

Democracy, what does that mean?

Young people and E-participation
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Objectives

- ❑ To explore the benefits, problems and opportunities that e-democracy is offering, and compare e-democracy as a broad approach to other methods of securing youth participation
- ❑ To investigate the feasibility of extending e-democracy initiatives for young people
- ❑ The survey asked young people about
 - Their attitudes to local politics;
 - The issues they are interested in;
 - Their internet 'habits'; and
 - The kind of opportunities for participation young people would welcome.



RBA Research... Methodology

- ❑ 75 peer sessions with young people (196 in total)
 - aged 11-19
 - Bristol, Surrey, Kingston, North Lincolnshire, East Riding, North West
- ❑ Interviews with local stakeholders including teachers, council officers, councillors, and youth workers
- ❑ Interviews with national stakeholders including ODPM, The British Youth Council, The National Youth Agency, The Hansard Society, LGA
- ❑ Desk Research



Kate's Research...Methodology

- ❑ Questionnaire completed by 117 young people aged 12-16 from two local schools
- ❑ Purposive cluster sampling - schools as 'clusters' of types of young people
- ❑ Access to schools – the issue of 'gatekeepers'

- The City Academy Bristol**
 - Deprived/Working-class cluster
 - Ethnically diverse – less than 50% of white British origin.
- St Mary Redcliffe & Temple**
 - Affluent/Middle-class cluster
 - Ethnicity – 80% of white British origin



Are young people interested?

- ❑ **YES!**
- ❑ Sketchy understanding of 'democracy' – don't see it as being relevant to them.
- ❑ Young people are interested in a range of 'political' issues, but lack appropriate and attractive opportunities to get involved
- ❑ Over half of the young people surveyed said that they would like to have more opportunities to express their views to the council
- ❑ Only 10% agreed that "local politicians listen to what young people have to say and understand our needs"



So...what are young people interested in?

- ❑ 'entertainment facilities'
- ❑ 'services for young people'
- ❑ 'sports & activities'
- ❑ 'open spaces'
- ❑ 'education'
- ❑ 'crime prevention'



But why do some young people choose not to get involved?

- ❑ They don't understand political issues
- ❑ They dislike politics in general
- ❑ Because they are young they feel their views are not important
- ❑ No-one takes young people's views seriously
- ❑ Young people are cynical
- ❑ Apathy

KEY MESSAGE - Nothing will encourage young people to take an interest in speaking up about issues of importance if they do not believe action will be taken as a result



Young People & The Internet

- ❑ 85% of the young people surveyed said they use the internet regularly.
- ❑ Young people use the internet for a wide range of activities, including finding information, playing games and email.
- ❑ 47% stated that they would use a website to contact the council 'frequently', whilst 69% stated they would use such a site at least 'sometimes'.



What type of activities?

Enthusiasm for interactive and participatory activities:

Interactive features (i.e. polls, chat, bulletin boards)

Online petitioning

Surveys on various issues

Details about Young People's Forum

Less interest in initiatives that are informative in nature:

Interviews with Councillors/politicians

'Day in the life...' style features

Live chat with Councillors/politicians



Examples of Activities

- Kingston Online Surgeries
 - Familiar surrounds & direct access without face-to-face contact – less intimidating
 - However, young people want a speedy response – suggested a pop up game to play while waiting.
- Citizenship online games
 - Fun and enjoyable – well received by those who tried them.
 - Suggestions – more challenging for older children, more scope for creativity in response, language & marketing.
- I'm a councillor, get me out of here
 - Being able to question elected representatives of key issues
 - Gain greater understanding of how Local Gov. operates



Key messages for practitioners

- Take a leap -try something different
- Invest in online promotion and outreach
- Keep it simple
- Let young people set the agenda
- Let them get involved at the design stage of any initiative and make sure they test it
- Review anything you do and develop the approach
- Listen, provide action...and don't forget to FEEDBACK!



Conclusions

- Young people are regular and competent internet users and Internet technology has the potential to act as an excellent medium for encouraging greater participation.
- The political appetite of young people is best (and perhaps only) satisfied by engagement in meaningful, consultative processes. Young people want opportunities which enable them to get **involved** with local democracy.
- E-channels of communication must not be used in isolation. They should compliment existing channels.
- Schools must play a key role in introducing the initiatives to young people, encouraging and supporting them to use the initiatives.



Conclusions

- The success of future e-democracy initiatives is dependent on whether they present young people with a genuine opportunity to express their opinions and needs in a way which they feel will have an impact.
- Young people do not seek an additional information channel, which casts them as passive recipients of services, but rather would welcome initiatives which genuinely seek to engage them in **discussion, debate and decision making.**



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