



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs

Chair: Natascha Engel MP
Vice-Chair: Simon Hughes MP
Vice-Chair: Peter Bottomley MP

NOTES OF MEETING

Financial Support and Wellbeing and AGM

Wednesday 28 October 2009.

Present.

A list of those registered for the meeting is in *Appendix A*.

Annual General Meeting.

At the Annual General Meeting all officers plus Lynda Waltho MP were re-elected.

Introduction to meeting on Financial Support and Wellbeing.

Natascha Engel MP. Natascha welcomed everyone to the APPG on Youth Affairs and explained how the Minister Helen Goodman MP had been delayed so the group would have half an hour to use before her arrival.

Stephen Matthews, YMCA England. Explained that young people in the preparation group had developed four questions for the Minister and that this time now gave the group a chance to discuss a whole host of other questions to warm up.

Natascha Engel MP. I used to be on the Work and Pensions Select Committee so I can write letters and use other avenues to get questions answered. What happened at the last meeting with Liam Byrne MP, then Minister for the Cabinet Office which was really fantastic was watching his face as the questions were asked, he really enjoyed it and learnt a lot from the meeting. That's what today should be about.

Misha Julian, Volunteer, Princes Trust. I've been rejected from Jobseekers as there's a problem of discrimination as a young person with bipolar.

Natascha Engel MP. I've not heard of that before, Is that an issue people have come across widely?

Jennie Crossling, Volunteer, Princes Trust. There's a problem of job centres not being helpful for young people, a lack of personal approach, no-one around to really help.

Natascha Engel MP. That is a very common problem, also there's problems with those hot phones or warm phones. There is stupidity in being told to go to a job centre and then there being told only to apply by phone. Especially at the moment when there's more people going into job centres. If they are just restricting advice to people to people who are already claimants, I know why they're doing it as if they find you a job that isn't a tick against job numbers.

Jennie Crossling, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. The question of ticking boxes shouldn't be part of their work.

Paul Connolly, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. I went to the job centre to look for work and they said we've only got four minutes to sign you up so they had to do that.

Natascha Engel MP. Did you come to the last meeting that we had? It was a really interesting meeting and the thing that came out of it the most was welfare issues. Young people already have quite a lot to deal with, in terms of the image of young people, and on top of that you have other issues. The British Youth Council is doing a big campaign on the equalization of the minimum wage, so you have discrimination at that level but then also you have additional problems on top of that in the welfare system. You also have sixteen hour rule which a few of you may have fallen foul of. That was the thing that came out more strongly out of that meeting.

Dai Davies MP. There's an impersonal touch to job centres. You stand in an open plan room, wondering why you're there. 16 to 18 year olds are not seen in the same way as 18 year olds, there's a void.

Nicola Striven, Youth worker, Prince's Trust. This lack of contact affects young people.

Bex Groves, Volunteer, Young Advisors. It costs employers more to employ young disabled people as insurance companies charge more, an extra £2000. When you're from a rural area that stops employment.

Natascha Engel MP. Where do you come from?

Bex Groves, Volunteer, Young Advisors. Tintagel. I'm part of Young Advisors.

Steve Lee. Youth Access. Youth Access released research on Monday that found over one million young people failed to get advice on serious welfare issues – which costs the Government £1 million and costs young people themselves. There needs to be a cross-cutting Government strategy on this. We

need to look at experiences with job centres. The Social Inclusion Unit are already doing a study of job centres for young people and what could be more effective.

Natascha Engel MP. The reason why we talked to Liam Byrne MP last time was because he is Cabinet and effectively sits above all departments. We can't wait for issues not to be youth anymore, it's just not right. What's the best way to do this, that is the question. Groups like this are really helpful, the opportunity to get different departments together. The access by young to rights cuts across everything as that what this is about. Many young people don't know what they're rights are let alone getting access to them.

Steve Lee, Youth Access. Said will circulate report to members of the APPG on Youth Affairs.

Natascha Engel MP. When I was on the select committee we visited job centres around the country, even though they had the same colour coding and layout but they were all different. If you had good individuals working there it made all the difference.

Natascha Engel MP. The other real problem I find is that they don't cater for people who are not comfortable with writing as well. The way we have found that really makes things change, is hearing directly from young people. Its about talking to as many people as we possibly can who are in position to make changes – that's why we have Helen coming today as hopefully once she hears your stories and questions that will make her go away and think. Whether these questions are about having youth advisors or having training in job centres plus to make staff understand young people is up to you.

Jennie Crossling, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. It's more about young people knowing the system is not working for them. There's a lack of trust in the system. A lot of young people feel we can't change anything, we go and talk to Ministers and then it gets written up and nothing changes anyway.

Natascha Engel MP. And this is what we're trying to do.

Jennie Crossling, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. They [MPs] need to have a hands-on approach and come and hear our opinions.

Natascha Engel MP. It's the problem of the way we do things – elections and things. You would go to see your MP who then lobbies the Minister on your behalf. What we haven't done today is organize for you to meet with your MP – we're doing this collectively. The Minister comes here and realizes it's a large group of people, an important group of people. If you ask the Minister directly your set of questions then she has to answer the question.

Paul Connolly, Volunteer, Princes Trust. In the area I live in I don't even know who my MP is as he's not really involved with young people. MPs don't make an effort to meet us; it should be a two way thing shouldn't it?

David Clark, British Youth Council. At BYC we know that the power is what happens in the MPs inbox. This meeting is one platform to get it across but right to your MP as when it gets brought up in Parliament she'll say actually my constituents have been writing to me about this and she can write letters to Ministers too. Things do change but you can't think that this one thing will change it. Talk to you MP, they like to hear from their constituents as that's what they do.

Jennie Crossling, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. Many young people have just given up.

David Clark, The British Youth Council. But you could change that if you said to your friends I wrote to my MP?

Bex Groves, Young Advisors. Young people do not fit into the boxes or categories defined by the Government so therefore there's not the right help for them.

Sophie Richings, Volunteer, Scout Association. We had success with our Rain tax campaign – when we asked MPs to stop it – we did this by making the campaign accessible to young people and getting them involved.

Hessel Williams, NACRO. There's no feedback coming back from MPs on the changes they make for young people. That is not coming across. There should be lines of communication going to young people about what's changing.

Natascha Engel MP. We are trying by doing this. I totally agree with you about your communications point. How do we do that? I represent a constituency of 71,000 voters in it and that's only people who are over 18. That's why other MPs do not often go into schools, colleges. I do but it means I'm dealing with additional thousands of people. How can I communicate with young people?

Hessel Williams, NACRO. When young people do something that's not positive it gets out pretty quickly in the media. You've got to work with the media. If we don't raise young people's self esteem nothings going to work.

Natascha Engel MP. I totally take all those points about working with the media. I've had meetings with my local newspapers that about the fact that every week they had a hoodie, thug etc on the front page and every time they say they'll do something more positive about young people and then the very next day there's a negative story.

Muna Ally, Volunteer, YouthNet. Are we going to see change? Can the Minister do something to let us know if there will be any change?

Natascha Engel MP. I'll pick that up in a minute. As we have done things in the past, writing letters to Ministers and things.

Sean O'Halloran, Chair, Youth Advisors. Explained work of Young Advisors and their research for government on youth issues and how this directly builds youth empowerment.

Robbie Catchford, Volunteer, The Scouts Association. Asked the rest of the group to suggest what they would do to get young people involved with their MPs. Would like to hear some suggestions.

Helen Goodman MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Work and Pensions, arrives.

Natascha Engel MP. If we could have some positive suggestions for when Helen sits down. We've had quite a heated debate about the Government not listening to young people and some very specific questions on welfare issues. We've now only got twenty minutes left so let's get straight into questions.

Questions:

Paul Connolly, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. Can the Government support young people over the age of 19 to access Apprenticeships? (We don't stop being young at 19).

Chris Loftus, Volunteer, Prince's Trust. What does the Government expect an apprenticeship scheme to do for young people? We would like to see long-term all apprentices knowing what they will get out of an apprenticeship: whether it is a job, accreditation or otherwise.

Helen Goodman MP. The Minister reiterated that there are chances for young people aged over 19 to do apprenticeships and will talk to other ministerial colleagues and get back to group on this question.

Muna Ally, Volunteer, YouthNet. How does the Government measure the entitlement of students to financial support and why do people doing an Apprenticeship not get the same level of support as students?

Helen Goodman MP. The Minister reiterated that students are not working, Apprentices are. The entitlement to financial support is means-tested and there is currently a cap on top-up fees. She is currently reviewing the overlap between the student loans system and benefits, particularly single parent benefits as students come in all shapes and sizes.

Katie Hamilton, Respect Advisory Group. Do you intend to simplify the benefits system? How? When?

Helen Goodman MP. The forms have been through a process of simplification over the last few years.

Natascha Twigg, Creekside Foyer. Why is it that I feel better-off on benefits? The two opportunities that I have to progress – education and work – will affect my benefits, particularly my housing benefit. So if I continue to study or enter employment I loose out. Surely the system should help me?

Helen Goodman MP. There are traps for young people on benefits. This is the kind of situation I would like to look into.

Natascha Twigg. Creekside Foyer. What ideas do you have? You could let people earn more on the Minimum Wage?

Helen Goodman MP. It would be very expensive, I've looked at estimates. As a result of this meeting I'm going to talk to people who manage job centres and are not tuned into young people's issues.

Margareet Ayoola, Volunteer, YouthNet.

It is our belief that the current system does not support young people. We want a system that gives honest financial advice, and is an open-door providing on going support for all. Is this possible?

Helen Goodman MP. The Minister explained that have to have rules that apply for everyone –in order to deal with problems of inefficiencies were developing a quicker application system.

Division Bell – MPs and Minister leave to vote.

Natascha Engel MP returned to Chair the meeting and thanked guests for joining this debate and took further questions. Young people expressed that were unhappy by the level of detail and amount of time given by the Minister.

Natascha Engel MP reiterated that she would pass on their feelings to the Minister and would send a letter reiterating the questions they asked today.

Natascha Engel MP gave her email address ENGELN@parliament.uk for the group to contact her between meetings.

-----Meeting ends-----

Appendix A: Attendance

- Natascha Engel MP;
- Lynda Waltho MP;
- Dai Davies MP;
- Hannah Dobbin, NCVYS;
- Cherie Aris, Volunteer, NCVYS;
- Natalie Grant, Volunteer, NCVYS;
- Dilshan Shavin Fonseka, Volunteer, NCVYS;
- Steven Pryse, NCVYS;
- Selena Brown, NCVYS;
- Daniela Oliveros, NCVYS and Dare London;
- Stephen Matthews, YMCA England;
- Lindsay Martin, YMCA England;
- Sean O'Halloran, Chair, Young Advisors;
- Bex Groves, Young Advisor, Young Advisors;
- Jane Brooker-Wood, Young Advisors;
- Sem Moema, The Scout Association;
- Tarik Bumer, The Scout Association;
- Robbie Catchford, The Scout Association;
- David Moorcraft, The Scout Association;
- Sam Morris, The Scout Association;
- Sophie Richings, The Scout Association;
- Scott Ridings, The Scout Association;
- David Clark; The British Youth Council;
- Helen Deakin, The British Youth Council;
- James Smith, The British Youth Council;
- Siobhan McNulty, Volunteer, The British Youth Council;
- Joel Odumosu, Volunteer, The British Youth Council;
- Emmanuel Adanlawo, Volunteer, The British Youth Council;
- Sophie Newman, Volunteer, The British Youth Council;
- Katie Hamilton, Volunteer, Respect Advisory Group;
- Katie Marple, Diana Award;
- Madhia Qayyum, Volunteer, Diana Award;
- Michael Castle, Volunteer, Diana Award;
- Hessel Williams, NACRO – Creekside Foyer;
- Harman Sandher, Foyer Federation;
- Tom Johnson, Foyer Federation;
- Natasha Twigg, Creekside Foyer;
- Sharon Savanhu, Creekside Foyer;
- Darragh Ayres, Creekside Foyer;
- Kirsty Simpson, Creekside Foyer;
- Chantelle Kelly, Volunteer, YouthNet;
- Muna Ally, Volunteer, YouthNet;
- Anjeli Shah, Volunteer, YouthNet;
- Margareet Ayoola, Volunteer, YouthNet;
- James Barradell-Smith, YouthNet;

- Alicia Hardy, YouthNet;
 - Swatee Deepak, YouthNet;
 - Teresa Broughton, Citi UK Consumer;
 - Moira McKerracher, UK Commission for Employment and Skills;
 - Lindsay Nash, PricewaterhouseCoopers;
 - Deb Conner, KPMG;
 - Michaela Kirsop, pfeg;
 - Rachel Allan, Barclays Bank Plc;
 - Steve Stillwell, Financial Services Authority;
 - Linda Jack, Financial Services Authority;
 - Alex Burch, Independent Academic Research Studies;
 - Caroline Donald, Young Foundation;
 - Ashley Sweetland, UK Youth Parliament;
 - Steve Lee, Youth Access;
 - Charlotte Hill, UK Youth;
 - Kim Maynard, Catch22;
 - Denise Morrisroe, Equality and Human Rights Commission;
 - Brid Scanlon, Equality and Human Rights Commission;
 - Robert Slinn, Saint Vincent de Paul Society;
 - John Moorcraft, Youth at Risk;
 - Steve Lee, Youth Access;
 - Helen Longworth, Duke of Edinburgh;
 - Katherine Hill, Children's Society;
 - Peta Boucher, Leap Confronting Conflict;
- and many others.