

Why young people's power?

Youth power means that young people can work towards being involved and resourced as adults in our social and political world. Young people can imagine a better world, and can be equipped to use changemaking means – such as lobbying, organising, learning, dreaming big, campaigning, mobilising, learning and community building – to do that.

Youth power needs to be thought about in its own right, alongside youth voice. Youth voice means that young people are listened to by institutions that are generally created by and run by adults, and that those institutions respond to what they hear. Both voice and power are important. They may overlap and work with one another, but they can be thought about separately.

In practice, our social and political world makes young people's power very difficult to establish and exert, especially young people who experience structural injustice and inequalities. Young people in general face great prejudice from powerful institutions about their talent, capacity and knowledge to be involved in changemaking. We do not educate most British young people to think that their power matters, or how to use it within our system. Schools do not tend to focus on practically building young people's political literacy or their power to make change.

Intersectionally, diverse young people face particular barriers to their involvement in holding power to account. Young people are legally and developmentally distinct from adults, but this should not justify adults instinctively hoarding power or stop people from looking at how young people can build power within these parameters.

Where should young people work for change?

Young people are often faced with a paradox. They are sometimes told to limit any change they want to make to small local issues. On the other hand, when we talk about making change, young people are often told go to their MP – the very apex of British power. But the power held in society that impacts young people resides in all kinds of places and institutions.

Just like adults, young people need to address the sources of the injustices they experience, both locally, regionally and nationally – even internationally. Here are some of the systems and locations of power that young people focussed on:

- Central government at Westminster
- National governments (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)
- Local or regional authorities (Councils, Greater London Authority)
- Members of Parliament or the House of Lords
- Members of the Senedd / Northern Ireland Assembly / Scottish Parliament
- National government departments (for example, the Home Office)

Local government departments (for example, local social services or leisure services)

City Mayors

Businesses, industry and/or corporations

Traditional media

Social media

Prominent public figures (this could range from celebrities to people who are leaders and influencers in the areas that you campaign about)

Care system

Youth secure estate

Health authorities

National systems

National charities

Funders

Other campaigners

Local community organisations

Schools and colleges

universities

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