

Hansard Society – Y Vote Video

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote innovative ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local and community 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 Y Vote Video project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report, we highlight the aims and objectives and achievements of the Y Vote Video project, and lessons learned by the Hansard Society.

The grant

The Hansard Society partnered Ujima Housing and Copland school in the London Borough of Brent to deliver the Y Vote Video project. The Hansard Society is an independent non-partisan educational charity, which aims to promote effective Parliamentary democracy. Ujima Housing aims to provide good quality affordable homes and support to people in housing need, and those requiring care and support. Ujima Housing was founded in 1977 by a group of people concerned about the desperate problems facing young, single, Black, homeless men and women.

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £4,500 to the Hansard Society for the Y Vote Video project and an amount of **£4,500** was paid out. The primary aim of the project was to test the effectiveness of video evidence in bringing new voices into Parliament, focusing specifically on young African and Caribbean students aged 11–18.

The Commission's grant

covered the costs of coordinating and delivering the project for both the Hansard Society and Ujima Housing. The Y Vote Video project ran from July to November 2004.

Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of Y Vote Video were to:

- test the medium of video in bringing new voices to Parliament;
- provide an opportunity for young African and Caribbean students to express their opinions;
- provide young people with an alternative method for exploring, articulating and communicating views on issues relevant to them; and
- demonstrate to Parliament the effectiveness of using alternative methods to engage with and understand the needs of young people.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to:

- increase young people's awareness of, and willingness to participate in, the democratic process;

- increase young people's knowledge of how to engage with Parliamentarians, and confidence and ability to articulate their views to Parliament;
- determine if the videos can be used as evidence in relevant Parliamentary enquiries;
- increase awareness amongst Parliamentarians, Select Committees and All-party Parliamentary Groups of Y Vote Video as an alternative method of receiving evidence from young people; and
- directly influence Parliament by putting this method of communication on the agenda.

Evaluation

Fiona Booth, Director of Citizenship Education at the Hansard Society, led the evaluation of this project with input from Ujima Housing's Project Manager Andrew Duke. The following methods were used to assess its success:

- pre- and post-project questionnaires completed by nine out of 12 youth participants;
- a focus group during one of the training workshops; and
- feedback from Copland School's Year 12 media teacher.

Deliverables

Over the five-month project, Y Vote Video delivered the following:

- twelve students from

Copland school's Year 12 Media Studies programme participated in the project. Three of the students joined midstream;

- four training and information workshops were held with the students;
- seven three-minute videos were produced by the students;
- a video premiere night was held on 30 November 2004 with 80 attendees; and
- special guests to the premiere night included Stephen Twigg, Education Minister, and Paul Boateng, MP for Brent South and Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Resources and project management

Andrew Duke, Project Manager at Ujima Housing, was responsible for coordinating the Y Vote Video project. Fiona Booth took over responsibility for overseeing the project, however, when Andrew Duke left halfway through the project. 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:

- Hansard Society – development and delivery of workshops and video premiere night: **£2,200**
- Ujima Housing – project management and workshops: **£2,300**

Total: **£4,500**

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

The Hansard Society's Y Vote Video project achieved a number of its key objectives and outcomes toward increasing young peoples' engagement with democracy and democratic institutions.

The Hansard Society planned for 20–40 students to participate in the Y Vote Video project but, in practice, Copland school only allowed 12 students to get involved. This was because the volume of school time required to participate in the project was felt to be too considerable for such a large number of students. Nine students started the programme in July 2004 and an additional three students joined in September for the last two training workshops and production of the videos.

Once the four training sessions were complete, the students conducted their own background research, developed storyboards, organised interviews, and filmed and edited their own videos. All of this work was showcased at the video premiere night held on 30 November 2004, which was attended by 80 guests, including Paul Boateng, MP for South Brent, Stephen Twigg, Education Minister, Lord Puttnam, film director, and BBC broadcaster Richard Bacon.

Each video addressed a subject the student producers felt passionate about. Topics ranged from smoking in public to unclean public transport, stereotypes about hip hop culture and mobile phone theft. Although the videos each focus on a single issue, they also explore the background, current political climate and possible courses of action for Parliament to improve the issue.

Through watching the videos and seeing the results from the student questionnaires, it is clear the students made the connection between important issues in their lives and how Parliament could improve or influence them. The results from the questionnaires show the students' awareness of democracy was increased, as was their confidence and knowledge about how to express their opinions to Parliament. The areas of most significant change were around their knowledge of UK Parliamentary processes and institutions, and their knowledge of different methods of communicating with Parliament.

By the end of the project all nine students had rated their knowledge about Parliament as three or higher on a five point scale. At the start of the project only three students had done so. In addition, at the start of the project only three of the nine students responded to a question about how they would contact their local council or MP. By the end, eight of the nine students provided a

response and five new methods were suggested, including email, MP surgeries and giving evidence to Select Committees.

The one aspect of Y Vote Video that was not completed during the project was testing the videos with Parliamentary Select Committees and All-party Parliamentary Groups to see if they could be an effective way of giving evidence in Parliamentary enquiries. Unfortunately, the sound quality of some of the videos did not meet the standards required by Parliament and a number of the soundtracks required re-editing to ensure compliance with copyright laws. As a result, the videos have not been distributed to date.

BBC Parliament has, however, provided the Hansard Society with in-kind support to assist in solving these problems. All of the videos have now been improved to the standards required by Parliament and the Hansard Society has identified a number of relevant Select Committees to receive copies in the coming months.

Longer-term evaluation

The full impact of this project will not be known until feedback is gathered from Select Committees and All-party Parliamentary Groups about their usefulness as evidence in relevant enquiries. A number of Select Committees have expressed interest in viewing the videos and once their feedback has been collected a recommendation can be made

about the benefits of video evidence from young people.

The Hansard Society's timeline for this aspect of the project is to distribute all videos by September 2005 and gather feedback from the Select Committees and All-party Parliamentary Groups by November 2005. The results from this final component of the project should be monitored over the coming year.

Conclusions

The Y Vote Video project has been successful at engaging young people with the democratic process in a new and innovative way. It is not yet clear, however, if this will be a good method for young people to give evidence to Parliamentary Select Committees and All-party Parliamentary Groups.

The 12 students who participated in the project, although less than half the number originally planned for, clearly increased their knowledge of UK Parliamentary processes and institutions, and their knowledge of how to express their opinions to Parliament.

The seven three-minute videos show the young people's interest in political issues, and their understanding of the avenues that are available to express their opinions. The student questionnaires completed at the start and end of the project illustrate that the students learned new ways to make their opinions known to Parliament and also felt their knowledge had increased

during the project.

All of the students gave positive feedback about participating in the pilot project, and the students' media teacher also felt that the project increased both the students' awareness of the role of Parliament and their knowledge of how to have their voices heard.

An important consideration for the future use of videos as evidence is the quality of equipment available to schools. One key lesson learned by the Hansard Society was that low production quality interfered with the ability of Select Committees and All-party Parliamentary Groups to use the videos. This could result in difficulty replicating Y Vote Video at other schools if adequate equipment is not available. In addition, teachers and project managers will have to monitor closely the quality of the videos produced.

At this stage it is impossible to judge the value of the videos beyond raising the students' awareness. Whether or not this method of collecting and giving evidence should be recommended for future roll-out will be determined once Parliamentarians have commented on this form of evidence.

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to identify a number of elements

of good practice and 'lessons learned' that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- conducting training workshops about UK democratic institutions prior to producing the videos provided students with valuable knowledge about how Parliament takes evidence and what role Parliament can play in improving issues; and
- partnering a specific school and incorporating the project into their curriculum provided students with time to research their subject and gain confidence in approaching individuals for interviews.

Lessons learned

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

- when partnering a school it is important to coordinate project schedules with exam schedules, and agree at an early stage how many students and classes will be allowed to participate;
- when schools are expected to provide equipment it is important to determine whether or not the equipment will be adequate

for the project's requirements; and

- when testing a new method of communication with Parliament, it is essential to identify any technical requirements to ensure the product can be used.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Fiona Booth from the Hansard Society at: F.Booth@hansard.lse.ac.uk 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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