

Experiences and Lessons from Youth Parliaments in Scotland and around the World

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What should a 'Parliament' Do? What should it Look Like?

Most discussion of legislatures start with democratic niceties (composition pre-function):

- who should get selected and/or elected & the electoral system
- This is oddly often separated from what it is that you want the legislative body to do (e.g Lords reform)

We compared existing info with our own surveys on existing Youth Parliaments to find out what they did and how.

Why:

- A major investment by governments
- Important symbolic impact
- Potential for actual policy impact
- Need to learn/establish best practices

Data:

- Austria
- Belgium (2)
- Cyprus
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Germany
- Greece
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- France
- Sweden
- UK

Results

Run by:

- For most: parliament; ministry of education; government organisation
- For some: non-profit organisations, charity

Stated aims:

- For most: civic education, role-playing
- For some: fulfilment of UN convention
- For some: representation & youth voice & impact

Results

Selection of MYPs:

- Wide variation (national elections; class-based; student council-based; essay-based)

Size:

- Often simulates national assembly

Tenure:

- From 1 day per year to a full academic year

Ages:

- For most: secondary school
- For few: late primary school

Results

Proceedings:

- Focus on one or more bills
- Themes: education, environment, health and social policy etc
- “Parties”: present in only 3 YPs
- Often committee-based
- Some with plenary sessions

Results

Interaction with MPs:

- Often a question time with ministers

Impact:

- Results communicated to politicians as recommendation/guide
- Televised debates
- Only in a few cases were decisions later passed as law (for example: Italy 1997; Scotland 2014)

Case Study: Scottish Youth Parliament

Context:

- MSYPs are aged 14-25 & represent constituencies (2 MSYPs per constituency) in all 32 local authorities + some MSYPs from national voluntary organisations.
- Elections = every 2 years
- Each year MSYPs vote on an issue to campaign on (e.g. marriage equality; living wage; votes at 16; support for young carers; mental health; public transport).
- Regular responses to SP Committees & Government Consultations (grown considerably in recent years).
- 3 meetings per year (part legislature, mainly advocacy).

THE SYP EXPERIENCE

Being an MSYP is great for your personal and professional development. Here are just some of the great benefits of being an MSYP:

- Meeting new people and making new friends;
- Being a part of national campaigns and projects;
- Representing young people across Scotland;
- Being an ambassador for a national organisation;
- Influencing policy and decision making in Scotland;
- Effecting change; and,
- Gaining valuable transferable skills in public speaking, youth engagement, media, and influencing.

SYP is great for your CV, and allows you to make real changes to improve Scotland for young people.

Case Study: Scottish Youth Parliament

Research Questions:

- Is the SYP representative of the various socio-economic groups that compose society as a whole?
- Does participation in the youth parliament increase political interest, personal and skills development, and the likelihood of volunteering?

Results: SYP Looks Like Scotland

Sex: 51% male, 49% female (pop. = 50/50)

Ethnicity: 92% white (pop. = 98%)

Disability: 10% (pop. = 8 to 15%)

Non-religious: 54% (pop. = 52%)

SES: 41% from bottom 50% neighbourhoods

LGBT: 12%

Results: Skills ↑

- 91% say skills ↑ due to SYP
- 95% lower SES say skills ↑ due to SYP vs 81% higher SES (ns)
- 65% older interest in politics ↑ due to SYP vs 44% younger

Results: Volunteering ↑

Post SYP experience of volunteering:

Sex: 86% of females vs 64% males (both higher than population: 30% vs 25%)

Religious: 83% of religious vs 70% non-religious (both higher than population: 29% vs 25%)

Age: 79% of 14-17s cohort vs 59% 18-25s cohort (no population data)

Results: Volunteering ↑

Post SYP experience of volunteering:

Disabled: 78% of abled vs 43% disabled (both higher than population: 28% vs 26%)

SES: 61% of most deprived vs 80% least deprived (both higher than population: 23% vs 33%)

Conclusion

SYP =

- Representative of Scotland: YES
- Useful: YES (policy impact + higher %s volunteer post SYP than in population)
- Useful: NO (differences among the population are replicated in the SYP cohorts too)

For volunteering SYP should consider targeting: males, older cohorts, disabled, non-religious, and those from more deprived neighbourhoods.



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