation. Governance can mean different things to different people. For some it is how an organisation makes its decisions, for others it is ensuring that an organisation has policies and procedures that set out how it should operate. In reality, both are two sides of the same coin, as governance represents the processes by which an organisation makes its decisions that set out how it operates.

‘There are 11 million children under 18 in England. There are 190,000 registered charities in England and Wales, with 900,000 trustees, but only 4,400 of those trustees (less than 1%) are aged under 25.’

Source: www.charitycommission.gov.uk

METHODOLOGY

Drawing on the previous research 'Involved or Ignored', BYC reviewed the two questionnaires used to gather the data in 2004. Some adjustments were made to the questions and the type of responses available in order to make the questionnaires more accessible.

The key research questions for this year's survey were:

- What is the rate of involvement amongst respondents?
- What is the level of young people's involvement?
- How is involvement encouraged and how could it be further encouraged?

BYC aimed to secure responses from the widest possible range of organisations and young people, via the website www.byc.org.uk, social networking sites, existing subscribers to BYC's communications and proactive email and telephone contact with groups outside of BYC's existing network.

'SurveyMonkey' software was chosen to administer the survey, analyse responses, and to highlight trends and patterns in responses.

477 organisations and 259 young people responded to the survey. Based on the 5,138 people/organisations, who received details of the survey directly from BYC, this represents a response rate of 14%.

Summary of Findings

- Young people have a good understanding of what governance mean – over 70% of the 259 respondents said they understood the term.
- Significantly more organisations state they involve young people in their governance – 70.9% in 2009 compared to just 45.1% in 2004.
- More young people also reported an involvement in governance – 64% in 2009 compared to 56.6% in 2004.
- 82.6% of organisations involving young people rated the extent to which they benefit from doing so at the top of the scale, stating: ‘we benefit a lot.’
- Young people aged 18-25 are more likely to be full members of an organisation’s governing body than those under 18.
- Public sector bodies are more likely to involve those under 18 in some level of governance than charities.
- Over a third, 37%, of organisations stated they had taken specific action to increase young people’s involvement in governance over the last 5 years.
- Over 75% of organisations not currently involving young people in governance ranked their interest in doing so at the top end of the scale.
- A large majority, 87%, of young people not currently involved in governance said they were interested in getting involved.
- Both organisations and young people feel that young people’s involvement in governance is beneficial.
- In preparing young people for a governance role, both organisations and young people agreed that initial and ongoing training were the most useful methods.

FINDINGS

The rate of response to the 2009 survey was higher than in 2004. 'Involved or Ignored' brought responses from 71 organisations and 101 young people. This year's survey prompted responses from 477 organisations and 259 young people out of 5,138 people contacted. However, it should be noted that not all those who started the survey completed it. Completion figures ran at around 50% for both organisational responses and for young people.

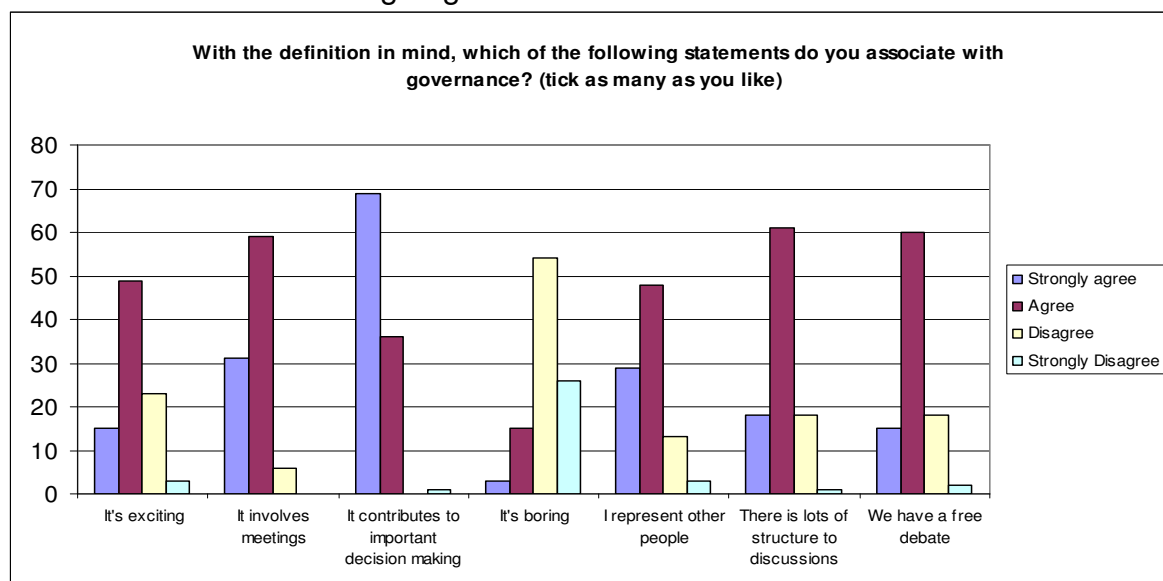
The survey was carried out UK wide although the bulk of respondents were based in England. There was good representation from a range of organisations including national charities and public bodies. The young people respondents represented a good cross section with slightly higher numbers of young females than young males responding and higher numbers of the 20-25 year age group. Specific detail on the demographic profile of respondents is available later in the report.

Young people's views of governance

The young people's survey began by establishing the level of understanding of the term 'governance', and provided a definition to give context and clarity to the questions that followed. Over 70% of young people said that they understood what the term governance meant. For those who stated that they didn't understand the term, the following definition was provided:

'Governance means everything involved in making sure that an organisation is run effectively and achieves its goals'

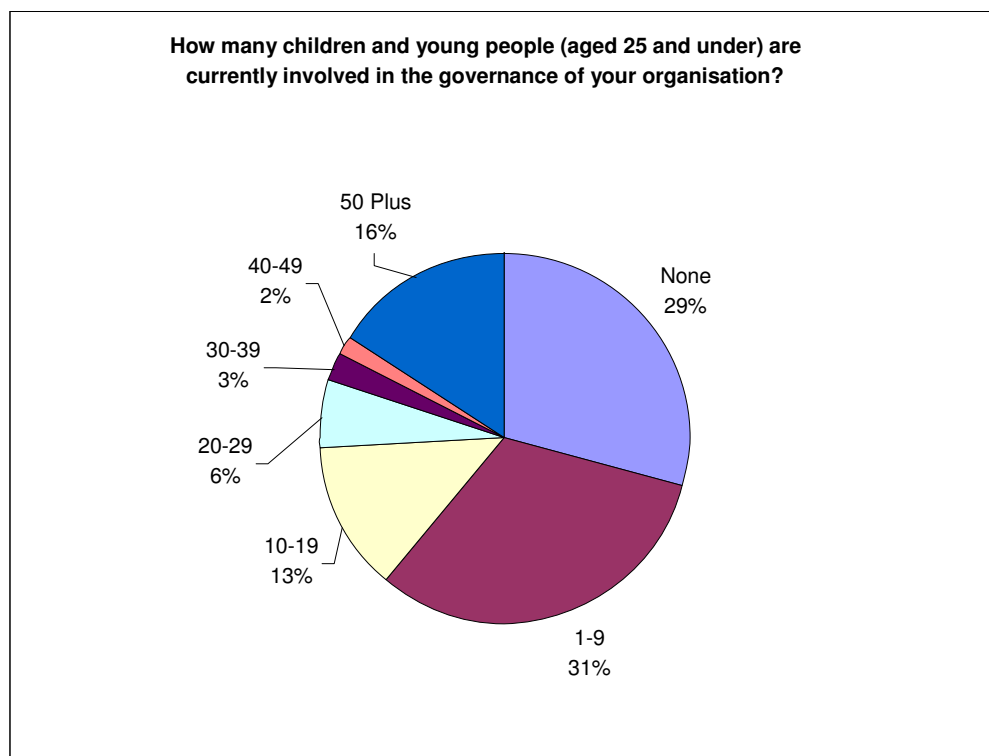
With this definition in mind, young people were asked for their views on different statements relating to governance.



Rates and levels of involvement

Rates of involvement

Organisations were asked to identify the numbers of young people involved in governance. 70.9% of respondents were currently involving young people in some form of governance, with most involving between 1-9 young people. In 2004, this figure was significantly lower, at 45.1%.



Of those not involving young people, the highest representation was from national incorporated charities (44.1%) and the lowest from social enterprises (14.3%).

Young people were also asked about rates of involvement. 64.6% of respondents to the question are currently involved in some form of governance. In 2004, 56.6% stated that they had some experience of governance.

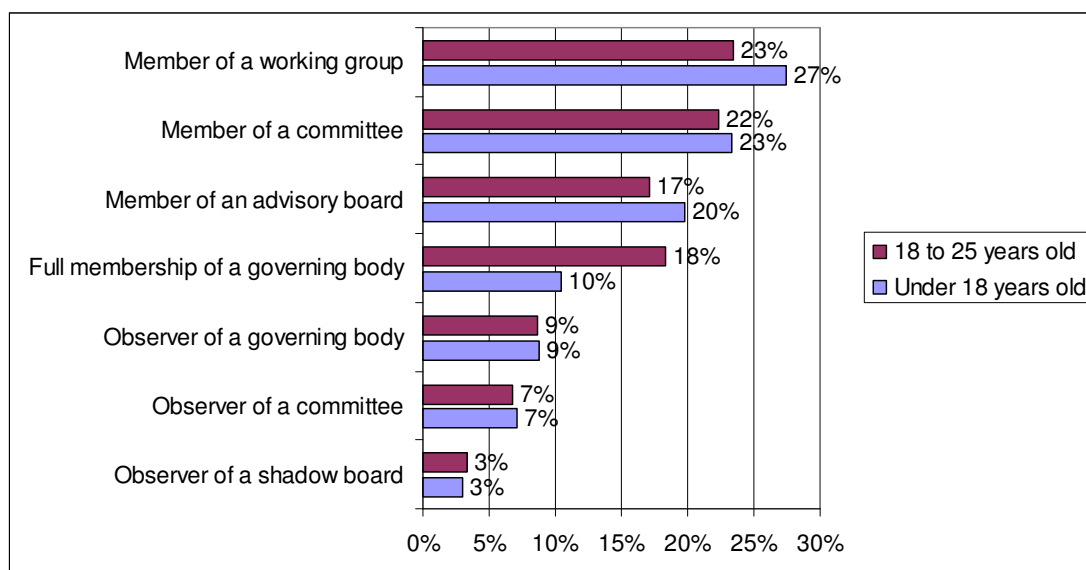
Further analysis identified that of these, 76.6% of male respondents are involved in governance and 54.7% of female respondents. However, due to the higher response from young women the actual numbers equate to 29 young women and 36 young men, in total.

Levels of involvement

In order to categorise the level of young people's involvement, governance was broken down into the following categories:

- Full membership of the governing body eg. trustee
- Associate/observers of the governing body
- Members of sub/standing committee
- Observers of sub/standing committee
- Members of an advisory board/group
- Observers of a shadow board
- Members of a working group/operational committee/group

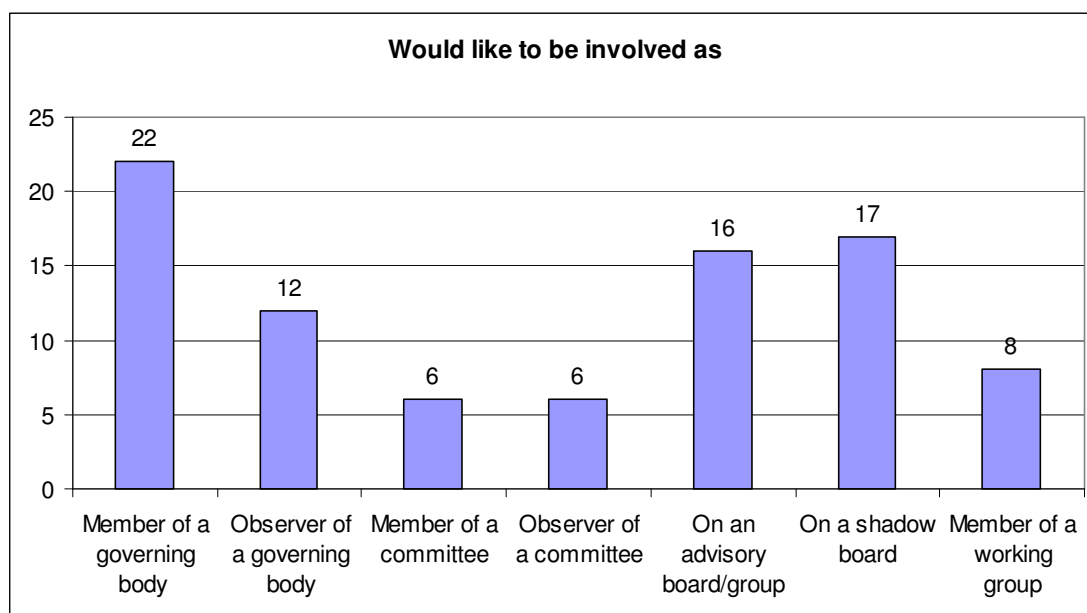
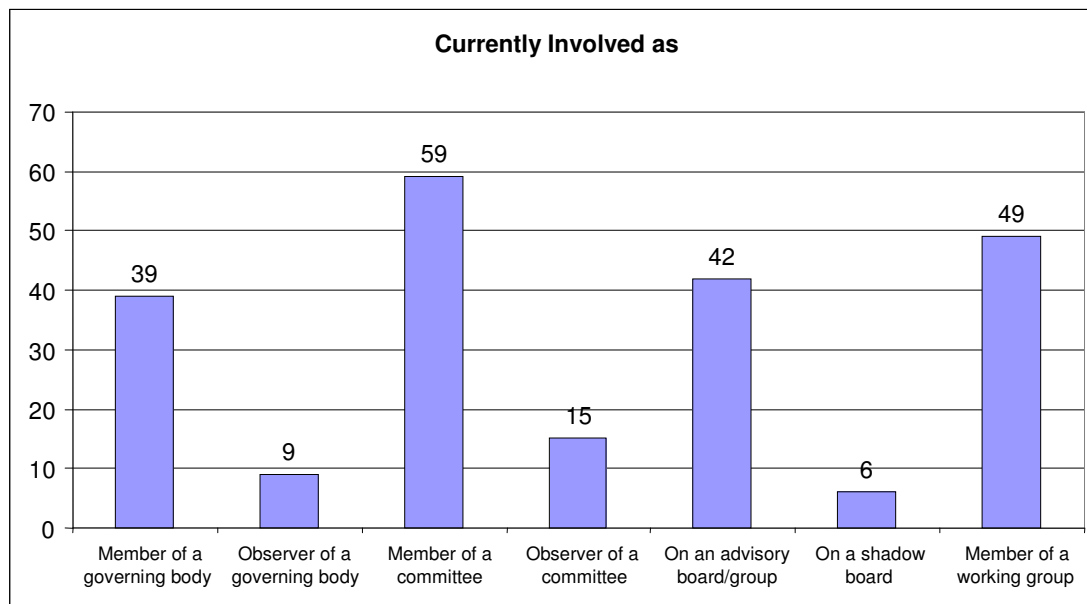
Organisations were asked to specify the age of young people involved in the different levels of governance. This was further broken down into two categories – those under 18 and those 18-25. This highlighted that those under 18 are most likely (74.2%) to be a member of an advisory board and least likely (43.2%) to have full membership of a governing body. Conversely, for those 18-25 they were most likely (88.6%) to have full membership of a governing body and least likely (68.5%) to be observers of a governing body.



Young people involved in public bodies were more likely to be members of a committee or an advisory board than within the charitable sector. Public bodies also involved more of those under 18 in these roles. Organisations involving young people were asked to rate how much they felt they benefited from having young people involved in governance. 82.6% of respondents rated this at the top end of the scale stating: 'we benefit a lot.'

Young people were also asked about their levels of involvement. The three most common levels of young people's involvement were committee

members (55.7%), working group members (47.1%) and advisory board/group members (40.8%). Young people were also asked what they would like to be involved with. The findings from these are represented below:



Of those young people not currently involved in governance, 87.2% stated that they would like to be.

Encouraging young people's involvement in governance

Organisations were asked as to whether they had taken any steps in the last five years to increase young people's involvement in governance. 78.0% stated that they had. It should be noted that this question was answered by 37% of the questionnaire respondents in total which equates to 177 organisations.

A question asking what specific action organisations had taken resulted in a wide spectrum of responses including:

'We have ring fenced two positions on our Board of Trustees for Youth Representatives.'

'User groups for specific issues.'

'Full member on governing body.'

'We set up a young people's steering group INNOV8 in 2008. Members of this group feed back to the Board of Directors and are able to influence policies and direction. We also appointed a young person to our Board of Directors in 2007.'

'Talking to them 1:1 and in groups.'

'Participation in school council.'

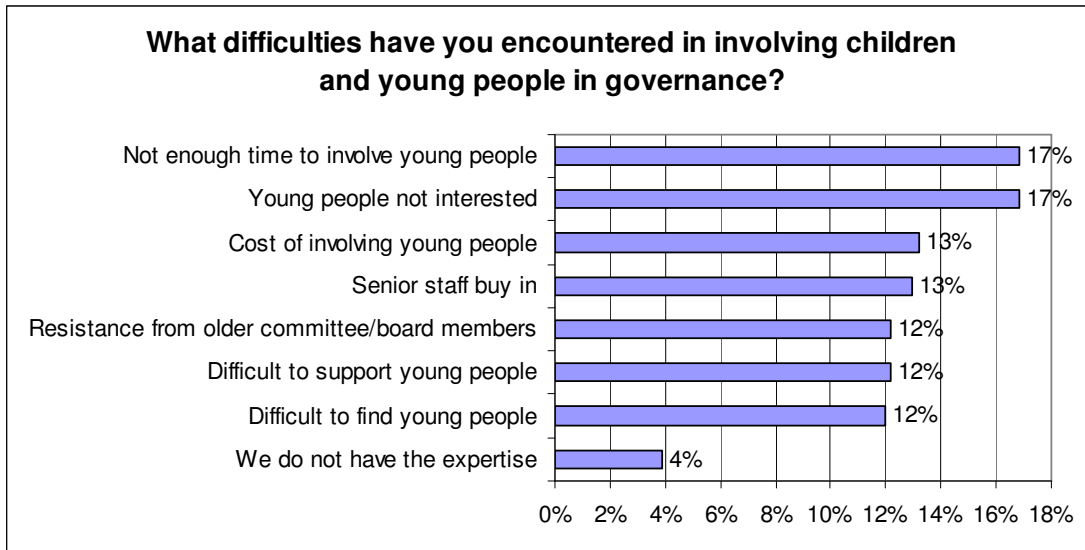
'We have a shadow committee that helps evaluate our activities and feeds back information to our Management Committee.'

'Introduced an observer role for a student on our governing body and increased number of NUS nominees on working groups.'

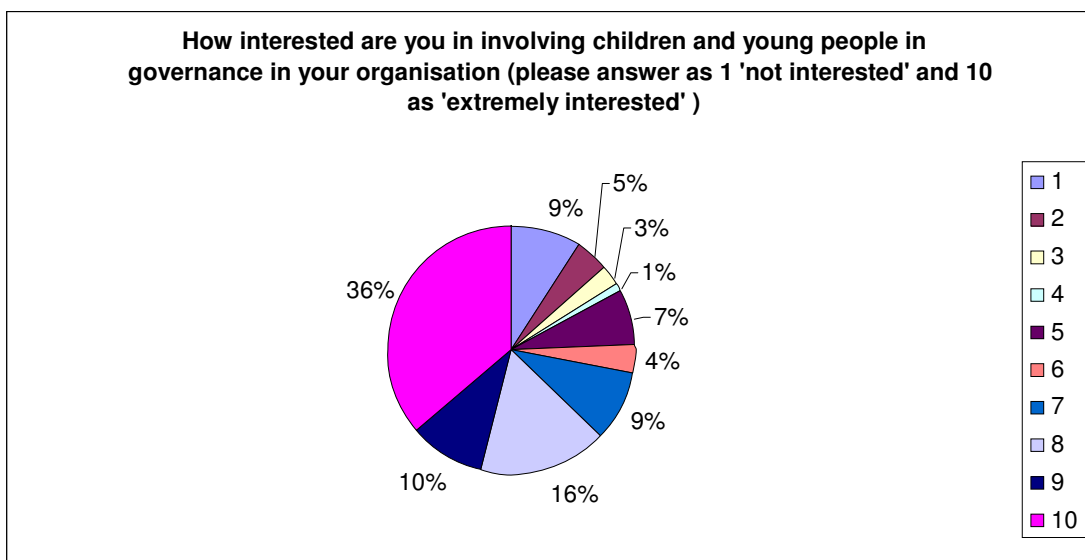
There were also several mentions of youth councils and youth action groups being established as well as use of Hear by Right and the 'v' youth action teams.

Organisations were asked as to whether they had experienced any difficulties with involving young people in governance and, if so, what kind of issues had they encountered, from a list provided. The majority stated that they hadn't encountered issues but the two highest areas highlighted were: 'Not enough time to involve young people' (49.1%) and 'Young people not interested' (48.0%) by far the lowest response was: 'We do not have the expertise' (12.7%). Public bodies were more likely to highlight time as a factor than the

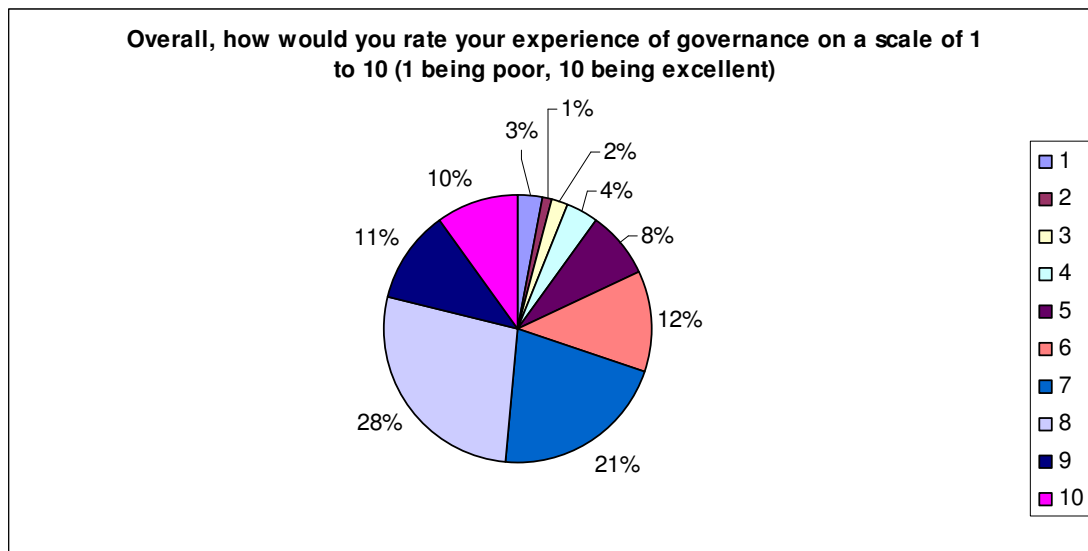
charitable sector. The main theme from the written responses was around the demands on young people's time and fitting an additional responsibility into their lives.



Organisations not currently involving young people in governance were asked how interested they were in doing so. Over 75% rated their interest at the top end of the scale:



Young people were asked to rate their experience of being involved in governance from 'poor' to 'excellent', over 70% rated it at the higher end of the scale, as shown below:



Preparing young people for governance

Young people's views

Young people were asked whether they had received any support in preparation for their role. Of those that responded to this question, 81.1% stated that they had received some kind of support. Training was by far the most common form of preparation that young people had received. Typical responses to this question were:

'Trustee and organisational training.'

'Training around governance and what it is.'

'Support from youth workers and some training around committees and how they work.'

Other young people stated that:

'We received regular training and regular meetings/discussions were held, which gave us a chance to voice our opinions and concerns.'

'I have had an induction weekend with all the Trustees as well as mentoring support when I became chair.'

It is worth noting that this question was answered by 37% of respondents which equates to 44 young people in total. Young people were asked how they could have been better prepared. Interestingly, quite a few respondents stated that *'on the job learning'* was a standard part and there wasn't any particular preparation that they would have wanted. Several respondents stated that they would have found training most useful and there were several comments about language:

'Getting to grips with political jargon.'

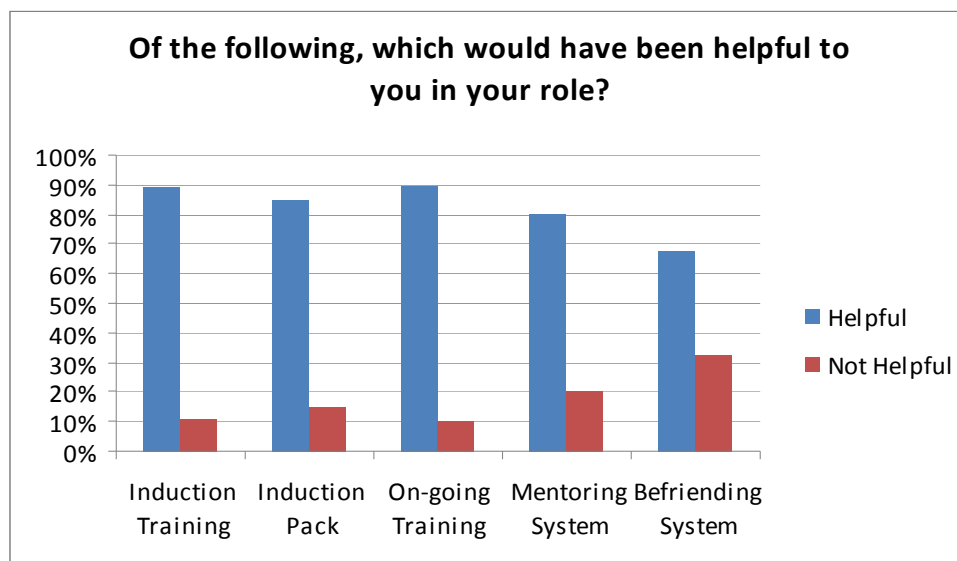
'Dictionary of key words and acronyms.'

'Understand the language better.'

One young person captured the essence of several of the responses:

'I think being new to the role, I was unable to participate in the discussions as much as I was unaware of the statistics. So next time I would like to read into the topic that we are discussing so that I can give a more informed contribution to the discussion and participate fully.'

In response to a question asking young people what kind of support they find most useful, there was little differentiation, with all five options presented seen as desirable. The two most popular means of support were ongoing training (90.1%) and induction training (89.2%).



Responses from those not currently involved in governance on the preparation they would like for a role were very similar to those who are currently involved, with training being seen as the most helpful:

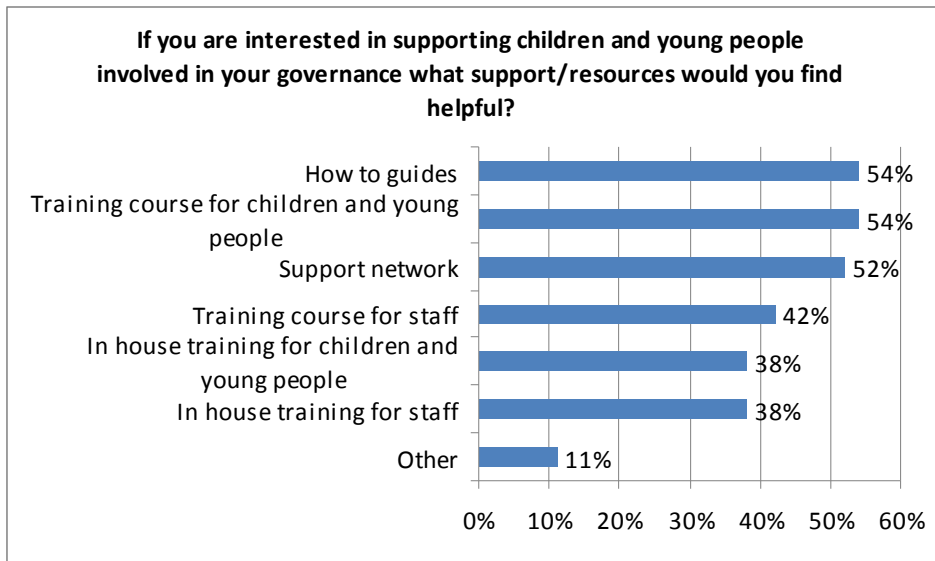
'Training on the organisation and an understanding of expectations.'
'A full training programme about the governance role and what it does.'
'Theory training, purposes and workings of the group.'

These results were again borne out where young people were asked about support for any further governance roles. Ongoing training (96.4%) and induction training (93.2%) scored the highest.

Organisational view

Organisations currently involving young people in governance were asked what support they currently give to young people. The responses to this correlate with those most favoured by young people. Induction training (65.6%) and ongoing training (62.6%) brought the highest level of responses. Other forms of support highlighted by organisations mainly included *'staff support'*.

Organisations were asked what tools they were aware of to support young people in governance. 55.6% of respondents highlighted awareness of tools with those most cited being Hear by Right, Participation Works and British Youth Council materials and training. Knowledge about support tools was particularly high within public bodies at over 70% of respondents. The following graph shows how helpful organisational respondents felt they would find different support tools/resources.



Profile of Respondents

Organisations

The profile of responding organisations broke down into the following categories:

Incorporated registered charity	50.2%
Unincorporated registered charity	10.9%
Public body	15.2%
Social enterprise	2.7%
Community/volunteer group	3.1%
Other	17.9%

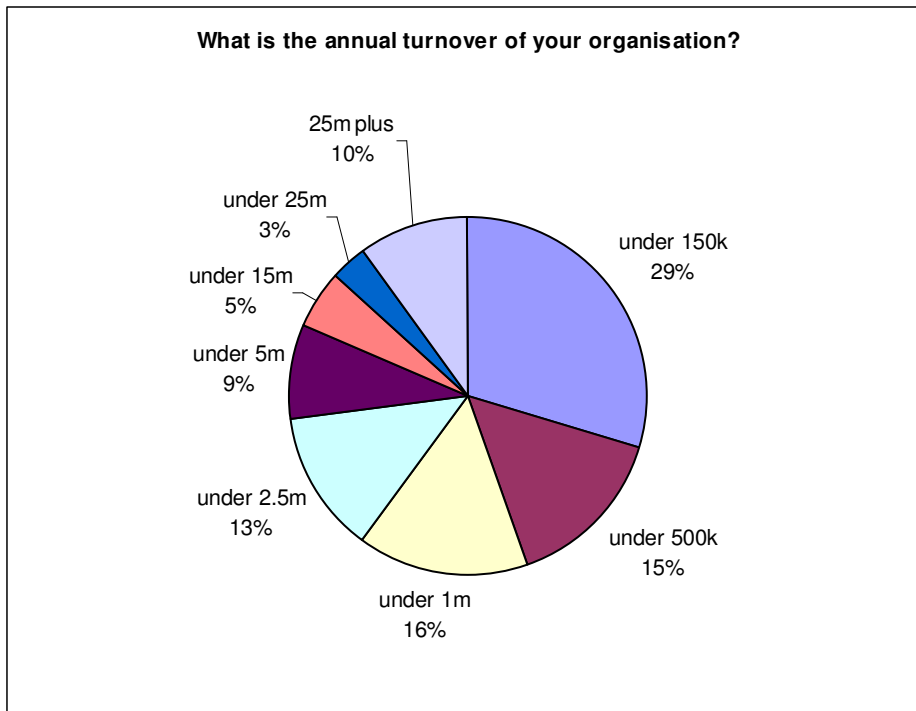
In classifying the focus of their work, the main area highlighted was: children and young people (35.9%). However, there was representation from all of the following categories:

Education
Sports, exercise
Local community neighbourhood citizens group
Social welfare
Justice, human rights
Student union
Religion
Health, disability
Arts, museums
Politics
Trade unions

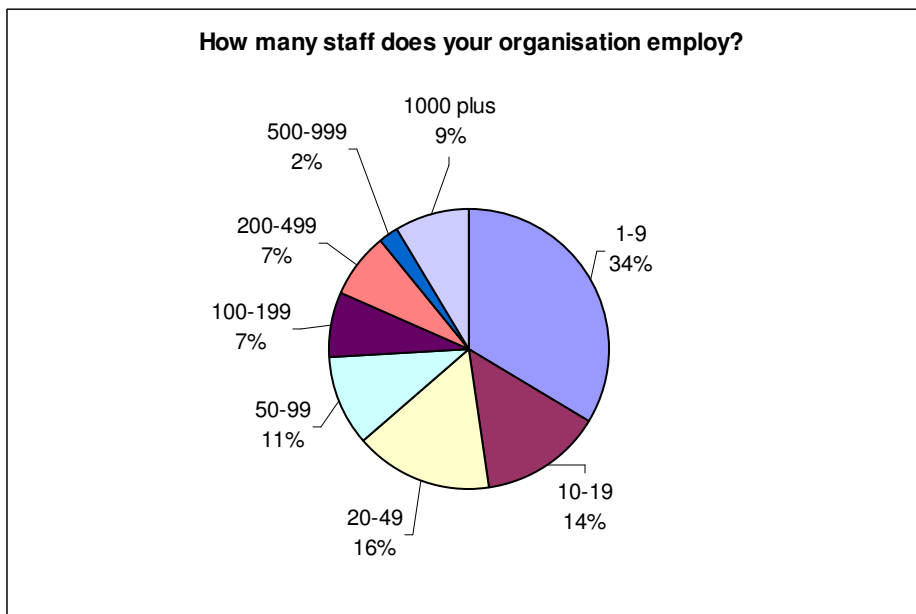
There was representation from all countries in the UK with most being located in England (87.8%) and working locally (58.8%). The geographical level at which organisations operate showed an interesting shift from the 2004 survey:

Geographical operation	2004	2009
Local	38.5%	58.8%
Regional	23.1%	18.7%
National	33.3%	14.8%

There was good representation in terms of the size of organisations with most being relatively small in terms of turnover under 150k (29.7%). However, 9.9% had a turnover of over 25m.

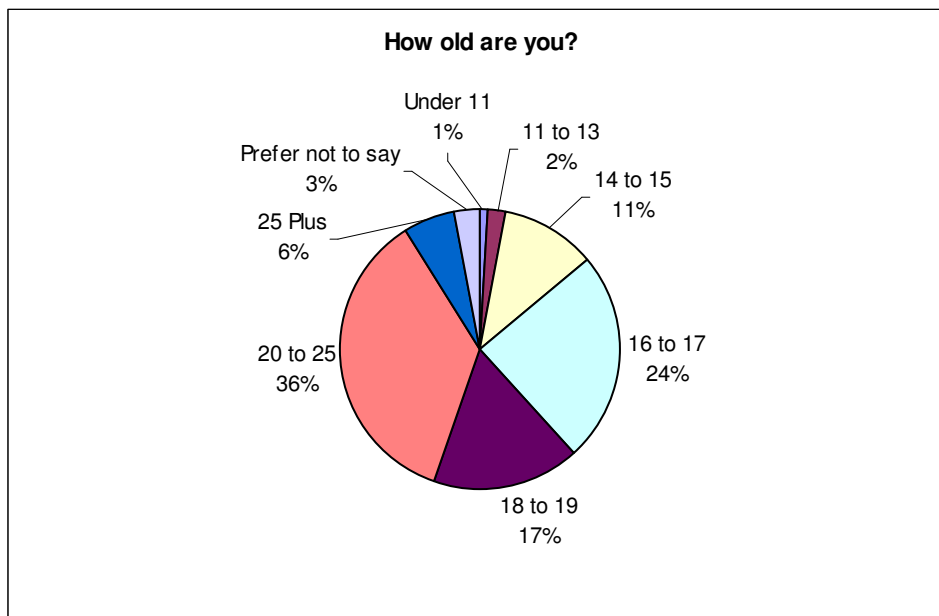


Similarly, in terms of the numbers of staff, employed the majority (63.5%), were between 1-49 but there was also representation from those who had over 1000 (8.7%).



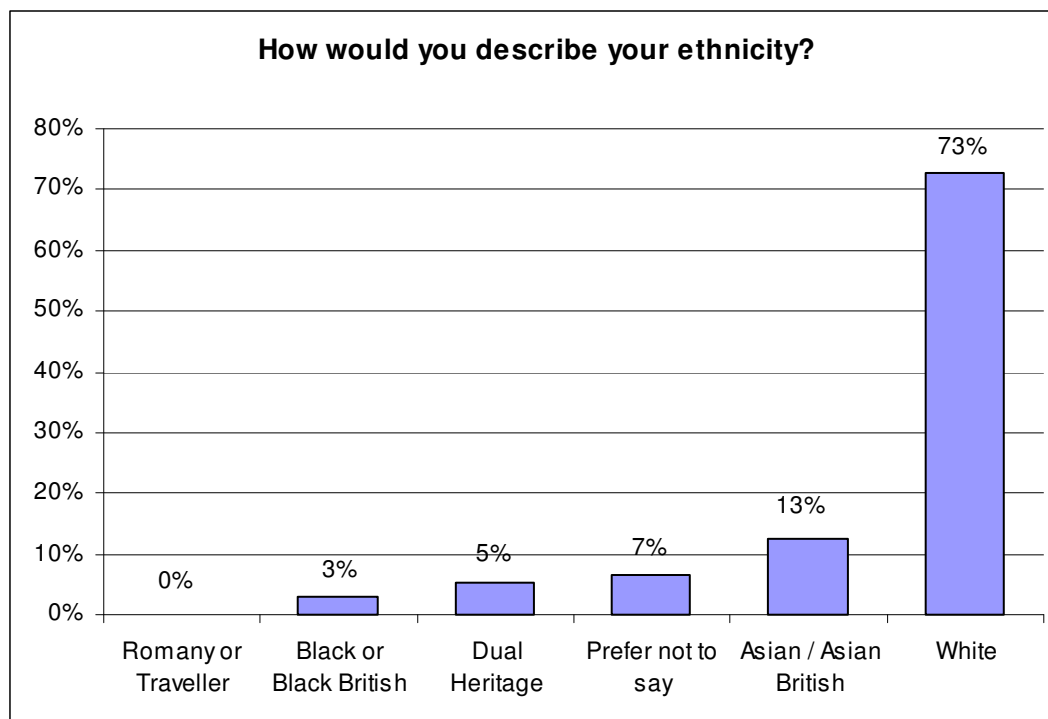
Young People

The demographic profile of the young people that responded demonstrated fairly good representation overall, although by far the bulk of respondents were from England (95.5%). This represents a significant increase from the 2004 survey, where there was greater representation from the different UK countries with only 57.9% of respondents being English. The overall gender split of young people was slightly skewed towards female respondents (59.6%). The majority of respondents were in the older age group 20-25 and this was true for both male and female respondents.



The age of respondents has also shifted from 2004 where there was greater representation from those 15 or under (43.4%).

The ethnicity categorisations showed representation from all ethnic groups as shown below:



However, some disparity was highlighted in further analysis of these statistics with no representation from Black/Black British males and 4.9% for young women. The largest category for young males responding was White British 82.7%, for young women the White British category was 66.7%.

In addition, 15% of respondents identified themselves as disabled.

Conclusion

The survey points to a clear increase in the numbers of young people reporting involvement in governance and an increase in the number of organisations reporting young peoples' involvement, both of which are positive findings.

The higher rate of response from both organisations and young people in 2009, set against a comparable exercise five years earlier, may also reflect a positive trend in the level of interest and engagement in the participation of young people in governance and/or operational decision-making in organisations.

Young people in the 20-25 year age group are more likely to be involved in governance, especially within the charitable sector. Public bodies are more likely to involve those under 18. This is probably due to the nature of statutory versus voluntary provision and the age of their main service users / beneficiaries.

Where organisations take a proactive approach to involving young people in governance, the mutual benefits are clearly recognised and valued. Organisations involving young people in governance were extremely positive about the benefits of involving young people, and the majority of young people currently involved in governance report a very positive experience.

There is room for growth in relation to both the rates and levels of young people's involvement in governance. Nearly 30% of organisations are not currently involving young people and this figure climbs to over 40% among the larger national incorporated charities. Organisations that don't currently involve young people in governance are keen to do so, and over 80% of young people not currently involved would like to be. This presents an opportunity for Participation Works and partner organisations to seek to continue to address this over the next five years.

It would appear from the findings that there is still some awareness raising as to what constitutes governance and the emphasis on young people's involvement in decision making. Where organisations were asked as to what forms of governance they have introduced, the spectrum that was presented included a number of responses that could be seen as youth participation as opposed to governance. It would appear from these findings that there is work to be done around generating a consensus as to what constitutes governance.

In preparing young people for governance, induction and ongoing training were the most favoured options alongside 'How to guides'. This suggests that young people value being supported throughout, while accepting that a lot of learning will take place within the role as they carry it out.

Future research would benefit from an increase in the number of responses and completed responses to give a larger sample size enabling more detailed analysis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this survey, suggested next steps for The British Youth Council and Participation Works are as follows:

1. Make this research report available online and disseminate it as widely as possible.
2. Promote existing governance guides such as 'Trust Youth' (BYC, XXXX) to increase understanding of what constitutes governance and methods for including young people within organisations.
3. Contact organisations that advise on governance to arrange for information on involving young people in governance to be integrated in, or signposted through, their work.
4. Continue to promote governance training for young people to both organisations and young people.
5. Consider conducting more in-depth research in the field of young people in governance, including focus groups and 1:1 interviews.
6. BYC to consider how to target future research to increase diversity of responses including increased representation from all 4 UK countries for both organisations and young people.
7. Seek funding for research into young people and organisational governance every 3-4 years, to build a picture of change over time.