

A vote of confidence

The adult founder of the UK Youth Parliament believes the organisation has an important future, but the government has to get fully behind it.

The UK Youth Parliament is making young people aware of their rights.

Kate Parish, development co-ordinator for the UK Youth Parliament, is proud and positive about the organisation for which she works, particularly when she considers some of the barriers she faced - notably the argument that there was no need for a UK Youth Parliament (UKYP).

“About two and a half years down the line we’ve got 300 young people in MYP posts and we’ve got 87 per cent of the young people in England represented with over 80 per cent of local authorities on board. You just have to be persistent and you mustn’t be afraid of upsetting people.”

She acknowledges the constraints she has to work under. “We get £110,000 from the government for the Youth Parliament for a year. There’s 160,000 young people in Kent alone under the age of 18, so we have less than a pound ahead for just Kent.”

So, if she was given a blank cheque, what would be her priorities? “One of the main interests for me is the support of young people at a grassroots level and we’re not even able to provide that because we run on a shoestring.

“We’d like to make sure that we have regional organisers working full time and under contract. We’d like to do European trips to see how different systems run and have regional exchanges across the UK as well.”

Despite the fact the CYPU has encouraged eight out of fifteen government departments to produce guidelines about involving young people in government policy, the ignorance around the practical implications of implementing them is a worry to Kate.

“There are no budgets produced by these departments specifically for engaging young people. I don’t think they really realise just how expensive it is to engage and consult with young people effectively and genuinely.

“A lot of government departments don’t even have a child protection policy. So, there’s a steep learning curve for them.”

Given her enthusiasm and acceptance that the Youth Parliament has made strides forward, Kate’s views on the future are equally positive. “I would love more MPs to take a personal interest in what young people are doing in their constituencies. I’d love schools to recognise there is a UK Youth Parliament.

“My ultimate aim? I would like to see that by 2005, every young person in the country aged between 11 and 18 knows that there is a Youth Parliament, that they have a right to vote and that they have a right to be represented at a UK level.

“Once we get to that stage we can really sit down and say, ‘Yes. We’re a success.’”

The UK Youth Parliament

- A national organisation, covering the whole of the UK, aiming to give young people between 11 and 18 a voice at national level.
- Every LEA in England represents a Youth Parliament constituency
- There are nine regional groups that meet five or six times a year.
- All the young people in the UK Youth Parliament meets once a year.
- An annual manifesto is published.
- More than 27,000 young people in Kent voted in the first of the new elections to the Youth Parliament last month.

About the team

This story was produced by Louise Hardy, 16, and Sabrina Golding, 15, with additional reporting by Jasmine Stewart, 15. An edited version was published in [The Independent](#) as part of their Youth Matters supplement, produced in association with the Children and Young People’s Unit.

0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

Related Links

From the rest of the web

[Uk Youth Parliament](#)