



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs

**Minutes of meeting held at 5.30pm, Wednesday 6th November
Grimond Room, Portcullis House**

Launch of the Youth Select Committee's report *A Curriculum for Life*

Guest Speakers:

- **Natasha Brown, Chair of the Youth Select Committee**
- **Hardip Begol, Director, Assessment, Curriculum and General Qualifications, Department for Education**
- **Steve McCabe, Shadow Education Minister**
- **Tim Loughton, former Education Minister**
- **Baroness Estelle Morris of Yardley, former Secretary of State for Education**

The meeting was chaired by Julie Hilling MP (Lab, Bolton West), Chair of the APPG.

1. Introduction and welcome

Deputy Chief Executive of the British Youth Council, **David Clark (DC)** introduced the session and welcomed attendees. He introduced the Youth Select Committee and spoke briefly about their inquiry into the national curriculum. Group Chair, Julie Hilling MP then introduced the speakers and briefly set out the format of the evening: each speaker would make a short statement, which would be followed by a question and answer discussion with the members of the various youth groups present.

2. Panel contributions

Natasha Browne (NB) spoke briefly about the Youth Select Committee's inquiry into the curriculum and drew attention to the recommendations of the report on Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). She spoke of the importance of PSHE in helping young people to acquire life skills and prepare them for adulthood. She also encouraged pupil involvement in developing the curriculum within their own schools. She thanked all of the members of the committee and those who gave evidence.

Hardip Begol (HB) welcomed the report and the work of the committee. He praised the quality of the report, saying that it was "*on a par*" with the quality of reports by House of Parliament select committees.

He said that a balanced curriculum is needed and noted that there are signs of improvement in PSHE. He said that it is key that young people are given the help they need to acquire life skills, and welcomed the committee's conclusion about pupil involvement. He spoke about a recent Ofsted report that highlighted the need for citizenship education and which suggests that there is some improvement in its teaching in schools.

He said that the Department for Education (DfE) will carefully consider the recommendations of the report and provide a formal response. He noted that there is no definition of citizenship in the report, to which **NB** replied that the Committee felt that the concept is too broad and that each school should be able to develop their own definition.

Steve McCabe (SM) said that Labour supports a core curriculum but spoke of the importance of ensuring it is properly balanced – which, he said, is where the committee's report comes in. He said that he did not believe there was a need for statutory PSHE, but that there is a need for better engagement and buy-in from pupils.

He mentioned the difficulty expressed by some civil servants he had met in engaging with young people. He expressed a view that politicians often propose reforms based on outdated views of the education system from when they were in school.

He suggested that the report should be debated in the House of Commons by members.

Tim Loughton (TL) said that he was disappointed to that the Government had not submitted evidence or attended the oral evidence sessions of the inquiry. He praised the Youth Select Committee, and its work. He said that it was right that the Government responds to the report and suggested that there should be a debate in the House of Commons.

He criticised previous Government studies on sex education, saying that there had not been enough change. He said that there was a need for qualified and specialised citizenship teachers, and suggested that outside specialists could go in to schools to teach these subjects with supervision. He also said that young people should have input and involvement in designing this curriculum.

Baroness Morris of Yardley (EM) added her congratulations to the committee, and noted the unique character of the report, saying that because it includes a youth voice, it should be influential.

She spoke of her time as a teacher, noting that PSHE was only taught by non-specialised teachers who happened to be available. She highlighted that when she first became a Minister she set up a working group to ensure that changes were made to improve standards of this type of education in schools.

She urged more development on sex education and citizenship, and stated that we should not settle for the same level of progress that was made between 1997 and 2010 over the next 13 years, and instead should promote change.

She spoke about demand side and supply side problems, and noted that teachers do not train to teach PSHE and instead see it as something they have to do as an add on. She said that this needs to change to make progress. She argued that it was possible that because everyone approves of teaching PSHE that there has been no development in improving the subject. She concluded by saying that the committee should "*hang on to the report*" because it might be one of the things that makes a real difference.

JH argued that there is always a battle for something to be added to the curriculum and that there is a need to take a "*holistic view*" to improving education: it is not just about improving PSHE or sex education, but the wider curriculum.

3. Discussion and feedback from young people

JH thanked the speakers for their comments and encouraged young people to ask questions.

Solomon Curtis, a member of the Youth Select Committee asked whether the Government would have sent a minister to give evidence had the report by a House of Commons Select Committee.

Responding, **HB** said that he had given evidence to the inquiry on behalf of the Department for Education, and that occasionally ministers are not available to attend Select Committee hearings so officials go instead, as was the case with the Youth Select Committee. **JH** noted that sometimes Committees have to change their timings to accommodate for this.

A representative of the Diana Awards said that she wanted to carry out citizenship teacher training but that all of the five universities that teach citizenship teaching qualifications had scrapped their courses this year because not enough applications had been made. She said that there are young people passionate about citizenship but are unable to carry out the relevant training.

Kerry Sildatke, a member of the Youth Select Committee asked whether the Government would respond to the report.

Matt Smeeth, a member of the Youth Parliament, asked how you go about changing the mentality of students to get them to pay attention to citizenship and sex education.

A representative of the Diana Awards said that sex education needs to change to meet the needs of the current generation. She said that body image is an important part of this, and that it should be included in lessons.

Mariam from Teens and Toddlers said the term PSHE and citizenship has a stigma which means that people do not take it seriously. She argued that interpersonal skills should also be taught in these lessons in schools to give young people the tools they need in life to be confident and communicate well.

Yassine from the Hillingdon Youth Council spoke about votes for 16 year olds and argued that young people could be susceptible to misleading statements and messages, so it is therefore important to teach young people how think about politics.

TL said that while there is a need to make young people believe it is worthwhile to vote, simply making PSHE compulsory is not the way to do this. He said that you cannot "*box-tick*" PSHE, but you have to make it applicable to the issues of the current generation, praising a school he had encountered that was helping young people to understand the dangers of 'sexting'. However, he argued that this should all start at home – schools should empower parents to take a lead.

At this point **JH** had to step out of the room and **DC** took over the chair.

EM said that poor standards of teaching is a real issue but accepted that PSHE does not lend itself to traditional structures of teaching and often occurs in a more informal structure. She said that there has not been much change in terms of standards of PSHE teaching.

On votes at 16 she said that she had reservations about the policy, with the difficulty being that some young people might not understand the issues at hand.

DC asked for an assurance that the Government would respond to the report, to which **HB** answered that the Government would seek to have the response published within the standard 60-day period assigned for a response to a report by a Parliamentary Select Committee. **HB** said that he was optimistic about the future of citizenship education, highlighting once again the recent Ofsted report, which had praised its teaching in schools.

SM agreed that votes at 16 was a difficult issue. He wondered whether there was a need to better define the problem with PSHE, and said that we need to know more about what modern society means to people, including how images of motherhood, fatherhood and celebrities affect young people.

He said there is a need for a curriculum that reflects the difficulties faced by young people today, and asked whether there could be a mechanism whereby citizenship learning is given accreditation so that universities view it as important when granting places.

NB said that she wasn't convinced about accreditation for citizenship classes, saying that the subject should be seen as enjoyable and engaging to study and that accreditation might undermine this.

Jack from Dorset Youth Council asked for the panel's views on informal education, and asked whether youth workers could be asked to step into the classroom.

TL highlighted the commission on youth work that he oversaw as a minister, which recently reported, and said that youth work has a real role to play in teaching young people life skills. He said that academies are often more interested in involving youth workers as they have greater freedoms to be able to do this.

He said that there is a need to recognise the transition from childhood to young adulthood as a positive thing instead of a negative one focusing on the good things young people are involved in, such as volunteering, the National Citizen Service, The Scouts and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

EM said that informal learning is key, arguing that it works because it is often away from the classroom. She said that the last Government had considered whether schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh Award could get UCAS points or a higher status to promote its value to universities.

She said that it is harder to set up youth services in inner cities, which is often where it is needed the most, and argued that there should be a commitment to bridge the gap between formal and informal education in a more effective way.

JH returned to the chair and asked how you go about measuring sex and relationship education.

Tamara from Methodist Youth said that there are so many areas to cover in life skills, including body image and sex and asked how you could fit it all in.

Emma Jane from St John's Ambulance said that citizenship should be incorporated across every subject and every lesson.

Dan Grayon from LGBT North West said that the Youth Select Committee report includes no reference to LGBT issues, and asked whether the committee agree with the importance of LGBT education.

Members from Safer London Foundation asked who should decide what to teach young people, arguing that young people's views need to be understood, which is hard to do unless you engage with them.

Adam Scott from 3 Faiths Forum asked whether there should be an opt-out for parents if they do not want their children to take part in sex education.

Charlotte from CityYear said that it was important to bridge the divide between young people and later life, and said that nothing is more powerful than getting advice from someone your own age – the 'near peer' model highlighting the City Year approach.

Mujtaba from the 99% Campaign expressed a view that the Government talks about wanting to improve education but doesn't and enacts more cuts to services, which in turn means youth centres are closing. He said that this will lead to a 'lost generation'.

Matt Burton, a member of the Youth Select Committee, highlighted a recommendation of the report relating to informal education and how this could be strengthened.

Becca from United Reformed Youth said that we need to teach life skills across all levels and suggested using best practice to help schools learn from each other.

Isobel Trout, a member of the Youth Select Committee urged the members of the panel to listen to young people when looking at curriculum reform. She highlighted that only 2 young people responded to the Department for Education consultation on the issue, and that the Government should work harder to engage with young people.

Joanna from the Diana Awards said that there is nothing on BME education in the report, even though it is a key element of education.

HB agreed that it is important to have flexibility in the content of PSHE, as different schools need different things. He concluded by saying that engagement with pupils is essential.

SM said that these life skills should begin in children's centres, as it did with Sure Start. He talked about the importance of the delivery model, and that the 'near peer' model seems to be a good one for this issue. He argued that parents should not be able to choose to opt their children out of sex education.

He said that the politicians present need to find something to do with the report to get it a wider audience.

TL said that the youth voice is important, and that he would table questions in Parliament on when the Government plan to respond to the report, and would seek a cross party back bench debate.

He argued that mental health is an important issue too, and that that it must be part of the curriculum.

He praised the idea of the 'near peer' model, and said that LGBT issues are still a massive issue. He argued that schools should show that we will not tolerate homophobic behaviour.

NB said that the report encourages external participation, and that LGBT should come under sex and relationship education anyway. She argued that pupils should be telling their schools what to teach them.

JH closed the session by the speakers and attendees, highlighting the importance of young people's contribution to the group. She said that there is a need to do something more with the report, and that she and the other MPs present would commit to press it forward in Parliament. She urged the attendees to highlight the report to their MPs and apply pressure to make its recommendations a reality.

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Julie Hilling MP	Chair of the APPG on Youth Affairs
Steve McCabe MP	Shadow Education Minister
Tim Loughton MP	House of Commons
Baroness Morris	House of Lords
Hardip Begol	Department for Education
Sir Peter Bottomley MP	Member of Parliament
Barbara Hear	Office of Tom Watson MP
Natasha Browne	Chair, Youth Select Committee
Youth Select Committee members	
Artswork	
City Year	
Church Girls Brigade	
Diana Awards	
Fellowship of the United Reformed Youth	
Frontier Youth Trust	

Girlguiding
Hillingdon Youth Council
IARS – 99% Campaign
Liverpool Schools’ Parliament
Manchester Youth Council
Member of Youth Parliament for Newcastle
Methodist Youth
NUS
Oxford University
Rathbone
Safer London Foundation
St John Ambulance
Surrey Youth Focus
Sutton LEA
Teens and Toddlers
UK Youth Parliament
vInspired
We Have A Voice
Ynys Mon Labour Party
NCVYS (ENVOY)
BYC
YMCA
Connect Communications