

# Positive for Youth

What it means for  
young people

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If you are aged between 13 and 19 and live in England, then the Government's *Positive for Youth* policy is about you.

It brings together the work of all relevant government departments into a vision for how all parts of society – including councils, schools, charities and businesses – can work more closely together to help all young people realise their potential.

## Context

In this difficult financial climate, the Government knows that you may be concerned about your future or about the future of local services for you. It also knows that many young people still need early help to overcome the disadvantages they face in life, or to protect them from harm.

## The Positive for Youth vision

*Positive for Youth* aims to address these concerns and set out a way forward.

The kind of society that young people have said they want is one in which all young people have a voice and the supportive relationships, strong ambitions, and good opportunities they need to realise their potential.

## Youth voice

A society that is 'Positive for Youth' will respect your rights – particularly your right to have your voice heard on issues that affect your life – and expect you to respect the rights of others.

You can use the messages in *Positive for Youth* to show your council, school, health service, or any other service provider that they must listen to and take account of your views.

This doesn't mean that they must simply do anything you want. It means that the decisions they make must be informed by your views and they must explain how their decisions affect you.

The Government wants every local authority to have a group of young people that is able to represent your views in decisions about local services. It also wants young people to be involved in inspecting the quality of these services.

Young people say they are tired of getting a bad press. The Government wants your achievements and positive contributions to society to be recognised and celebrated. It wants you to speak up when you see negative media images and reporting that you think is unfair or unhelpful.

The Government will fund the British Youth Council to:

- set up a new group of young people to advise government ministers directly on how policies affect the lives of young people and their families;
- advise councils and others on how to involve young people in making decisions and inspecting services;
- make sure there are young people able to represent your voice in the media; and

- support the UK Youth Parliament, which means every local authority area should have their own young person elected to speak out about the needs of local young people.

Each local authority area will soon have a new organisation called Local HealthWatch to make sure that young people will have a voice in shaping local health services.

### *Helping all young people succeed*

Your parents, carers, and families have the main responsibility to support and help you through your teenage years as you make the transition to adulthood.

The Government is investing to support and strengthen families, particular those with significant problems, and acting to safeguard young people whose family situation puts them at risk.

Your success in education is crucial to the rest of your life.

The Government is:

- reviewing the National Curriculum;
- allowing schools more freedom to do what they know works best and giving them extra funding to help them support their most disadvantaged students;
- providing a bursary, through schools and colleges, to support young people who most need help with the costs of staying on in post 16 further education; and
- raising the age that young people must stay in education or training to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015 – this can be in school or college, in an Apprenticeship, or in work or volunteering with training.

The Government has also recently announced a Youth Contract worth over £1bn to support more 16 and 17 year olds to participate in education or training, to expand opportunities for young apprenticeships, and to help more young people find work.

Your experience outside of school or college is also crucial in shaping your character and ambitions for the future.

This includes what happens at home, but it also includes the support you get from adults you can trust and through the opportunities and services available to you in your local area. If you face serious problems you may need specialist early help to prevent problems getting worse and causing you harm.

The country's challenging financial situation means that in many areas difficult decisions are having to be made about funding for youth work and other services you might use.

*Positive for Youth* sets out a new vision for how councils, charities, communities, business and others can work together more closely, and with you, to deliver these services. Working in this way is better than simply cutting back existing services to fit the funding available.

In addition to the services funded by your local council, the Government is funding a number of extra opportunities for young people.

You may have a new state of the art Myplace youth centre open or opening soon in your area. There are 63 in England. The Government has provided the money to build these

centres which will be hubs for a wide range of activities and services for you. If you are 16 in 2012, you may be one of over 30,000 young people involved in National Citizen Service. This will give you the opportunity to work alongside young people who come from different backgrounds to yours in a challenging programme of character building activities and social action in the community. The programme is being funded directly by the Government in addition to the money it gives to councils. There will be even more opportunities get involved in 2013 when there will be up to 60,000 places available, rising to 90,000 in 2014. Over time, the aim is to give every 16 year old the opportunity to take part in National Citizen Service.

Around 140,000 young people are involved in the Sea Cadet Corps, Combined Cadet Force, Army Cadet Force or Air Training Corps. The Cadet Forces have over 3,300 units across the UK. The Government wants to work with schools and communities so that more of you have access to a local Cadet unit through which you can get involved in exciting personal development opportunities.

### **Your role**

You have a role to play too in creating a society that is more 'positive for youth'.

With the right support, you can

- take the initiative to shape your own life and be a positive influence in the lives of your peers
- be creative, enterprising, and entrepreneurial
- take responsibility, show leadership, and take advantage of the opportunities open to you
- act to help others, including through volunteering
- respect other people and recognise authority and boundaries.

You can speak up on issues that concern you, both nationally and locally, and challenge negative media reporting when you think it is unfair.

You can also get involved in your local area – helping to make decisions and inspect and give feedback on the quality of services, to improve them and to make them more youth friendly.

To find out how to get involved contact your local council or the British Youth Council.

### **What next?**

The Government will work with young people and youth organisations to understand how things are going for young people, and the progress that is being made in realising the *Positive for Youth* vision.

It will publish an audit of overall progress at the end of 2012.

### **Further Information**

*Positive for Youth* can be downloaded from the Department for Education's website at [www.education.gov.uk/positiveforyouth](http://www.education.gov.uk/positiveforyouth). An executive summary is also available.

## **Case Study - Sheffield**

*Positive for Youth* contains a number of case studies. The following examples show the role young people have played in one particular area.

### **Young people inspecting services**

In Sheffield, young inspectors use a 'mystery shopper' technique to review activities and services for young people – from sports facilities to youth clubs and social venues. Young people meet privately at the end of the session to complete their assessment framework, discussing strengths and weaknesses of the service and award the service with a star rating, including constructive feedback on recommendations for improvements. The service receives a scoring sheet together with a set of recommendations and a certificate. Services that are not highly rated have the opportunity to improve and apply to be re-inspected, receiving an improved certificate.

### **Young people's role in preventing disturbances**

Young people in Sheffield took action in August 2011 to discourage their peers from joining in the disturbances that were taking place in other cities across the country.

On Tuesday 9 August, Sheffield Futures – the city's main provider of youth services and youth engagement groups – met partner organisations including Sheffield City Council and South Yorkshire Police to discuss a strategy for preventing riots in Sheffield. As an organisation that puts young people at its heart, Sheffield Futures decided to involve young people in its planning, knowing that this would be vital to success. They then took the lead in establishing a panel of young people representing all existing local participation groups including Young Advisors, Sheffield Youth Council, and the UK Youth Parliament. The panel of young people was briefed on what was happening. They couldn't understand why people would want to wreck their own environments in which they live, play and work – so they came up with a slogan 'Steel City NOT Steal City' to show that they were proud to be from Sheffield. They recommended the quickest and most effective way of sending a positive message to the young people of Sheffield was through social media networks. Throughout the week that followed the panel monitored social media sites. They passed on any intelligence they gleaned to the police within minutes enabling officers to target potential 'hotspots' in a low key manner without antagonising situations. They used social media to inform the young people of Sheffield about what was really happening. The panel also put together an information leaflet outlining young people's rights and responsibilities, and the consequences of their actions in relation to the riots, which was distributed widely through all youth workers and youth centres in Sheffield. Interviews with panel members on local radio and in local newspapers made clear that young people were taking positive action against the riots.

One Sheffield Young Advisor said "Through joint working between professionals and young people we were better able to create a powerful force to counteract the riots. This relationship will continue to have a positive influence within the city both now and in the future."

### **Young people influencing the local democratic process**

The mosquito is an electronic device designed to disperse groups of young people from specific places by emitting high frequency sound that only young people can hear. Following a successful campaign led by Harrison Carter, the member of the UK Youth Parliament for Sheffield, the Cabinet of Sheffield City Council voted unanimously in January 2011 to end the use of mosquito devices on all council buildings. It also recommended that partners such as the police do likewise and refuse to endorse the use of mosquito devices across Sheffield.

Other authorities that have taken similar action against the mosquito device include Lancashire (May 2007), Knowsley (June 2007), Kent (June 2008) and Kirklees (September 2010) – all as a result of successful campaigns by young people.