

# The Centre for Youth Voice Project Discovery Consultation Summary

Eli Adie and Rammiza Akhtar  
January 2024



## Contents page

1. Introduction	2
2. Part one: consultation methodology	2
2.1 Who did we ask?	2
2.2 What did we ask?	3
3. Part two: strengths and gaps in youth voice and participation practice– research and evidence in the UK	3
3.1 Capacity building	3
3.2 Research and evidence	5
3.3 Communications and storytelling	5
3.4 Networking	6
3.5 Summary	7
4. Part three: co-creating an action plan for the Centre for Youth Voice	7
4.1 Youth engagement	7
4.2 Intergenerational governance	9
4.3 Centre for Youth Voice actions list	10
Capacity building	10
Research and evidence	11
Communications and storytelling	11
Networking	12
Youth Engagement	14
Intergenerational governance	15
4.4 Next steps	18
5. Summary	19
6. Acknowledgements	20





## 1. Introduction

Supported by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), YMCA George Williams College<sup>1</sup> is establishing a Centre for Youth Voice. The Centre for Youth Voice aims to advocate for and support a stronger role for the voices of children and young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement in the youth sector. The work of the Centre for Youth Voice is underpinned by the understanding that children and young people have a fundamental human right to be involved in the decisions that affect them, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The Centre aims to share expertise in understanding and advocating for the role of youth voice and participation across the youth sector by providing direct support to practitioners and enabling young people to develop their research and evaluation skills. Our approach is framed by relational practice which underpins all our work at the College.

The Centre also aims to build an evidence base to support the impact of quality youth voice and participation practice across the UK, by exploring how listening and responding to young people influences positive change, with a particular focus on voluntary sector youth organisations. Young people and adults will be able to view and contribute to this data repository through a platform on our website called the 'Youth Voice Observatory'.

This report documents the first phase of the development of the Centre for Youth Voice, establishing a clear action plan by consulting with young people and practitioners across the sector about the strengths and gaps in youth voice and participation practice, and the evidence that underpins it.

This report has three sections, the first covering the methodology used in the consultation, the second

identifying the strengths and gaps of youth voice and participation work in the UK, and the third documenting the co-creation of an action log for the development of the Centre.

You can find an infographic summary of the consultation findings [here](#), and an infographic of our next steps [here](#).

## 2. Part one: consultation methodology

### 2.1 Who did we ask?

We spoke to a wide range of people from across the youth sector to gain a better understanding of the youth voice and participation space. A total of 64 people took part in the consultation through semi-structured interviews and focus groups: 38 practitioners and 26 young people.

When recruiting practitioners, we initially connected with frontline workers, managers, senior leaders, and funders from the National Participation Network<sup>2</sup> and the Back Youth Alliance<sup>3</sup>, as well as researchers and academics connected to the College's wider work. As we progressed through the consultation, we also engaged with relevant practitioners identified through LinkedIn and those recommended to us by the young people involved in the consultation.

When approaching young people, we initially connected with those who were already involved with activities within the College, including our Young Evaluators Panel and Young Evaluators Network. As we progressed through the consultation, we also engaged with young people who were not already involved with the College's work through two virtual focus groups.

<sup>1</sup> [YMCA George Williams College](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The National Participation Network](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Back Youth Alliance](#)

## 2.2 What did we ask?

To understand the strengths of and gaps in youth voice and participation work in the UK, we asked questions based on four key areas of work:

### Capacity building

- What youth voice capacity building resources are already being used in the sector?
- What are the gaps in youth voice capacity building resources?
- How can we make capacity building resources more accessible?

### Research and evidence

- What youth voice research and evidence already exists and is being used in the sector?
- What are the gaps in youth voice research and evidence?
- How can we make youth voice research and evidence more accessible?

### Communications and storytelling

- What stories should the sector be telling about youth voice and participation?
- How would you like to see us tell these stories?

### Networking

- How do you currently network?
- Do you have any unmet needs when it comes to networking?

We thematically analysed the data gathered to provide a greater understanding of the strengths of and gaps in youth voice and participation in the UK from young people's and practitioners' perspectives. The findings of this consultation constitute part two of this report.

To co-create an action plan for the Centre for

Youth Voice, we also carried out a range of informal consultation activities with adults and young people around two topics relating to the involvement of young people at the College – intergenerational governance and youth engagement. A summary of the insights gained in relation to these topics and the co-created action plan can be found in part three of this report.

## 3. Part two: strengths and gaps in youth voice and participation practice– research and evidence in the UK

### 3.1 Capacity building

#### What youth voice capacity building resources are already being used in the sector?

Most practitioners did not pinpoint specific resources they used to aid them, although a few referred to models that guide their practice. This highlights a need for resources to aid capacity building for youth voice and participation work, particularly supporting the implementation of common models.

“We use models of participation like Shier and Hart. (Practitioner).”

A few practitioners mentioned that they turned to Participation People<sup>4</sup>, the National Youth Agency<sup>5</sup>, and YMCA George Williams College for resources. A couple of participants mentioned they developed their own internal resources for youth voice and participation work. Some practitioners mentioned a need for increased support and training to develop their practice and highlighted a lack of free-to-access training and support.

Young people found this question a challenge, perhaps because they do not often review resources, or that there is a lack of young people-friendly resources in this area. Either way, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from the data collected. Several young people also noted that they did not understand what 'capacity building' meant. Instead, the term 'resources' or 'resourcing' was better understood.

<sup>4</sup> Participation People

<sup>5</sup> The National Youth Agency





### What are the gaps in capacity building resources?

Following on from the previous question, practitioners identified a number of resources they felt would enable them to undertake youth voice and participation work more easily and effectively. These included:

- Resources on how to engage young people equitably in youth voice and participation work, with a particular focus on engaging underserved populations;
- A standardised checklist of activities to undertake when conducting youth voice and participation activities;
- Guidance on how to embed youth voice into youth sector organisations and how to appropriately resource it;
- Guidance on how to train and support young people to undertake leadership roles;
- Resources to support youth voice and participation-oriented funding applications; and
- Resources to enable the evaluation of youth voice and participation work.

Practitioners also highlighted the need for a clear and shared set of definitions for youth voice and participation. Young people were not able to identify many gaps in capacity building resources. However, similarly to practitioners, they did highlight the need for resources that provide guidance on how organisations and young people can obtain funding to support youth voice and participation activities.

“Toolkits, quick intros to policy, funding, things like that. [It] sometimes feels quite limited and we don't get a chance to really understand stuff like funding [or] understanding the mechanics behind the project. (Young person).”

One other area identified by young people that was distinct from practitioners was the need for intergenerational governance<sup>6</sup> documentation. Young people desired resources that enabled practitioners to make intergenerational governance a more integral part of their organisations. In particular, they mentioned resources relating to best practice around how organisations can work with young people in an authentic way.

### How can we make capacity building resources more accessible?

In terms of accessibility, both groups stated the need for training to support practitioners and young people to understand the youth voice space better, and for work to be delivered with quality and clarity.

Youth practitioners consistently highlighted the need for shared language and for definitions to be embedded in all resources. This would allow people in the youth voice space to develop a greater and more consistent understanding of the work taking place across the sector and to share learning with peers using commonly agreed terminology.

Youth practitioners also expressed a desire for templates or pro-formas that could be used across the sector to save people time recreating commonly used tools. Practitioners felt they had limited time to spend on resource creation, so having a central bank of resources would greatly help with capacity building.

Young people agreed with practitioners that a shared language and definitions pertaining to youth voice and participation would be helpful.

“Professionals or organisations can throw a lot of words around - too many sometimes. [They need to] be clear on what they mean and what different organisations mean by them within their context. (Young person).”

<sup>6</sup> Young Trustees Movement, *Intergenerational governance*.





Young people also mentioned that resources needed to be accessible and used across a variety of platforms and formats to cater to young people's different needs. Infographics were also mentioned as a method of making resources more accessible.

### 3.2 Research and evidence

#### **What research, evidence, and resources already exist and are being used in the sector?**

The young people and practitioners could both name a range of models of youth voice and participation that support their wider work, such as the Lundy Model and Hart's Ladder of Participation.

Whilst both young people and adults were able to name a couple of charities that had useful youth voice and participation resources, they found it hard to locate them across a wide range of websites and felt that the evidence base for these resources was not clear. This suggests that a centralised, dedicated resource space may be useful.

Wider research and evaluation evidence was either not available, not accessible, or not used. One young person commented they know research is conducted but struggle to find it.

“I know other organisations do put out research, but where does it all go? (Young person)”

Additionally, practitioners noted that there was not much longitudinal data to support the case for this work.

#### **What are the gaps in youth voice research and evidence?**

Following on from the question above, both groups highlighted the need for more data that supported them to demonstrate the impact of youth voice and participation work. Practitioners noted that there was generally very little youth-led research, particularly on youth voice, and there was little or no longitudinal study of the impact of youth voice and participation. Young people particularly mentioned the need for more research and evaluation on how youth voice and participation work impacts individuals.

#### **How can we make youth voice research and evidence more accessible?**

What stood out from the focus groups amongst practitioners and young people was that the lack of a centralised 'hub' for relevant research and evidence made it difficult to find. Both groups identified that much of the research and evaluation relating to youth voice is generated within the academic or research space.

Practitioners expressed a desire for research and evaluations to be written in more accessible formats, have simple executive summaries, and to clarify who had been involved as participants and researchers. We also note that access to research in journal articles is often also blocked by a paywall.

The young people commented that outputs are often inaccessible due to being too long, too complex, or not visually engaging. In addition, young people in particular highlighted the lack of diverse formats in how academic findings on youth voice are communicated.

### 3.3 Communications and storytelling

#### **What stories should we be telling?**

There was a lot of overlap between what practitioners and young people wanted to hear in terms of communications relating to youth voice. Both groups expressed wanting to hear stories from individuals from diverse backgrounds and not just from those who regularly engage with youth voice opportunities. Young people also felt that the practitioners who worked with them were sometimes more able to see the changes that happened for them than the young people were. In this respect, a young person and youth practitioner were said to co-create narratives of change that occur through youth voice and participation work.

Practitioners pointed out that alongside stories of best practice, stories of failure should be showcased to normalise learning from mistakes and support continuous quality improvement processes to those working in this space.

In time, youth practitioners would also like to see the stories of youth voice and participation as usual rather than exceptional as these practices become fully embedded into youth work.



“Celebration and shouting about successes is ace for the time being, but down the line, I would like to see less foregrounding of youth voice and participation as 'exceptional' and more expectation of it as a default. (Practitioner)”

It was evident that young people were heavily invested in communications and storytelling. Young people wanted there to be a focus on organisations amplifying stories of particular individuals who are active in this space, rather than just amplifying other organisations doing youth voice and participation work.

Though both groups were excited by communications and storytelling, it was acknowledged that in order to do this work ethically and safely, resources and training are needed to enable young people to participate. It was also noted that young people can often be tokenised, become a 'mouthpiece' for adults, or are not made fully aware of the potential long-term implications of telling their story. Therefore, having training and resources specific to this would ensure more organisations can confidently empower young people to tell their own stories where desired.

#### How would you like to see us tell these stories?

Again, we found a lot of overlap between how both groups wanted stories to be told. Both felt that stories of youth voice work do not reach a wide audience. They felt short-form video content across social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok could create an easy entry point into this work for those who might not typically engage with it.

The accessibility of the content was also raised by both groups as an issue. However, using social media to share stories has particular ethical issues which would need careful navigation, as mentioned by one participant.

“There are so many ethical issues with TikTok and so using the platform almost seems at odds with a lot of the social justice issues that young people care about. (Young person)”

Additionally, one participant mentioned that storytelling needs to happen in more creative ways, such as through art, as social media is not always the best place for engagement. There was also a desire to have more stories showcased through podcasts. Both groups felt they were a good medium to delve deeper into stories that were not often shared. The point was also made that young people are potential creators of multi-media stories about youth voice.

### 3.4 Networking

#### How do you currently network?

There was an obvious divide in the platforms that practitioners use to network compared to the platforms young people use. Practitioners largely stated they used LinkedIn as their main networking platform. A few practitioners were aware of the Lundy Community of Practice and the National Participation Network, whilst a couple of professionals mentioned Youth Work Units or the College's Impact Networks.<sup>7</sup>

“Regional Impact Networks are very helpful- they're great for getting information out to the sector. (Practitioner)”

The practitioners and young people did not name a wide range of youth voice or participation networks. This might suggest there is a need for information on networks to be shared more widely and drawn together nationally.

Young people mainly cited Instagram as the platform they used to network, with some young people using LinkedIn as a way to connect with other young people and practitioners in the youth voice space. X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok were also cited as networking tools by a few young people. They felt that Instagram allowed them to network directly with other young people whereas X was seen as a place to find out about other organisations. Young people expressed a desire for more youth organisations to be on Instagram so they can interact with them directly using their preferred platform.

Spoken communications was also noted as a method of networking by both groups. However, this was only said to be possible if people knew



those who were involved in similar work.

Finally, young people were often particularly positive about being invited to face-to-face networking opportunities, like conferences.

### Do you have any unmet networking needs?

It was evident that practitioners and young people have greatly differing networking needs.

Practitioners highlighted the need for a central online space where people from all contexts can come together and discuss their work. The current networks of practice, though useful, felt difficult to access, too specific, or not specific enough. It was also noted how reliant young people were on gatekeepers to access these networks.

A couple of practitioners highlighted that distinct spaces for youth workers who directly work with young people locally and a space for professionals who work in more 'national level' roles may be helpful and would make differentiation of materials easier.

“[We] need networking spaces that are the right level for the person.  
(Practitioner)”

Young people expressed a need for more face-to-face events as these allowed for greater interaction and promoted enduring relationships. Young people also felt that organisational events were often adult-led and that young people's contribution should extend beyond just speaking engagements. This could include young people giving their own presentations, running their own workshops, conducting their own enquiries, or planning their own events to which they invite other young people and/or practitioners.

Young people also suggested that organisations should advertise opportunities through schools to increase reach and make the youth voice space more diverse. The creation of an 'opportunity hub' where all youth voice opportunities could be found was also seen as advantageous.

## 3.5 Summary

The consultation with practitioners and young people has highlighted how fragmented youth voice and participation work is. There is a wide range of models and toolkits, which is hard to navigate, a lack of research and evaluations to support learning and development, and a gap in support and training to assist practice. Information is scattered across numerous networks and organisations, and this needs drawing together into one place for simplicity. This creates a very clear narrative and set of goals for the Centre for Youth Voice.

## 4. Part three: co-creating an action plan for the Centre for Youth Voice

### 4.1 Youth engagement

Within our initial proposal to The National Lottery Community Fund, we committed to involving young people throughout the project with a strong youth voice mechanism, bringing together a group of young people to play four key roles:

- Leaders driving the direction of the Centre for Youth Voice;
- Advocates for quality youth voice;
- Quality assurers of our work; and
- Influencers of our wider work.

We initially worked with our Young Evaluators Panel<sup>8</sup> and Young Evaluators Network<sup>9</sup> to explore how we should approach this, so that we could learn lessons from our wider youth voice and participation work at the College. The young people highlighted that before launching the work of the Centre for Youth Voice, we needed to do more work to overcome barriers that might prevent young people from accessing it.

Young people highlighted the following potential barriers to youth engagement:

- Youth voice and participation opportunities are largely concentrated in major cities like London and Manchester, but are less available for young people living outside of these communities, including in devolved administrations;
- Face-to-face events are often booked in the South of England, resulting in significant travel for young people from other areas of the UK;

<sup>8</sup> [Young Evaluators Panel](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Young Evaluators Network](#)





- Applications to join youth voice and participation projects often lean heavily on assessing the young people's existing skills, knowledge, and previous experience with youth voice and participation activities, which can advantage young people who are already highly engaged;
- Youth voice and participation opportunities require significant commitment from young people;
- It is often unclear why young people are being involved, what exactly is expected of them, and when activities will take place, which can make it hard to commit to long-term projects;
- Young people are not consistently recognised and rewarded for their contributions to youth voice and participation opportunities; and
- Young people involved in youth voice and participation want to be involved in communications and storytelling relating to their opportunity, but this is often seen as an 'optional extra', rather than being a core part of the work.

Together with our Young Evaluators, we developed the idea of a Regional Youth Voice Ambassador model to support the Centre for Youth Voice, seeking representation from young people who are using their voices to impact positive change across the UK to overcome the barriers identified.

We convened a series of focus groups in September 2023, where alongside the wider consultation questions, we asked practitioners and young people their views on how Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors could be involved in the Centre.

### **How should our Regional Ambassadors be involved in the Centre for Youth Voice?**

Practitioners felt that young people should be involved in the design and delivery of work across the Centre for Youth Voice. This could include young people sense-checking resources, leading consultations and sessions, and becoming local advocates for people in their area doing good work. The young people largely agreed with the points made by the practitioners and supported the idea of regionality.

“

**I really like the idea of Regional Ambassadors. A lot of the work is concentrated in Manchester and London. (Young person)**

”

Young people also felt that the Regional Ambassadors should be involved from the inception of the project and should be adequately supported to do so. The young people emphasised the importance of youth leadership in the Centre for Youth Voice. This included becoming team leaders, rather than just supporting adults and playing a consultative role, leading on local projects so young people are at the heart of things. The young people also felt they should be involved in redefining the definitions used in this space and designing the evaluation of the Centre for Youth Voice. They also identified that young people should be enabled to network with young people locally to them.

### **How can we ensure this opportunity to support the Centre for Youth Voice is accessible and equitable?**

Young people emphasised the importance of getting the advertising for any roles right, including a balance in the need for expertise and experience, enabling more young people to apply.

To facilitate recruitment, young people said staff from the Centre would need to go to where the young people are and explain the opportunities in their own language. Transparency about the work, demands, accessibility of the project, and support for wellbeing was also important according to the young people. Young people themselves are likely to be the best advocates for this work.

Practitioners and young people agreed that the opportunity could be made more accessible by accepting applications in a variety of formats such as video. Both groups also stated the importance of providing training and support for young people who take part in the Centre's work. Practitioners further emphasised the need to ensure young people's expenses are covered and consider remuneration, whilst the young people stated the importance of appreciating the young people's time and expertise.

## 4.2 Intergenerational governance

In our strategic plan for the Centre, we committed to working towards a model of intergenerational governance at the College whereby young people and adults would jointly govern the College's activities as a board of trustees. In effect, this sees us embedding the practice of the Centre for Youth Voice internally. We further reinforced this commitment when we signed the Power of Youth Charter<sup>10</sup> in June 2023 – a framework for organisations to empower more young people to take action, make a difference, and influence change.

When approaching intergenerational governance at the College, we wanted to ensure that we were working in line with best practice guidance, and so we consulted with the Young Trustee Movement (YTM) early on in our journey. In addition to accessing their training and resources, we were able to connect with and learn from members of their wider team, including Amelia Ireland, YTM's Chair of Trustees, who also participated in some of our wider consultation activities.

Following this review of best practice, we convened a series of focus groups with internal stakeholders at the College, engaging staff from our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, young people involved in our Young Evaluators Network, and our existing Board of Trustees. During these focus groups, we asked our stakeholders to take part in a 'pre-mortem' activity, asking them to think about everything that could go wrong in relation to five key areas: recruitment, communication, training and support for adults, training and support for young people, and reviewing and reflecting.

After identifying the potential problems, the groups were then prompted to think about how they could problem solve these issues. The potential problems and solutions identified throughout this whole process are outlined in the actions list below.



<sup>10</sup> [Power of Youth Charter](#)

### 4.3 Centre for Youth Voice actions list

#### Capacity building

<b>Problem</b>	There is no clear definition of ‘youth voice’, or ‘youth participation’; these terms are often conflated across the sector. The language used to describe youth voice and participation activity across the sector is not used consistently, with some young people noting this can present barriers to engaging with the work.
<b>Solution</b>	We will develop a set of intergenerationally approved definitions of ‘youth voice’ and ‘youth participation’. We will develop a wider glossary of terms to support consistency in the language applied when talking about youth voice work across the sector.
<b>Problem</b>	There is no clear central location for practitioners or young people to go to find capacity building resources in relation to youth voice. Practitioners and young people want access to more resources which support the delivery of high-quality work.
<b>Solution</b>	We will develop a capacity building section on our website. We will work with our Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors and Youth Voice Practitioner Advisory Group to identify existing resources and support the development of new resources where gaps are identified.
<b>Problem</b>	There is a lack of free-to-access training for youth voice and participation practitioners.
<b>Solution</b>	We will work to better promote our free-to-access support offers for youth sector organisations. Free-to-access support with the Centre for Youth Voice team can also be accessed through our Office Hours <sup>11</sup> support service.
<b>Problem</b>	Practitioners need a way of measuring outcomes, impact, and quality in relation to youth voice and participation practices. Practitioners need this to help them obtain support and seek funding to carry out more of this work within their organisations.
<b>Solution</b>	We will work with our Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors and Youth Voice Practitioner Advisory Group to develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which can be used by voluntary youth sector practitioners and organisations to evidence the impact of youth voice and participation practices.
<b>Problem</b>	There is a lack of resources to support organisations in working towards models of intergenerational governance.
<b>Solution</b>	We will share learnings from our own journey towards intergenerational governance at the College and work with our colleagues at Young Trustee Movement to highlight other resources and stories of success.

<sup>11</sup> Office Hours



**Problem** Capacity building resources are often shared in formats which are inaccessible and un-engaging.

**Solution** We will ensure that all outputs shared by the Centre are visually engaging, accessible, and youth and practitioner proofed.

### **Research and evidence**

**Problem** There is no central location to go to when seeking out research and evidence relating to youth voice.

**Solution** We will develop a Youth Voice Observatory, which will act as a data repository for outputs relating to youth voice.

**Problem** There is not much longitudinal data to support the impact of youth voice and participation practices.

**Solution** We will design and develop an annual Youth Voice Survey to capture regular data from voluntary youth organisations and young people about their youth voice activity. We will analyse this data to demonstrate where youth voice is leading to change.

**Problem** Research and evidence are often shared in formats that are inaccessible and unengaging.

**Solution** We will share learning from the Centre in a range of visually engaging and accessible formats, ensuring that these are youth and practitioner proofed.

**Problem** There is a lack of youth-led research and a lack of research which demonstrates the impact of youth voice activities on the participating individuals.

**Solution** We will support and advocate for participatory practices in research, including highlighting funding and opportunities enabling young people to engage with this work.

### **Communications and storytelling**

**Problem** There is a lack of representation for young people from diverse or underserved backgrounds in youth voice and participation.

**Solution**

We will recruit our Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors to be representative of a wide range of diverse communities.

**Problem**

Young people involved in youth voice and participation opportunities are keen to be more involved in communications and storytelling, and are often restricted in their ability to engage with this work due to a lack of budget. When young people are involved in communications, there is often a lack of training and support offered, leading to young people being 'tokenised' or treated as a 'mouthpiece' for adults.

**Solution**

We will identify and apply for match-funding to establish additional training and support for our Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors to engage in communications and storytelling work. We will deliver training to all young people engaging in our participation projects to upskill them to be able to contribute to communications work at the College.

**Problem**

Communications and storytelling relating to youth voice often only focuses on the success stories.

**Solution**

We will tell a wide range of stories, including exploring the frequent challenges, frictions and failures experienced when approaching participatory work.

**Problem**

Communications and storytelling relating to youth voice is often adult-led and focuses on amplifying the work of other organisations, rather than the young people themselves.

**Solution**

We will enable other people working in youth voice to tell their own stories, including young people. In general, we will take an intergenerational approach to our work, ensuring that both adult and youth perspectives are considered.

**Problem**

Youth voice work currently does not have a big reach and is not meeting a wider audience due to a lack of accessible content.

**Solution**

We will share learning from the Centre in a range of visually engaging and accessible formats, including short-form media. We will also work with our Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors to ensure that these are shared across platforms which will reach young people.

**Networking****Problem**

There is a lack of awareness of the available networking opportunities for practitioners and young people working in youth voice and participation.

**Solution**

We will include a 'networking' section on the Centre's 'Capacity Building' page on our website, which will direct to existing networking opportunities for young people and practitioners involved with youth voice and participation.

**Problem**

Some practitioners have struggled to find networking opportunities relating to youth voice that is relevant to them, as they are either too specific or not specific enough. Existing networking opportunities are often focused towards 'participation' practitioners; this can exclude youth workers who do work relating to youth voice in wider engagement contexts.

**Solution**

We will continue consulting with practitioners to explore this need further. We will explore whether the voluntary youth sector would benefit from a specific networking opportunity offered through the Centre, focusing on sharing learnings related to youth voice within the wider engagement contexts.

**Problem**

A reduction in face-to-face events following the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered young people's ability to network with practitioners. Young people's attendance at events is often tokenistic.

**Solution**

We will support and advocate for participatory practices in networking events relating to organisations which work to better the lives of young people. We will take a participatory approach to designing and delivering networking events at the College.

**Problem**

There is a divide in the social media and networking platforms used by young people and practitioners. Some practitioners voiced concerns about the safety of using platforms such as X, and young people reported that they had experienced 'trolling' when sharing youth voice content on this site.

**Solution**

LinkedIn was quoted by both young people and practitioners as a safe platform that could work well to engage both groups in this work. We will use LinkedIn as a key platform for intergenerational engagement in this work.

**Problem**

The College currently reaches a predominantly adult audience and doesn't use the social media platforms that are most often cited by young people e.g. Instagram and TikTok.

**Solution**

We will work with our Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors to explore whether the College would benefit from having a presence on Instagram and how we might act on this.



## Youth Engagement

### **Problem**

Youth voice and participation opportunities are largely concentrated in major cities like London and Manchester, so young people from these communities tend to be better represented. Opportunities do not always include young people living in the devolved nations.

### **Solution**

We will deliver a Regional Youth Voice Ambassador model seeking representation from young people across the UK. This should include at least one representative for each Regional Youth Work Unit in England, alongside representatives from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### **Problem**

Face-to-face events are often booked in the South of England.

### **Solution**

We will identify a residential venue in the heart of England for the delivery of our residentials at the College, to minimise travel for young people travelling from other areas of the UK.

### **Problem**

Youth voice and participation opportunities are often not advertised directly where young people will see them.

### **Solution**

We will work with our Young Evaluators to ensure that the opportunity is shared through youth-led networks as well as practitioner-led networks.

### **Problem**

Applications for youth voice and participation opportunities often focus on previous experience over expertise.

### **Solution**

In our applications, we will focus on giving young people an opportunity to demonstrate why they are passionate about youth voice and what expertise and lived experience they can bring to the role.

### **Problem**

Youth voice and participation opportunities across the UK aren't accessed equitably and there is a lack of pathways to participation for young people engaging with this work at local or regional levels.

### **Solution**

We will particularly encourage applications from young people who have never engaged with a national youth voice or participation opportunity, but who are impacting change on a local or regional level.

### **Problem**

Youth voice opportunities often only accept applications in one format, usually written submissions.

**Solution** We will encourage applications to be sent in a wide variety of formats.

**Problem** Young people are not consistently acknowledged or rewarded for their contributions to youth voice and participation opportunities.

**Solution** We have developed an internal Recognition and Reward Policy with the support of our Young Evaluators and will follow this consistently.

**Problem** Young people involved in youth voice and participation opportunities want to be more involved in communications and storytelling.

**Solution** We will identify and apply for match-funding to invest in work relating to youth-led storytelling at the College. We will empower young people to tell their own stories through our communications work for the Centre.

**Problem** It is often not clear why young people are being involved, what exactly is expected of them and when activities will take place.

**Solution** We will provide clarity to young people on the rationale for involving them in activities, what is expected, and how we will provide feedback. We will provide a clear timeline of activities within the information pack shared with young people who are considering applying for the opportunity.

## **Intergenerational governance**

### **Recruitment**

**Problem** We may not get the balance right between looking for experience and expertise. We may not get the balance right between stressing the commitment requested whilst encouraging accessibility and equity. Additionally, young people may not apply because they are unsure whether the opportunity is accessible around their other commitments.

**Solution** We will follow guidance from the Young Trustee Movement on how to approach recruitment. We will ensure that the recruitment pack contains clear information about the nature of the role, level of commitment required, and what training and support will be offered. We will provide a virtual Q&A session during the recruitment period to answer questions from interested candidates.

**Problem** We may not find suitable candidates. We may not reach young people from underserved communities who have the lived experience we are seeking.

**Solution**

We will speak to youth organisations and young people to understand the best channels to reach young people. We will ask young people to help us share the opportunity with their networks, and use a range of mediums to advertise the opportunity.

**Problem**

Under 25 Trustees may feel isolated as the only young person on board.

**Solution**

We will recruit at least two Under 25 Trustees so that they have access to peer support.

**Communication****Problem**

Under 25 Trustees contributions may not be valued by Over 25 Trustees. There may be a lack of communication, or inappropriate communication between Over 25 and Under 25 Trustees.

**Solution**

We will provide clear guidance around roles and responsibilities, expectations and codes of conduct to all Trustees. We will provide training to all Trustees to support effective collaboration.

**Problem**

Under 25 Trustees may not be familiar with technical language or concepts. Over and Under 25 Trustees may have different preferences in communication styles.

**Solution**

We will provide 'jargon-busters', definitions and key terms to support new Trustees. We will encourage the use of inclusive language. We will ask Over and Under 25 Trustees to help co-produce guidance and training.

**Problem**

Over 25 Trustees may struggle with the new way of working.

**Solution**

We will provide additional support for any Trustee who requires further support, training or development to engage in Intergenerational Governance.

**Problem**

There may be a lack of transparency in communication between young people and adults. Training and support may not fit for purpose, and may not be consistent for both Over and Under 25 Trustees.

**Solution**

We will ensure that training offered to Over and Under 25 Trustees is consistent, equitable, and appropriate to Trustees level of experience, regardless of age. We will encourage an intergenerational approach to all of our training for Trustees, offering additional targeted opportunities as needed, and ensure all training has been co-produced or youth-proofed.



## Training and support for Under 25 Trustees

**Problem** Under 25 Trustees may not be aware of their roles or responsibilities, and may not meet the expectations set out in the Trustee role description.

**Solution** We will provide clarity around roles, responsibilities, and expectations to all Trustees. We will provide shadowing opportunities for new Trustees, in addition to training, guidance and support throughout tenure, and each Under 25 Trustees will have an Over 25 Trustee Mentor.

**Problem** Under 25 Trustees may not feel confident to speak up in board meetings.

**Solution** We will take time within our training at the start of the process to support Trustees to build strong, trusting relationships.

**Problem** Under 25 Trustees may not understand information relating to board meetings and feel unable to contribute meaningfully.

**Solution** Our Senior Leadership Team will provide support to Under 25 Trustees to help them in preparing for board meetings. Our Over 25 Trustee Mentors will provide further support to Under 25 Trustees, giving them space to reflect after board meetings and address any gaps in understanding.

**Problem** Under 25 Trustees may struggle to 'keep up'.

**Solution** We will build in regular check-ins with peers, mentors, and staff to provide additional support for Under 25 Trustees. Under 25 Trustees will be invited to complete an annual review with the Youth Engagement Lead, to inform continuous quality improvement to our approach to intergenerational governance.

## Training and support for Over 25 Trustees

**Problem** Unconscious bias or adultism may lead to tensions, conflict, or a hierarchy emerging.

**Solution** We will provide training around unconscious bias, adultism, and the importance of diversity in governance to all Trustees. We will ensure that Trustees have a safe way to address any potential tensions or concerns.

**Problem** Over 25 Trustees may not engage in training and may not prioritise actions relating to intergenerational governance.

**Solution** Our Chair of Trustees will review engagement with intergenerational governance as part of their board management and address any concerns or training needs with Trustees.

**Problem** Training may be adult-led and may not meet the needs of young people.

**Solution** We will encourage all of our Trustees to access training with Young Trustee Movement. We will work with our Young Evaluators and Under 25 Trustees to develop co-produced guidance.

### Reviewing and reflecting

**Problem** Reflection or feedback may not be gathered from Trustees.

**Solution** We will provide an effective support structure for Over and Under 25 Trustees throughout their tenure, providing opportunities for regular reflection and feedback.

**Problem** Trustees may feel unable to give constructive criticism or negative feedback to each other.

**Solution** We will ask Trustees how they like to give and receive criticism and constructive feedback and encourage this to be respected by colleagues. We will encourage all Trustees to be reflective and discuss challenges with their peers to try and identify collaborative solutions.

**Problem** The impact of embedding intergenerational governance may not be evaluated, or, the evaluation may focus on the fact that young people are involved in governance, rather than looking at the impact of their involvement.

**Solution** We will work with the Young Trustee Movement to explore approaches to evaluation, developing a framework that will support us to reflect on our continuous quality improvement journey in youth governance.

## 4.4 Next steps

As we move into the next stage of developing the Centre for Youth Voice, we will bring together two key groups of stakeholders to support us to deliver our work: a team of Regional Youth Voice Ambassadors and a Youth Voice Practitioner Advisory Group.

By working together with both groups of stakeholders, we will ensure the work of the Centre is always co-produced, accessible, and relevant to young people and adults working across the voluntary youth sector.

## 5. Summary

Reviews of best practice, commitments to youth voice, and consultation have shaped our understanding of how we can strengthen youth voice at YMCA George Williams College and ensure that the Centre for Youth Voice develops, grows, and functions optimally. We are excited about harnessing these insights to develop an action plan to transform youth voice and participation work in the youth sector.

## 6. Acknowledgements

We are grateful to everyone who has helped us shape and steer the Centre for Youth Voice to date. We would especially like to thank the following people for their crucial roles:

- Bethia McNeil and Tom Burke, for their instrumental role in conceptualising and writing the original proposal for the Centre and guiding us through the initial stages of the consultation process; and
- Joe Rich and The National Lottery Community Fund, for supporting our vision and providing the crucial funding which has enabled us to bring the Centre to life.

This report would not have been possible without the support of a wide range of stakeholders from across the UK voluntary youth sector. We'd like to thank all of the young people who took the time to share their thoughts, opinions and feedback with us. We would particularly like to thank:

- Harman, Amy, Rorey, Claire, Django and Finlay from our Young Evaluators Panel;
- Eshan, Nasiha, Thomas, Sneha, Guto, Dev, Safaa, Irys, Victor, Gracie and A from our Young Evaluators Network; and
- All the young people who took part in our virtual focus groups.

We would also like to thank all the adult practitioners who spoke to us throughout the consultation period. We would particularly like to thank the following practitioners for their unwavering commitment to advocating for and amplifying the voices of children and young people:

- Josh Harsant and the team at Barnardos;
- Bez Martin and the team at Anna Freud;
- Kevin Franks and the team at Youth Focus North West;
- James Rimmer, Antonia Dixey, and the team at Participation People;
- Alia Dundoo, Peter Traynor, Eleanor Marsea, and the team at Youth Futures Foundation;
- Elsa Cardona, Danny Brown, and the team at the British Youth Council;
- James Cathcart at Young Voices Heard;
- Amelia Ireland, Grace Jeremy, and the team at the Young Trustees Movement;
- Jo Hickman-Dunne and the team at the University of Manchester;
- Dave McPartlan, Honorary researcher at the University of Cumbria; and
- Cath Larkin, Ali Roy, Candice Satchwell, and the team at the University of Central Lancashire.

Finally, we'd like to extend our gratitude to our communications team at the College, for all of their work on this report. We'd particularly like to thank Erin Metcalfe for her commitment to responding to the feedback raised through the consultation, including leading the design work and infographics for this report.



### YMCA GEORGE WILLIAMS COLLEGE

---

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. Established in 1970, the College works to provide transformational support to practitioners, funders, and policy makers across the sector, to improve the quality and impact of provision and outcomes for children and young people across the UK. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College now hosts three Centres of Expertise. The Centre for Youth Voice at YMCA George Williams College advocates for and supports a stronger role for the voices of young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Underpinned by the belief in participation of young people in the decisions that affect them, the Centre for Youth Voice develops and shares relational, structural, and practical approaches to embedding the voices of young people, and directly supporting them to develop their research and evaluation skills.

To find out more about our work, visit [ymcageorgewilliams.uk](http://ymcageorgewilliams.uk) or follow us on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).