

Hansard Society – Connecting Parliament with Young People

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to promote ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local groups as well as national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the Hansard Society's Connecting Parliament with Young People project. In the report we highlight the aims and objectives, and achievements of the Connecting Parliament with Young People project, and lessons learnt by the Hansard Society.

The grant

The Hansard Society worked with the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Parliamentary Reform and the Puttnam Commission's Young Persons Working Group to deliver this project. The Hansard Society is an independent, non-partisan, educational charity that aims to promote effective Parliamentary democracy.

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £5,218 to the Hansard Society for the Connecting Parliament with Young People project. An amount of **£3,758** was paid out. The primary aim of the project was to create an opportunity for young people to participate in the modernisation of Parliament and for MPs and peers to hear directly from young people in response to the Modernisation Committee's report *Connecting Parliament with the Public*.

The Commission's grant primarily covered costs to coordinate the event, plus travel and subsistence for young people and their guardians. Connecting

Parliament with Young People ran from February to April 2005.

Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of Connecting Parliament with Young People were to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of formal UK political institutions, in particular the UK Parliament, among young people and their teachers.
- Provide an opportunity for young people to participate in the modernisation of Parliament by expressing, articulating and communicating their views about the recommendations of the House of Commons Modernisation Committee.
- Provide an independent and non-partisan forum for MPs, peers, Parliamentary officials and others involved in encouraging political participation to hear young people, in their own words, express how formal political institutions could better engage with them.
- Pilot a template for how Parliament could take evidence from young people and encourage young

people to participate in the decision making process in Parliament.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to increase:

- understanding among young participants of how Parliament and other formal political institutions in the UK operate;
- understanding of the work carried out by Parliament outside the main chamber of the House of Commons, in particular the work of select committees;
- appreciation of the importance and effectiveness of participating in the work of Parliament and other formal political institutions;
- awareness of the steps that Parliament and other formal political institutions are taking in an effort to increase public participation in their activities; and
- satisfaction among young participants that they have made a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on political participation and fed into the work of the Modernisation Committee on connecting Parliament with the public.

Evaluation

Vidya Ram, Project Manager for the Parliament and Government Programme, led the evaluation of this project in consultation with Caroline Bradley from Communicating Brilliantly. The following

methods were used to assess the extent to which the original objectives were met:

- post-event questionnaire and diversity monitoring survey completed by 14 of 40 young people;
- post-event questionnaire completed by eight of 20 MPs;
- post-event questionnaire completed by staff at eight MP offices responsible for recruiting young people; and
- interviews with the moderator and chair of the meeting.

Deliverables

Over the three-month project, Connecting Parliament with Young People delivered the following:

- briefing materials were prepared for the young people and event moderators;
- forty young people attended the APPG meeting on Parliamentary Reform for young people on 2 March 2005;
- twenty MPs attended the event; and
- a report about the project was prepared for dissemination to Parliamentarians.

Resources and project management

Vidya Ram, Project Manager for the Parliament and Government Programme, was responsible for coordinating and overseeing the Connecting Parliament with Young People project for the Hansard Society. Records of budgeted and

actual income and expenditures were maintained and monitored at the Hansard Society's offices.

The project delivered the above activities as documented below:

- Salaries: **£498**
- Travel and subsistence: **£2,390**
- Office costs: **£470**
- Evaluation: **£400**

Total: **£3,758**

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

The Hansard Society's Connecting Parliament with Young People project achieved its key objectives and outcomes toward providing young people with an opportunity to participate in the modernisation of Parliament, and express their views about the Modernisation Committee's report *Connecting Parliament with the Public*.

The project's key component was a half-day meeting held by the APPG for Parliamentary Reform in Westminster on 2 March 2005. Forty young people and 20 MPs attended the event, which included a moderated discussion session for young people to express their views on the Modernisation Committee's report. This was followed by a feedback session for young people to present their ideas to MPs.

In preparation for the event, the Hansard Society developed a series of briefing materials for both MPs and young people attending the event. The materials for MPs provided guidance for recruiting young people aged 14–17 who had no previous contact with their local MP or political parties. Suggestions included contacting schools, youth groups and pupil referral units. Feedback from eight MPs' offices suggested the guidelines were helpful, but used to varying degrees.

The recruitment guidance appears to have been effective, as young participants had diverse knowledge and experience of democratic institutions and represented a geographic spread across Great Britain. Two key areas for improvement, however, were increasing ethnic diversity and representation from hard-to-reach young people. Of the 14 young people who completed the diversity monitoring survey, only one identified themselves as non-white British, and all respondents were still in full-time education. Furthermore, five respondents had had prior contact with their MP, which could be reduced in future.

The Hansard Society also developed briefing materials for young people, providing background information about the Modernisation Committee's report in order to ensure that young people could actively participate at the event. Members of Parliament were asked to forward the briefing

materials to young people at least two weeks prior to the event, which was done in most cases. All of the young people who received the briefing papers said they found them useful and most felt they prepared them for the event. Those who did not feel prepared had only received the briefing material on the day of the event.

The event began with MPs moderating small group discussions on key issues. The Hansard Society prepared guidelines for the four moderators about how to structure the discussions and what issues to consider. The main issues focused on current ways that Parliament connects with members of the public and alternative ways as well.

The feedback session that followed gave young people an opportunity to present their views to MPs. All 20 MPs attended this session, which was chaired by Anne Campbell MP, former chair of the APPG for Parliamentary Reform. The Rt Hon. Peter Hain MP, former Leader of the House of Commons and Phil Woolas MP, the former deputy Leader of the House also attended.

Questionnaires completed by young people after the event demonstrated that the majority of respondents felt the event increased their understanding of Parliament and politicians had listened to their views during the event. All but one felt it was easier to express their views to Parliament than they had originally thought and

most felt this event was a good way for MPs to hear from young people.

Feedback from the politicians demonstrated that they felt the project was a useful template for engaging with young people. Only two of the 20 MPs had previously taken part in Hansard Society work to promote political engagement and all but one who completed the questionnaire felt they came away with new ideas about how to engage with young people. Furthermore, most felt that the event had increased their understanding of what young people think of Parliament.

The one key area young people identified for improvement was allowing more time to discuss issues. This was echoed by MPs who felt that the young people would have benefited from more time to prepare their presentations for the feedback session, and more time for further discussion after Peter Hain's response to the young people's presentations.

Longer-term evaluation

The long-term intention of Connecting Parliament with Young People is to disseminate the learnings from this pilot and encourage Parliamentarians to use this as a template for taking evidence from young people. Many of the MPs participating in the event had previously used a variety of methods in taking evidence from the public, but almost all felt that this would be a good addition to the methods they had used in the past. The

Hansard Society plan to take this forward by providing APPGs with a copy of the template, including a general guide about how to run a similar event.

To determine the long-term impact of this project it will be necessary for the Hansard Society to monitor take-up of this template and determine how widely it is used, and whether it improves MPs' engagement with the public. The Hansard Society plan to monitor this through contact with clerks of APPGs.

Conclusions

The Hansard Society's Connecting Parliament with Young People project has been successful at increasing awareness among young people about how to share their views with Parliament. It has also been successful at developing a template that APPGs can use to take evidence from young people.

Both young people and politicians participating in this project felt the briefing materials were helpful and contributed to the success of the event. Furthermore, both groups also felt that this template would be a good way for Parliament to take evidence from young people. A number of improvements have been recommended, such as incorporating

warm-up sessions prior to the event, scheduling more time for participants to prepare their presentations to MPs and more time for discussion during the feedback session.

It will be useful to continue monitoring the usage of this template among All Party Parliamentary Committees to see if it becomes more commonly used, especially among Parliamentarians taking evidence from young people.

Through the evaluation of this project, it has been possible to identify a number of elements of good practice and 'lessons learnt' that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- Providing young people with briefing materials ahead of the event prepared young people to discuss key issues on the day.
- Providing transportation costs for young people and their guardians enabled young people from across the country to participate.
- Using small groups during the discussion session gave young people an opportunity to generate ideas before presenting to MPs.
- Splitting the day into a discussion session and a

feedback session provided an opportunity to generate more ideas for presentation to the MPs.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- When recruiting participants to attend the event, more effort should be made by MPs and their offices to recruit hard-to-reach young people.
- A pre-event warm-up session could further prepare participants by ensuring that they all share a similar level of knowledge about democratic institutions.
- Providing more time for discussion and feedback would improve both sessions.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Vidya Ram from the Hansard Society at: V.Ram@hansard.lse.ac.uk or visit their website at or visit their website at: www.hansardsociety.org.uk

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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