

The commitment expressed by the Australian Government and the youth sector to improved collaboration and consultation between the sectors is a positive step in the development of effective policies and services for young Australians.

The 'Youth Initiatives' section on p.64 of this issue discusses the Australian Government's National Strategy for Young Australians. This page features invited assessments of the strategy from two leading organisations in the youth sector.

The articles are also available for comment on the ACYS blog: <http://youthstudies.wordpress.com/>

We encourage all interested parties to participate in the discussion or to contribute articles.

FYA: Youth policy needs more youth consultation

The National Youth Strategy, alongside other statements such as the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, signals a shift in policy narrative towards greater recognition of the importance of active citizenship and consultation with young people and representative peak bodies in shaping Australia's future. This shift presents a significant opportunity and potential to change, improve and extend the ways that young people participate in making decisions that affect their future.

While the National Youth Strategy represents a welcome and major step forward, the voice of young people continues to be largely absent in the formulation and implementation of policy related to this shift.

'Young people are frustrated that they are not being heard or taken seriously.'



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Research undertaken by The Foundation for Young Australians and the Whitlam Institute reveals that young people are frustrated that they are not being heard or taken seriously. Much of the effort of many young people to participate is also often overlooked. For example, engagement in informal settings and unconventional forms (e.g. through social enterprise) is often not understood or recognised and is sometimes dismissed.

Attempts to engage young people through consultation, such as the Youth 2020 summit, have been seen by some to be 'fairly tokenistic'. A number of young people expressed disappointment with the poor organisation and the last-minute withdrawal of key government representatives at the launch of the National Strategy for Young Australians in 2009. The consultation process was criticised elsewhere for being costly, excluding several large youth-led organisations and failing to connect with the majority of young Australians. A major challenge to

government is to genuinely listen to and enter into more active dialogue with young people.

As we move forward, we need to keep some fundamental questions front and centre: What do young people believe to be in their best interests? How do young people define success in study, work and life? Are their views valued and how can we demonstrate this? Though the answers are in principle quite obvious, their practical recognition is very much a work in progress.

Lucas Walsh

Director of Research

The Foundation for Young Australians

AYAC: Collaboration with youth sector vital to strategy success

While the Australian Government should be commended for putting the needs of Australian young people at the forefront of their policy agenda through the development of a national youth strategy, AYAC is concerned that the lack of comprehensive consultation with young people, and the sector that supports them, may be the strategy's downfall.

In Europe and Canada, national youth policy frameworks have been highly successful in improving service delivery, as well as promoting legislative change that has resulted in positive outcomes for young people. Central to this success has been the genuine commitment from governments to work hand-in-hand with the non-government sector.

Unfortunately many sector workers and young people who participated in the Australian

Government's National Conversation left the process feeling conned rather than consulted. This feeling was validated when the final strategy almost mirrored the draft presented to participants during the consultation process. Most young Australians and youth workers who AYAC has spoken with have not heard about the strategy, let alone been consulted.

While the government says the strategy will be used primarily by departments implementing policy that affects young people, in the future it may have significant implications for the non-government sector and young people who use its services, if the strategy is used to determine, among other things, funding arrangements and issue priorities.

To really make a difference in young people's lives, to create effective policy frameworks and to direct program funding to where it's needed most, the non-government sector cannot be ignored, because its services predominantly partner with government to develop and implement programs that actively support and educate young people.

For the strategy to be truly successful, the government needs to make a greater investment in the identified policy priority areas, and recognise the value of the work done by services across the country.

It is only with a genuinely collaborative attitude that we can work towards building a community that is supportive, respectful and safe for Australian young people.

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