

## OUR HISTORY

The British Youth Council is the National Youth Council of the UK. A youth-led charity, we empower young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. We support young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.

We are young people - and our charity aims to help other young people, whatever their background or barriers they face, to make the world a better place for us all.

### THE BEGINNING

**1948**

#### **Uniting young people across Britain since 1948**

The British Youth Council was born into a tense world of international relations just after World War Two. Established by the Foreign Office of the British Government in 1948 in preparation for the 'World Assembly on Youth', the original purpose of the British Youth Council was to unite young people in Britain against the forces of communism.

**1960s**

#### **Independence in the free-thinking 60s**

In 1963 the British Youth Council gained independence from the British Government, and we've been a charity working to champion the opinions of young people ever since. The British Youth Council I work to bring together youth councils across the UK really took off in the late Sixties, before expanding into developing our own network of local youth councils. This move was championed by then the British Youth Council staff member John Denham, now Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

**1970s**

#### **Supporting young people's causes in the 70s**

In the 1970s the British Youth Council really made an impact, helping build the profile of youth politics. In 1971, Prime Minister Edward Heath gave the keynote speech at the 'World Assembly on Youth' organised by the British Youth Council in Manchester. By now, the British Youth Council's tradition of electing young, vibrant Chairs was making a huge impression on youth policy, with David Hunt (now a member of the House of Lords), Janet Paraskeva (now First Civil Service Commissioner) and Peter Mandelson (now Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform) all serving terms as British Youth Council Chair.

As our reputation grew, the British Youth Council published the influential "Youth Unemployment: Cause and Cures" report, taking it to the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, in Downing Street to discuss the issue of youth unemployment. The British Youth Council

representatives also attended the controversial 11th World Festival on Youth, held in Cuba, where debate included human rights issues in the USSR and USA

## **1980s**

### **Tough times in the cash-strapped 80s**

The 1980s were tough times for the British Youth Council. In 1987, the British Youth Council in Scotland closed due to funding cuts by the Government at the time. In this period, the British Youth Council also had its founding Foreign Office grant withdrawn, following changes in international relations. However, BYC marched on, continuing to support and promote local youth councils, as well as helping to make history as the UK signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

## **1990s**

### **Leading in research and campaigns on youth issues in the 90s**

In the 1990s the British Youth Council teamed up with other organisations to lead campaigns including getting young people registered to vote, and on issues of young people's employment. The British Youth Council also blazed a trail in youth policy and research, with a number of influential journals and publications. With the support of the Government, the British Youth Council also increased our direct training and participation programmes, such as Youth on Board, reaching into youth organisations and local youth councils.

A decade of hard work in research, consultation and policy culminated in the year 2000, when the British Youth Council conducted the biggest consultation with young people ever commissioned by the Government, on issues like education, employment and young people having their say. The findings, 'Listening to the Unheard', led the formulation of the European White Paper on Youth which BYC coordinated as the UK members of the European Youth Forum.

## **00s**

### **Empowering young people in the Noughties**

The British Youth Council continues to build on our past successes and we pride ourselves on being a unique and inspiring organisation working across the UK to empower young people aged 25 and under to have a voice and be heard. The British Youth Council is truly led by young people for young people. Our Board of Trustees is made up entirely of young people, our staff team works alongside young volunteers, and we have a fantastic group of young campaigners and media spokespeople.

In 2008, our 60th anniversary year, the British Youth Council celebrated with a series of campaign activities designed to promote positive images of young people by celebrating our achievements over the past 60 years and the value of our contribution today. This included the British Youth Council '16 at 60' campaign to lower the voting age to 16. The British Youth Council has been campaigning for votes at 16 for over a decade, and along with the other members of the Votes at 16 Coalition, feels that now is the time for the Government to make a brave move to empower the next generation.

The full 'Celebrating 60 years of the British Youth Council's story can be obtained if you'd like to read more about the issues, people, and events that have shaped the British Youth Council in the past. It is this legacy which inspires today's members, volunteers, trustees and staff team to

continue blazing a trail on behalf of young people across the UK - whoever we are and wherever we're from.

**2010**

## **2010 and beyond**

We're certainly busy! We're working flat out to continue enabling young people to campaign for change and a better future, to grow our network of over 500 local youth councils and member organisations, and to support young people to play their part in making the decisions that affect them.

We are delighted to have added some recognition to our brand - with Investors in Volunteers, PQASSO Level 2, and Charity Commission Quality Standard kitemarks along with Positive Images Awards 2010, and Board of the Year 2010.

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SOURCE: British Youth Council website, 2024