

Our Bright Future: Learning Paper 6



YOUNG PEOPLE IN GOVERNANCE ROLES:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING FROM OUR BRIGHT FUTURE

Our Bright Future was an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It was a programme of 31 projects running from 2016 to 2021 which brought together the environmental and youth sectors. Projects shared the aim of empowering young people (aged 11-24) to lead future environmental change and ranged in scale from national to local.

Project activities included: involving young people in practical environmental conservation; engaging them in vocational training and work experience; supporting them to develop their own social action campaigns around environmental issues; and helping them to start their own sustainable enterprises.

The evidence in these papers has been collected as part of the evaluation of Our Bright Future. They have been written by the evaluators, Economic Research Service Ltd (ERS) and Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP), as a tool to share learning from the programme and to influence future provision.

Introduction

This paper aims to share how Our Bright Future's youth-led approach has influenced youth governance and/or leadership across Our Bright Future programme organisations. It explores ways that involvement in the Our Bright Future programme may have influenced organisational processes for involving young people in leadership and decision-making. This may have included establishing organisation-level youth 'forums' or 'boards' or 'panels', beyond those directly associated with Our Bright Future projects.

Youth-led approaches and youth governance are organisational processes and structures that give young people the opportunity to be involved in decision-making and leadership within an organisation and supporting them in these roles.

By presenting learning from the Our Bright Future programme we hope to assist others in developing similar youth-led roles and youth governance processes or structures within their organisation.



Has Our Bright Future led to the adoption of youth governance?

More than half of Our Bright Future partner organisations have established or plan to establish youth-led or youth governance processes or structures.

Our Bright Future projects have successfully provided formal routes for young people to engage in governance and decision-making at project and/or organisation-level, an approach which expanded as the programme progressed. Project managers felt this will be a key legacy after the completion of their projects.

Overall, 19 organisations involved in Our Bright Future stated that they have established or are planning to establish youth governance more widely in their organisation.

Youth governance was established or improved as a direct result of involvement in the Our Bright Future programme in over a third of organisations responding to the survey.



Seeing our Youth Council develop, grow, and gain influence across our organisation has been transformational. We held our first Council meeting in January. By December we had Youth Council members on our Trustees meeting. Within 12 months the organisation is wanting to engage with young people in a new more inclusive way, which is very exciting.

PROJECT MANAGER



Organisational-level youth governance and youth-led roles that organisations have or are planning to establish include:

- Young people providing input on decisions around strategy and activity, for example through formal roles as youth trustees, youth forums, youth advisory boards, and members of steering groups and panels
- Young people planning and delivering events, summits and workshops
- Young people leading youth programmes and groups
- Young people being consulted in governance decisions e.g. via focus groups and youth consultations
- Young people being involved in recruitment decisions, for example, on interview panels
- Young people being included in project planning

How has Our Bright Future helped organisations embed youth governance structures and processes?

The encouragement and support provided by the Our Bright Future programme has helped to raise awareness of the importance of youth governance. It has catalysed existing motivation for greater inclusion of young people in project organisations. Promoting the importance of a 'youth voice' as part of the Our Bright Future Policy Asks also encouraged organisations to move this forward in their organisation.

Some organisations are setting up processes and structures to support youth governance directly as a result of working with Our Bright Future, for example:

“(our organisation) has embedded young environmental leaders into the heart of our organisation as a result of developing and delivering (the Our Bright Future project).”

PROJECT MANAGER

“It is part of our aim to offer more agency and build collective power within the groups of young people we work with.”

SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER

“Due to the success of Our Bright Future we are starting a new Youth Project which will have young people on the steering committee.”

SCHEME MANAGER

“As a result of the programme, as one of the Our Bright Future projects, we now have a pool of engaged young alumni who we have consulted on elements of the (new Youth Programme).”

YOUTH CAMPAIGN COACH

“Key developments since the inception of our [Our Bright Future project] have included employing a dedicated member of staff focused on building youth participation in [our organisation] and to promote the power of young people around environmental issues.”

YOUTH CAMPAIGN COACH

Our Bright Future encouraged us to drive forward youth voice. It being one of the 3 Asks meant we had a green light to move this forward in our organisation. It was the consistent encouragement of the Our Bright Future Team that kept us focused on this. It allowed us to take risks and try things that were not occurring in our organisation. The OBF reporting also reinforced these drivers.

SENIOR PROJECT OFFICER

How has Our Bright Future helped organisations embed youth governance structures and processes? Continued

The Our Bright Future programme also equipped staff with skills and confidence, which supported the set-up and delivery of further youth governance initiatives. The ability to network, collaborate and learn from other projects was also highlighted. Through the programme, organisations had opportunities to learn and become inspired by other projects, sharing ideas and lessons learnt.

Being able to form networks and collaborative partnerships with other Our Bright Future organisations helped establish youth-led and youth governance structures and processes. For example, sharing experiences and learning with other Our Bright Future projects/organisations with established forms of youth governance such as youth councils, was seen as being helpful in replicating these structures and processes.

Support from the Our Bright Future programme afforded some organisations the opportunity to pilot new approaches to establish what works for their organisation. Delivering successful projects through the Our Bright Future programme's youth-led approach provided evidence of the benefits of having greater youth governance in their organisation.

[Our organisation] has been hugely influenced by OBF, hearing work from other partners programmes, hearing from young trustees as part of the annual seminar having the regular sections of the reports to fill in helps to keep it in the front of our minds.

PROGRAMME MANAGER

A key success in terms of project management has been the relationship developed between (our organisation) and (another portfolio organisation). This has led to a number of other collaborations...

PROJECT MANAGER

Meeting and collaborating with other Our Bright Future projects and organisations who already had youth governance embedded in their operations was a huge inspiration.

PROJECT STAFF MEMBER



Enablers from the Our Bright Future programme

Raising awareness and understanding of the value of youth governance

Providing staff with the skills and confidence to establish their own youth governance structures and processes

Opportunities to collaborate with other organisations and share experiences, ideas and resources

Collaboration between alumni/young people to identify and establish new opportunities within their organisation

Understanding the need to design structures around local circumstances, needs and young people's priorities

Young people recognising the value of governance and decision-making roles

Provide an environment to take risks and try new approaches to inform future work

Provide a driver for greater organisational commitment to youth participation

How have young people benefitted from taking part in youth governance?

Overall, Our Bright Future Organisations were very positive about the benefits that young people gained from being involved in governance at an organisational level. Positive outcomes for young people include:

- Gaining confidence
- Gaining leadership skills
- Appreciation of team work
- Gaining work experience

For example, by learning how organisations operate; improved knowledge and skill sets; and, developing awareness of environmental issues and what they can do to make a positive difference.



“ Giving young people the opportunity to learn how to navigate roles in governance is **extremely valuable for their future but also the future of our natural environment.** They have had opportunities to learn how organisations operate through attending meetings, helping to organise events, undertaking shadowing opportunities with our CEO & much more. **This has grown their personal skill sets for use in future education and job experience, as well as developing their awareness of local, national and global issues.** ”

YOUTH ADVOCACY OFFICER

Young person case study: Ellie, Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust

Ellie first became involved in **Green Futures** through coming to a youth consultation evening about the project in December 2014, during the project's development phase.

Having recently graduated from university with an MSc degree in Biodiversity and Conservation, Ellie was looking for opportunities to get involved with local environmental projects and become involved in the **Green Futures** project. Through getting to know Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT) staff, Ellie became a part-time Graduate Trainee with the Trust's fundraising team and during this traineeship also became a youth representative on the **Green Futures** Steering Group.

She really enjoyed her role as a **Green Futures Steering Group** member, and wishing to remain involved with the wider work of YDMT, Ellie contacted the Trust's Chair of Trustees to ask whether she could have any involvement with this side of the organisation. The Chair and CEO agreed to offer Ellie the opportunity to become a YDMT Trustee, which she accepted enthusiastically. Ellie now attends regular Trustees' meetings discussing matters and making decisions relating to the governance of the Trust. Ellie is the Trustees' representative on the **Green Future Steering Group** (having had to 'retire' as a young person once reaching the age of 25) and presents the decisions of the Youth Environment Action Fund grants panel to Trustees for them to endorse. Ellie is a subset of Trustees who continue to develop YDMT's strategy, she has also been part of a working group further diversifying the board and recruiting another young trustee. Thus making a real difference to the direction the Trust takes.

The opportunities that Ellie has been given through **Green Futures** have not only improved her experience, knowledge and skill set, but they have greatly improved her confidence, have given her a greater understanding of how she can make a positive difference to the environment, both locally and globally, and have given her belief that she can make a difference.

Whether it's helping to highlight environmental issues to others and encouraging them to do their bit for the environment, or through talking to others who have the power to make a bigger difference (e.g. politicians or Trustees and staff of environmental charities), Ellie now has the confidence to do both of these things, takes every opportunity to do so, and is delighted to be part of a growing movement of people who are trying to make a positive difference.

“After the youth council was finished after the first year, I didn't want to finish so I signed up for another year. Then covid-19 hit so I decided it was time for me to take a step back and use the skills that I had learnt to be more independent and branch out into other parts of the Wildlife Trust. I've now decided to be a reserve ranger... I wouldn't have had the opportunity to join the youth council without the MyPlace project.”

LANCASHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST
YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

“Having young people involved in an organisation's decision-making processes can have a positive effect, as young people bring in new ideas, have different priorities and offer a different perspective. They can also challenge the way the organisation engages with young people, so it becomes easier for young people to become involved with the organisation”

ELLIE BROWN, YORKSHIRE DALES MILLENNIUM TRUST, YOUNG TRUSTEE
(GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE, INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN GOVERNANCE)

How have organisations benefitted from youth governance?

Organisations that run activities with or for young people can benefit by better understanding young peoples' needs, issues, challenges and what is important to them. Having youth representation within organisational governance is an effective way to do this as it gives young people a voice to help shape the decisions that affect them. Surveyed organisations noted that having youth governance in their organisations was helpful to amplify young voices or enabled them to listen to what young people want. Having young people lead on events that are aimed at youth also proved successful.

Overall, organisations were very positive about the value that engaging young people in governance added to the functioning of their organisation, and the programmes or projects delivered by their organisation. Specific benefits for organisations include young people providing different/less traditional perspectives on business strategy and having young people as a resource to lead on specific campaigns.

Involving young people in organisational governance can also have positive impacts for improving inclusivity and diversity within an organisation. One organisation indicated that they want to better understand how intersectionality and diversity affects their work and that it would be positive to have a youth perspective on what could be done to address this.

What are the challenges in establishing youth governance in an organisation?



Ensuring sufficient funding and capacity was one barrier to establishing youth governance. Securing the time to engage properly with the youth governance approach and support the delivery of the work was a challenge.



Overcoming internal resistance or challenges for integration may impact on the success of youth governance in an organisation. This may be at a practical level but also relate to organisational culture. For example, *“fitting a young Trustee into an existing council which is significantly older”* or *“getting others to let young people lead on (some)thing”*.



Accessibility. It was highlighted that online access helped to improve access, for some. Paying for travel costs for young people has also been mentioned as a way to overcome accessibility barriers for some. One organisation pointed out that the young people involved in their youth council were already “well connected” and a couple of them were current young MPs.



Time demands on the young people. Young people often have several competing demands on their time and availability, at times leading to high turnover. In addition, organisations must accommodate a variety of motivations by young people which may lead to varying success in delivering youth governance over other forms of youth engagement. For example, some young people looked to engage more on practical conservation tasks than governance or decision making. This finding echoes themes discussed in the Learning Paper: Engaging Young People. <https://www.ourbrightfuture.co.uk/about/our-impact/>

How have organisations benefited from youth governance?

Helpful in understanding/listening to what young people want

Helpful in amplifying young voices

Young people bringing different/less traditional perspectives to business planning

Additional resource – e.g. young people leading campaigns

Young people leading events

Improved inclusivity and diversity

“Lancashire Wildlife Trust have been trying to focus more on inclusion and diversity. What is brilliant about the youth council is that it normalises conversations around that. Questions around sexual and gender identity are really open and normal, for example sharing pronouns. Not a conversation we would usually have had at LWT but it comes through the Youth Council and normalises it. It has transformed us.

CEO, LANCASHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST



What support do organisations need for maintaining youth governance in the longer-term?

Resourcing and maintaining new youth governance structures and processes can be a challenge. Challenges mentioned by organisations included: identifying how to resource youth governance approaches for the long term; and, the loss of key staff at the end of Our Bright Future project funding meaning that youth governance was no longer supported or embedded at an organisation level. Organisations may often require support identifying opportunities to build capacity and resource for establishing and maintaining youth governance in the longer-term.

The following types of support/resources were valuable in helping organisations establish and maintain youth governance within their organisation. However, there is a need for different approaches which account for local circumstances, needs and young people's priorities. Valuable resources/support include:

- Toolkits/guides on good practice for involving young people in governance,
- Skills workshops for organisation staff,
- Sharing learning/case studies from other successful projects/organisations,
- Learning about experiences of young people who have been involved in organisational governance structures/processes to help understand how to deliver youth governance opportunities which engage and retain young people.

Support and resources in these formats are already available and may be of interest to organisations looking to establish youth led governance processes or structures. For example:

- Our Bright Future's Good Practice Guide for Involving Young People in Organisational Governance.
- Free training, case studies, free adverts for young trustees, and networking opportunities through the Young Trustee Movement,
- Our Bright Future's A practical guide to embedding young trustees in your Governance.

<https://ourbrightfuture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Good-Practice-Guide-Putting-Young-People-in-the-Lead-V5.pdf>

<https://youngtrusteesmovement.org/>

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Perhaps more opportunities to hear from young Trustees themselves. Their experiences and how they came to be involved at that level. It's sometimes hard to sell it to young people who are unfamiliar with how charities operate.

PEOPLE & WILDLIFE MANAGER

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ORGANISATION CASE STUDY

Organisation case study: Lancashire Wildlife Trust Youth Council

The Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) 's Youth Council has been operating for three years, involving young people between the ages of 13-24. The MyPlace Senior Project Manager established the youth council by taking a trial-and-error approach and learning from other Our Bright Future projects along the way. Young people were initially recruited through the MyPlace project but the youth council has now developed more widely.

According to the LWT's Senior Project Manager, the Youth Council would not have happened without Our Bright Future: *"Our Bright Future enabled us to think differently about how we involved young people in our projects"*. They also said that the programme has been a great mechanism to learn from other projects and that this has been key to the success of the Youth Council. LWT's Youth Advocacy Officer has also said that the Youth Council (and the newly established youth campaigning group, Wilder Youth) would not have happened as quickly nor would it have become as big a project as it is now without the support and influence of Our Bright Future. *"They have always been available for advice and guidance, and they are always open to hear what the Youth Council and other Youth Groups have been up to"*.

Key learning points from implementing a Youth Council:

- A key success was the support of the Trustee Board Chair from the beginning, as well as good Senior Management Team leadership wanting the project to progress.
- Not every young person will be able to volunteer the same amount of time, but they all have individual strengths and are there for a reason.
- In person meetings can be more efficient, however more people are usually able to attend online.
- Inviting senior management teams, Trustee Board members as well as other staff along to formal quarterly meetings is a great way to engage across all levels of governance. It is also a great way for staff to see the potential and benefits of including young people in important decision-making processes.

What barriers or challenges have been encountered?

- Time constraints and workload for the young people. Many of the LWT youth council members are extremely active young people often involved in several different groups, councils etc, managing jobs and/or university study. Trying to balance it all with workload and mental health can be a real challenge at some points.
- Having a clear direction as there are so many opportunities that the group can take.

What support can help a youth council succeed?

- Having a dedicated staff member who the young people can bounce ideas off and who organises the opportunities for them. There needs to be a structure and someone advocating for young people from "the inside".
- Paying for travel costs for young people is important. But it would also be good to offer money for involvement e.g. if you participate in x number of hours with the organisation you will be paid £x per quarter. We don't have that in place, but it would be good to have it in the future.
- Be sure that you are giving young people a platform to voice their opinions then actually listen to them, and if what they want to achieve or see change in is unattainable, take the time to sit down with them and talk about it.

Key success factors & lessons learned

This learning paper identifies several key success factors and lessons learned for establishing and maintaining youth governance within an organisation:

- Having youth governance within organisations helps amplify young voices and enables organisations to listen to what young people want.
- Involving young people in organisational governance can have positive impacts for improving inclusivity and diversity within an organisation.
- Although overcoming internal resistance can be a challenge, gaining support from key staff members, e.g. the chair for the board of trustees, and/or senior management teams can help youth governance processes and structures succeed within an organisation.
- Securing specific funding to increase an organisation's youth provision can facilitate successful youth governance processes and structures.
- Having an existing connection or forming a new connection with local youth audiences can help with recruitment of young people.
- Developing networks and partnerships with other organisations aiming to do similar can facilitate sharing learning and advice on good practice.
- Having/recruiting a paid dedicated staff member to focus on youth advocacy / to support young people in their governance roles can increase success.
- Important to identify accessibility barriers and ways that you can overcome them, for example paying the travel costs of young people so that they can attend meetings.
- Important to recognise that individual young people will be able to contribute in different ways and to different extents.