

2017 AUSTRALIAN YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTATION REPORT



CANBERRA

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

ABOUT

THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IS A ROLE APPOINTED ANNUALLY BY UN YOUTH AUSTRALIA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE.

Running since 1999, the Youth Representative holds an extensive, nationwide consultation tour to engage with and discover the issues that are most important to young Australians.

During the tour, the Youth Representative tours the country, engaging and collaborating with young Australians through extensive consultation with students, community organisations and other institutions, in an effort to identify the issues that are most important to youth across the nation.

After the Consultation, the Youth Representative travels to New York as a member of the Australian Mission to the UN where they will attend the the UN General Assembly,

presenting the findings of the Consultation to the General Assembly's Third Committee.

Paige Burton is the 2017 Youth Representative to the United Nations. She is passionate about the role young people can play in international affairs, and educating their peers.

In 2015 and 2016, Paige was recognised for her work by Pro Bono Australia as the youngest ever recipient of the 'Impact 25: The 25 Most Influential People in the Social Sector' award. In 2017, Paige was named as a state finalist for the NSW Young Woman of The Year award.

Team of UN Youth QLD facilitators who helped run the QLD consultations.



With some student leaders at the consultation at Marymount on the Gold Coast.

Presentation of Australia's Youth Statement to the UN General Assembly. In the company of Australia's Permanent Ambassador to the UN- Gillian Bird, and Senator Gavin Marshall.



You can find more stories, photos, and data by following along online, or emailing the Youth Representative with a request.

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FROM THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

PAIGE BURTON

In 2017, I wanted to try and answer the question 'what would society look like if we saw our young people as a product of their values, experiences, knowledge, creativity, and not just of their age. For too long we have dehumanised young people by imagining them as merely young.

This year I asked tens of thousands of young Australians to tell me what they wish their representatives knew, and considered, about them when making policy.

I travelled over 100,000 kilometres meeting tens of thousands of young Australians. My team and I went to hundreds of schools, and community groups. We went to universities, festivals, markets, and conferences.

We ran thousands of consultations, and took them to the United Nations General Assembly. But it didn't end there. We collected data from every Australian Federal Electorate, and I wanted to share it with you. I want you to share the joy of reading the nuanced, complicated, and thoughtful opinions of the young people who live in your electorate.

Young people all over Australia spoke to me about issues relating to the cost of living, unemployment, and economic productivity. They shared the impact of education—both formal and informal on their lives. They told me of their desires for certainty in the realms of global peace and security. They articulated the importance of access to health services, programs, and quality public infrastructure. Young people expressed their experiences of environmental disaster, of unemployment, of forced migration, and of family violence. They shared their gratitude for fantastic educators, and life-changing programs.

If I've learnt anything this year, it's that our voices get stronger the more we listen. And I hope that listening closer to the young people in your electorate brings you as much joy as it has brought me. Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige Burton".





THE 2017 CONSULTATION

WHO? WHERE? HOW? WHAT?

The consultation took place from November 2016 to August 2017. Whilst a large majority of the consultation and data was collected face-to-face through use of paper surveys, online forms were made available to those unable to make it to a session of the Youth Representative's national tour.

The Youth Representative spent approximately one month in every Australian state and territory over the course of the year, working with a team of UN Youth Australia's facilitators to run consultations. Typically, a consultation lasted 1.5 hours.

All Australians between the ages of twelve and twenty five (inclusive) were able to participate in the consultation.

The team visited schools, universities, other educational institutions, community groups, non-profit organisations, festivals, markets, conferences, and held open events to reach more young people. Approximately 45,000 young Australians participated in face-to-face workshops with the Youth Representative and team. Around 2,500 completed web forms, and thousands more followed along with the stories online.

The Consultation aimed to answer the overarching question "what would society look like if we imagined young people in their full complexity?" and the survey took form to ask questions of five broad areas.

1. Engagement:

- Can you name your local Federal MP?
- Do you feel that your opinions are represented in government policy?
- As a young person, do you feel like your opinions are taken seriously by those in power?
- Do you read the news/follow every day?
- Where do you get your news?

2. Youth issues:

- What is the most important issue facing young people in your local area?
- What do you think is the most important issue facing young people in Australia?

3. General issues:

- Which issues would you like to see the government taking more immediate action on?
- Why are these important to you? Do you have suggestions for solutions?

4. Stories:

- What do you wish the government knew, and considered about you and your life when making policy?

5. Learning:

- Are you interested in learning more about current events?
- Are you interested in learning more about the United Nations?
- Are you interested in learning more about how politicians /the government make decisions?

And we threw in some ice-breakers for good measure:

- Cats or Dogs?
- Marvel or DC?
- Netflix or YouTube?
- Winter or Summer?
- Internet or TV?
- Bushwalk or Ocean Swim?





“What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?”

- 1. Mental health services**
- 2. Discrimination**
- 3. Youth engagement with politics**
- 4. Job opportunities**
- 5. Cost of education**
- 6. Climate change**
- 7. Abuse/harrasment**
- 8. Education funding**
- 9. Housing affordability**
- 10. LGBTI Rights**

THE ACT

The average age of the young people from the ACT who participated in my consultation was 16.7. Young people in the ACT are passionate about a large range of issues from curriculum reform to climate change. The top five issues that they would like the government to take action on can be found over the page.

14% of young Territorians in the consultation said that they feel like their opinions are represented by those in the government.

Responses like Alice’s (15): **“We are young adults and most of us have big ideas that are as valid as those of adults and politicians.”** can be seen across the ACT electorates, with many young people calling on their representatives to take them seriously. Of the young Territorians involved in the 2017 consultation, 15% of them feel like their opinions are represented in current government policy, and 37% of them feel like they are taken seriously as a young people, by those in positions of power.

63% of young people across the ACT follow

the news every day. They draw on a variety of sources, including, but not limited to: national broadcasters, radio, online foreign news services. They also get information from social media feeds (predominantly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram). Additionally, Snapchat, and Reddit, local papers, free-to-air broadcast television, new media companies such as Junkee, Pedestrian, and BuzzFeed.

More than half (56%) of young people in the ACT can name their local Federal Member

of Parliament.

64% of the young people in the ACT in the Consultation know what they plan to do for a career, with many concerned about job pathways, and relevant education with frequent talk of career paths leaving them slightly uncertain about their futures.

Curious, we asked about some preferences that young people have for a range of things. 77% prefer dogs to cats. 54% prefer books to movies. 59% prefer Summer to Winter, and 69% prefer a swim in the ocean to a bushwalk.

What some young people in ACT wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:

“My mental health is deteriorating, Im concerned there isn’t enough help or awareness about mental health issues. I am also gay and concerned that marriage equality won’t pass in Australia.” Ameia, 15.

“I wish the government would view us as actual people and citizens rather than minority and kids that can be over looked and put at the bottom when making priorities.” Charisse, 15.

“The fact that the decisions they make will affect us and future generations long after our current politicians have left Parliament - I wish they understood their shortsightedness.” Caitlin, 21.

“That the right to be Australian should not be something you have to fight for. We should be an open, accepting country.” Abigail, 13.

1 Climate change
Was a frequent concern for young people in the ACT
 “We need stronger policies and actions reflecting scientific evidence.” Emma, 13.

2 Gender equality
Equality between genders is important for young people in the ACT
 “I think they need to work on gender equality because everyone should be equal.” Max, 14.

3 Marriage equality
Young people want action
 “Why shouldn’t people be allowed to marry the person they love?” Jemimah, 12.

4 Healthcare
Improving mental health and disability services were of significance.
 “Improving disability and mental health services is not only an issue regarding the Government but also the community. For example, the stigma surrounding

5 Housing affordability
Was frequently mentioned in the consultation
 “Many of us are scared we will never be able to own a house” Mikayla, 15.

94%
 are interested in learning more about current events

76%
 are interested in learning more about the United Nations

74%
 are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

STORIES FROM THE ACT



"I wish the government supported young people to think critically about journalism. An era has ended in which a handful of media groups almost exclusively delivered 'the news'. These groups no longer are the 'gatekeepers' of public information.

This is the most powerful opportunity humanity has ever possessed. But we don't yet know how to use it. When getting our news, people face the largest cacophony of voices from across the globe that they ever have. Schooling should focus more specifically on teaching people to look for the evidence which underlies a claim. Then, evidence itself should be held to greater scrutiny. The public is woefully educated on the motives which may underly a news organisation, journalist, study or other source. We also aren't prepared on how to interpret data. When we see a cited study, that study can be intuitively taken as authoritative. School doesn't teach sufficiently to think about sample size, time, or any range of factors which warrants scepticism. We often hear the phrase 'objectivity' used in a way that implies journalists should have no opinion. But in an era of information overload, where the path forward can seem more ambiguous than ever, perhaps that conception is not helpful - if it ever was. People should expect their journalists to suggest the way forward. Issues with doing so disappear if the public scrutinises those claims rigorously.

Only through fostered scepticism can we build consensus. So let's help people become more sceptical."

Nick, 20, ACT.



"I wish the government could provide more assistance to the children from Defence families. At my school, we have a Defence mentor. It is only my first term at the school and I always enjoy being able to talk with a mentor and fellow students from Defence families.

Before moving to this school, I attended 3 other schools both overseas and interstate. None of which ever supported me. I feel it's important for schools to have these programs because it's hard to have parents who are deployed or living away from us."

Sarah, 14, ACT



"I wish the government knew more of the determination of young people to not be disadvantaged by their postcodes, and recognised the community organisations that support them to achieve regardless of where they live."

Corinda, 20, ACT.



"I wish the government knew that young Australians care about international health crises especially those facing women in Africa. I have particular concern with the poor standards of maternal healthcare that jeopardise the wellbeing of women. Women should have the right to adequate maternal healthcare." Munashe, 19, ACT.



"There should be no discrepancies between the quality and resources of public and private schools, and it's ludicrous there are some private institutions receiving more funding than public. I believe that education is the key to equality in employment, health, and all social aspects of life."

Manon, 19, ACT.



"I wish the government knew how worried I am about the impacts of climate change on our world. The environment is a very important issue that deserves more serious consideration from those in the position to make changes."

Ella, 19, ACT.



"I wish the government had more awareness of women's health issues, and the impact of these issues. Almost one in ten women in Australia live with endometriosis, and yet there is little awareness of what it even is.

For me, it means that I take ridiculously expensive medication imported from Canada so that I can live my life somewhat normally. It means it'll take an extra year to finish my degree. It means I might not get to have children.

Endometriosis is estimated to cost \$7.7 billion dollars annually, so surely there should be more recognition of this disease and more action taken by our government."

Kate, 19, ACT.



"I wish the government knew about the challenges young people-of-colour and immigrants have to face with within our society. The institutional obstacles and the awful recent discourse around the world has only made the situation worse for communities-of-colour. But I know (or at least hope) that Australians and our political leaders are more welcoming than what some of our recent actions might suggest."

Karan, 22, ACT.



"I am simply a passionate young Australian citizen who has been lucky enough to come across some amazing opportunities and incredible people who have helped and continue to help me along my lifelong journey of learning and social impact. However, it's easy for young people, including myself to get lost in the noise of the world and the expectations placed upon us as individuals and as a generation.

I wish the government realised that the youth around Australia and throughout the world want to make a positive difference, but are held back by the system of education we are brought up in. A system that focuses on content and information but doesn't teach us the skills, and provide us with the experiences that are going to be so key to driving our successes. A system that socializes us to believe we aren't capable of changing the world as young people. We just need to be shown doors to opportunities we never even knew existed, and feel empowered by people's belief in our potential.

We change the world everyday, but to change the world in a way that means something unfortunately takes more time than most of us have, and I just don't have that level of patience. We need to promote a culture that fosters young leaders and empowers us to act on our passions in a way that catalyses change, and innovate our education to embody the nexus of skills, creativity and experiences that is so vital in ensuring we not only survive but thrive together in the future we have to live in."

Aqeel, 17, ACT.



"As a young woman, it is so disappointing to see so few women in Cabinet and in parliament at all. If the government is truly committed to gender equality throughout society then they should ensure that the highest levels of government are inclusive of women.

Women have an important voice and I want to see the next generation of girls grow up with more role models in politics."

Steph, 21, ACT.



"I wish the government recognised the importance of an inclusive, extensive, and well resourced arts landscape. Since time immemorial this land has sustained a vital and vibrant tradition of human culture and storytelling. Ensuring every Australian is empowered to share, scrutinise, and celebrate their experiences, identities, and values is essential in honouring this history and enriching our future."

Marni, 19, ACT



"I wish governments knew that health starts with a pathway. The most simple public health solutions are influencing individual's lifestyle-changes through early intervention.

I grew up in a household where my parents were doctors. I very rarely went to the doctor, but it wasn't like I was treated at home from the sick bed. It was because my parents promoted a healthy lifestyle - by teaching me to cook. Sure, I could cook fried chicken but it was easier to make a stir fry. Less oil burns too.

My mother is doing research on something called the Healthy Kids Check for her PhD. It's a mechanism for GPs to give a broad based picture of a child's health through key indicators in the toddler and childhood years of development. She's completing a PhD by publication, and she was 5 years in when a new health minister cut Medicare subsidisation for the Healthy Kids Check. Start healthy lifestyles by allowing early intervention. The pathway to public health requires individuals to be prompted to change their lifestyles. Doctors are the ushers of that pathway. Governments need to recognise they require effective tools to achieve outcomes."

Jeevan, 19, ACT.



"I wish the government knew how hard it is to not have a consistent curriculum and education system for students who move interstate very often.

Due to my father's job, I have lived in WA, Queensland, and the ACT. Each of these states has a differing education system. Even the two states that use the ATAR system have two different ways of calculating it!

This difference makes it very difficult to move often, as you end up not only missing chunks of content that you need, but you also spend a lot of energy trying to understand the different systems. I have done Year 10 Chemistry and Physics 3 times, but have not learnt a thing about DNA because I kept missing the Biology unit in every school I attended that year. This is now affecting the way I approach university entrance exams like the BMAT.

You end up having to choose between getting good grades and making friends, as it's incredibly difficult to do both while trying to fill in things that you have missed and figuring out the dynamics of a new system.

This inconsistency makes life hard for teachers too. They are unable to assess student's abilities properly, sometimes resulting in students who are very capable being kept back from extension classes.

We should not be forced to international schools in the search for a curriculum that is consistent. There's no such thing as an 'Australian school system,' but maybe it's time that there is one."

Rhea, 16, ACT.

55%

of young people in Canberra can name their Federal MP



YOUR ELECTORATE

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION RELATES TO THE FEDERAL ELECTORATE OF CANBERRA

The average age of the young person engaged in my consultation in Canberra was 16.9. Issues related to equality were popular amongst Canberra youth. (Results of top 5 issues they would like action on over the page).

A fairly well-informed electorate, 66% of those consulted said that they read/follow the news every day. Those who follow the news every day mostly follow it on the National Broadcasters, foreign papers (New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera), and online papers (predominantly The Guardian) and social media feeds (Facebook, Reddit). A handful get their information on new media websites (Junkee, Pedestrian, BuzzFeed), with a few still getting their news from free-to-air TV (The Project, Channel 9, 7, and 10).

55% of young people consulted in Canberra can name their local Federal MP. 17% of young people in Canberra say that they feel like their opinions are accurately reflected in current government policy. 39% of the young people consulted saying that they feel, as a young person, that their opinions are taken seriously by those in positions of power.

On a lighter note: 77% of young people in Canberra prefer dogs to cats. 55% of young people in Canberra prefer books to movies. 71% prefer a swim in the ocean and a bushwalk and 62% prefer Summer to Winter.

“What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?”

1. Discrimination
2. Curriculum reform
3. Job opportunities
4. Education accessibility
5. Job opportunities
6. Climate change
7. Education funding
8. Cost of living
9. Immigration reform
10. Abuse/harrasment

65%

of young people in Canberra know what they want to do for a career

What some young people in Canberra wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:

“I wish they knew how their indecision and ignorance impacts young people. I’m in desperate need of medicinal cannabis and can no longer wait for the government to take action. I’m now looking at moving out of our country. They will lose our young people as a direct result of their lack of action” Laura, 22.

“We cannot be categorised in clear boxes, for example: if we are struggling to pay for our first house, not all of us are wasting our money on useless things and the minority who do might not have issues with financial security. They shouldn’t base decisions off something that is such a shallow view of our generation.” Pat, 16.

“Australia has been deemed to be breaking international law in the treatment of asylum seekers and spending an unimaginable sum of money doing it. Meanwhile, the government is struggling to establish a Construction industry watchdog and we lost most of our good politicians to dual citizenship. Government and politicians should stand for more than just about winning the next election.” Allen, 23.

“I wish they would consider not only their duty to the electorate, but their duty to future generations, both born and unborn. While I am now old enough to vote, and to have a say in how I am governed, the politicians that we elect should take into account the duties which we have to maintain and build a society for those who cannot yet vote, or who are not yet born. It is far too easy for elected governments consider only the months or years to the next election.” Alex, 20.

“That I don’t work whilst studying full time at university and it is difficult to pay for parking and printing and trying to live life at the same time as well as having a HECS debt and a preexisting medical condition.” Kelsey, 21.

1

Climate change was the top concern for young people in Canberra

“Climate change- we need to take action now. The biggest problem we have is that people have trouble believing that is happening.” Amelia, 15.

2

Gender equality was raised frequently

“Everyone deserves equal opportunities. We must end gendered discrimination.” Stephanie, 20.

3

Marriage equality

Is important to the young people of Canberra

“Just make marriage equal already allow gay marriage.” Grace, 15.

4

Healthcare

Access and quality is a concern

“Improve awareness about a wider range of mental health issues and remove the stigma around them.” Olivia, 16.

5

Closing the gap

Young people want action

“More schools need to be aware of the still large gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous people and should be educated in what we can do to aid in closing it.” Liz, 16.

93%

are interested in learning more about current events

74%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

71%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions