

# 2017 AUSTRALIAN YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTATION REPORT



**COWPER**

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.

With some participants from UN Youth NSW's Gender Equality Summit held at the University of Cowper.



Students present their ideas for how they would change government policy during the consultation at Collaroy.

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.

[youthrep.unyouth.org.au](http://youthrep.unyouth.org.au)  
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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?





# NEW SOUTH WALES

The average age of the young people from NSW who participated in my consultation was 16.8. Young people across NSW are passionate about a large range of issues from regional development, to curriculum reform. The top five issues that young people in NSW would like the government to take action on can be found over the page.

16% of young New South Welshman in the consultation say that they feel like their opinions are represented by those in the government.

Responses like Tabitha's (18): **"We are not a lazy generation. We are a generation with ideas, thoughts, and dreams, who are frequently told they are invalid or unachievable."** can be seen across most NSW electorates, with many young people calling on their representatives to take them seriously. Of the young people from NSW involved in the 2017 consultation, 36% of them feel like they are taken seriously as a young people, by those in positions of power. 60.7% of young people across NSW follow the news every day. They draw on a variety

of sources, including, but not limited to: social media feeds (predominantly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Occasionally Snapchat, and Reddit), local papers, free-to-air broadcast television, national broadcasters, radio, online foreign news services (such as Al Jazeera, and the New York Times), new media companies such as Junkee, Pedestrian, and BuzzFeed.

61% of young people in NSW can name their local Federal Member of Parliament.

## "What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?"

1. Mental health services
2. Housing affordability
3. Job opportunities
4. Youth engagement in politics
5. Discrimination
6. Drug/alcohol use
7. Education funding
8. Cost of tertiary education
9. Abuse/harrasment
10. Climate change

65% of the young New South Welshman in the Consultation know what they plan to do for a career, with many concerned about job pathways, and relevant education with frequent talk about the "future of work" leaving them slightly uncertain about their futures.

Curious, we asked about some preferences that young people have for a range of things. 87% of young people in NSW prefer the internet to television. 76.5% prefer dogs to cats. Slightly more (50.05%) prefer books to movies. 78% of young people in NSW rather Marvel than DC. 51% prefer YouTube to Netflix. 55% prefer Summer to Winter. And 58% prefer a swim in the ocean to a bushwalk.

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

"Young people aren't engaging with politics because they aren't represented. A minister for youth would be a good start!" Caity, 21.

"I wish the Government knew that it terrifies me to see inaction on climate change (and to even see steps taken in the complete wrong direction). I wish the Government knew that it breaks my heart to see refugees seeking asylum in Australia, be abused and neglected in Australia's name. I wish the Government knew how angry I am about so many issues, and how powerless I sometimes feel. But I also hope that the Government knows how strong our voices are, and how persistent we can be. I hope they know that I'll be fighting every step of the way, until we have proper, long-term solutions to so many of the issues facing us today." Josie, 19.

"That young people can be just as capable at having political ideas as older people." Thomas, 17.

"Invest more in science and technology to make Australia a global leader in innovation. Don't just spread and raise awareness about it. Encourage local science and technology businesses to hire local Australians here." Brenda, 21.

# 1 Housing affordability

## Was the top issue in NSW.

"House prices rise every year, it is becoming impossible for us to afford a house or even an apartment." Eassie, 15.

# 2 Gender equality

## Equality between genders is important for young people in NSW.

"I wish the government considered issues of gender inequality, such as the gender wage gap and the effect it has on women" Rose, 16.

# 3 Climate change

## Was a frequent concern for young people in NSW.

"I grew up overseas in a country that was severely affected by climate change. These threatening signs to LIFE ON EARTH will not be solved by itself." Lizzy, 16.

# 4 Healthcare

## Improving mental health and disability services were of significance.

"Access to mental health support is huge (Medicare psychologists have waiting lists for 3+ months) which is a long time to wait if you're suicidal and can't afford other services!" Hannah, 20.

# 5 Marriage equality

## Young people in NSW called for government action on marriage equality.

"Marriage equality: just do it so we can get on with other important things" Rand, 17.

# 92%

are interested in learning more about current events

# 80%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

# 77%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

# STORIES FROM NEW SOUTH WALES



"Growing up I spent a lot of time in hospitals. I was usually there for long-term stays. Hospitals were places where specialists treated me like a puzzle to be solved and where friends visited confused because I didn't 'look' sick. Other than my close family, the people who helped me get through every single hospitalisation were my nurses.

My nurses were the ones who were there to explain to me complicated medical jargon when doctors on their rounds left in a flurry. They were there to chat to me about my favourite books and movies at 2am when I couldn't sleep because of the pain. They were there to help clean me when I couldn't walk and feed me when I couldn't lift a fork to my mouth (airplane sounds and all). If it wasn't for the nurses I had, the weeks and months I spent in hospital would have been unbearable, but instead amongst all of the bad there was still laughter and silliness. There was still time to make ice-cream sandwiches and dress up as ghosts in the spare sheets and for a kid who is sick, that's all you really need. I wish the government knew that nurses aren't just there to assist doctors. Nurses are there to actively make patients' lives easier and better and happier and they deserve to be valued so much more than they are."

Danielle, 19, NSW.



"I wish the government knew that for me to travel to and from work, I need to take public transport. Young people are often labelled as "lazy" but in reality, we need reliable, and affordable public transport to get around when we have working parents."

Zane, 16,



"I wish the government knew that there are a lot of safe young drivers that deserve the trust to be able to drive more than one person home at night so their friends aren't left stranded or tempted to make dangerous decisions."

Lily, 17, NSW.



"I wish the government spent as much time and resources on protecting our environment as they do on protecting our borders. Climate change will affect young people the most."

Jacqueline, 22, NSW.



"I wish the government knew how important it is for me to have autonomy over my own body. I am a mother, and I am pro choice. I love being a mother, and becoming a mother reinforced for me the importance of women being able to make decisions about their bodies, and their futures. In Australia, a woman seeking an abortion will meet a very different fate depending on which state she lives in - from imprisonment, to needing two doctors approval, or facing threatening picketers. There needs to be a national cohesive policy towards abortion that is free from stigma, and gives women their full legal rights."

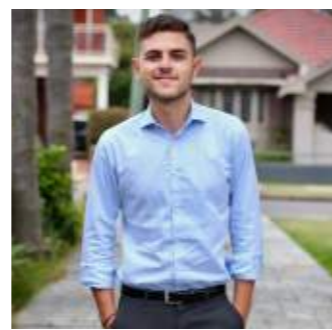
Jodie, 22, NSW.



"I wish the government knew how disheartened I am by the way that teachers are perceived in Australia. Since starting my education degree I've lost count of the number of times that people have questioned my career choice and told me that I "could do so much more."

How is it that we've gotten to a point where those who nurture our country's future are so undervalued by the rest of society?"

Rebecca, 22, NSW.



"I wish the government knew that I have great expectations of how we will deal with the challenges that face our cities. Urban density is our future. I don't mean that in an aspirational sense. I mean to say that it is the unavoidable trajectory of Australian society. The integrity of our public domain and urban infrastructure and our commitment to environmental sustainability will inevitably be stressed. Proactive, innovative and design-led solutions will be needed to make sure our cities continue to be livable for all. Australia is teeming with passionate and knowledgeable people in these fields so I am totally optimistic about our ability to produce these solutions and maybe even lead internationally. I think the challenge will be committing and focusing support for these people to do their work. I also think we all have a responsibility to make sure the powers that be care about these issues as much as they should."

Zachary, 22, NSW.



"I wish the government knew that my dream is to work on things that make a difference by changing our world for the better. However, whether I get a chance to make that change tomorrow depends on government actions today."

Daniel, 13, NSW.



"I wish the government knew how harmful it is to have such constrictive narratives of minority groups in the media.

At present, there are two dominant narratives surrounding Asian people: the "pushy and rude" Asian and the "shy and nerdy" Asian. Both these portrayals are huge generalisations, incredibly restrictive and to a degree, have negative connotations. When I was younger I use to struggle a lot with my heritage. I would feel ashamed and embarrassed because Western media had told me that I would grow up to be someone who was seen as rowdy and insolent.

Showing multifaceted stories of minority groups in society is vital in breaking the homogenous mould currently given to us by the media."

Simone, 17, NSW.



"I wish that the government knew that despite looking physically fine, I have a spinal injury and mental health issues that have forced me to redefine my limits. I wish that they could offer more support to those who do not fit the stereotype of someone with a disability. I know my limits do not define who I am, what I can do, and what I will achieve in the future."

Karen, 20, NSW.



"Being someone who identifies as part of the LGBTIQ community, I wish the government understood how necessary education and awareness-raising is in regard to our rights.

Young people are impressionable, so a lack of recognition, representation, and empowerment of people in minority groups can be detrimental to communities. Mental health issues are extremely prevalent in the LGBTIQ community, and should be addressed more seriously in educational systems, like the school curriculum."

Jac, 16, NSW.



"I wish the government knew that I pay well over half my income in rent, so that I can live a reasonable commute away from my university. I volunteer, have work experience, and work hard at university, but there's a 25% chance that I won't be able to find full time employment on graduating, and an even higher chance I won't find employment within my field of study.

I wish the government treated these kinds of issues seriously, rather than dismissing them as the baseless complaints of entitled young people."

Jonty, 22, NSW.



"I wish the government knew how much one teacher can change the life of a young kid in school. I'm studying physics because one teacher, the best science teacher at my all-girls school, told me that I could do it, and he changed my life forever. He stopped me from limiting myself to the 'girls' subjects, and I need the government to know that those teachers have more power over our future than anyone else.

If we want to see change in our society, we need to start treating our teachers the way they deserve to be treated."

Jen, 18, NSW.



"The government needs to take into consideration the young Australians going out on their own at a young age.

It's difficult enough to live in an environment that expects many of us to take unpaid internships alongside paid work to cover rent at 50% of our wage, without being constantly called lazy or being reminded of the fantasy that somehow we could afford a house if we avoided avocado toast."

Thomas, 22, NSW.



"I wish the government knew how bad our society is at actually understanding mental health issues. Despite around one in five Australians confronting the difficulties of a mental illness in any given year, there is very little formal education on what these illnesses might be and on the different ways they can manifest. I say this not as someone who has all the answers and wishes everyone else would catch up; I say this as someone who constantly feels lost, scared and terrifyingly ignorant as to what is going on in my own head. Ending the stigma is only the first step - I wish the government knew that there is a big difference between not recoiling in fear and shame at the words "mental illness," and actually having the confidence to confront your own mental health and be there for other people trying to understand theirs. Unfortunately, it seems like we, as a society, are still struggling to even take that first step."

Danny, 19, NSW.



"I wish that the government knew how much people care about the way that we're treating refugees and asylum seekers. Compassion should inform our decisions."

Mena, 21, NSW

# 77%

of young people in Cowper can name their Federal MP



# 54%

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



# YOUR ELECTORATE

## THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION RELATES TO THE FEDERAL ELECTORATE OF COWPER

The average age of the young person engaged in my consultation in Cowper was 16.6. A large range of issues were raised in the electorate (*results of top 5 issues they would like action on IN AUSTRALIA over the page in blue*).

50% of those consulted said that they read/follow the news every day, with the majority getting their news direct from online papers (ABC, Fairfax, NewsCorp) and from free-to-air broadcast news.

77% of young people consulted in Cowper can name their local Federal MP.

14% of young people in Cowper say that they feel like their opinions are accurately reflected in current government policy. 28% 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.

In lighter news: 80% of young people consulted prefer dogs to cats. 51% prefer Summer to Winter.

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

1. Drug/alcohol use
2. Job opportunities
3. Mental health services
4. Cost of education
5. Education funding
6. Curriculum reform
7. Crime
8. Personal/family financial issues
9. Discrimination
10. Climate change

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

“I wish they considered that we are not in their generation and how we feel and think is not always representative of how they feel and think. And that’s okay, but they need to listen to us and take us seriously. Work with us, and it’ll be better for everyone, and Australia.” Emma, 19.

“I wish they knew that their individual opinions are not always the opinions of the people. They are elected because they have been trusted to represent us. Even though they sometimes need to make decisions we’ve trusted them with, they shouldn’t forget why they’re there, and who they talk on behalf of.” Matthew, 21.

# 1

## Marriage equality

Was the top issue raised in Cowper  
“For marriage equality, just do it please.” Mitchell, 14.

# 2

## Healthcare

Was raised often  
“Mental health is the biggest issue facing young people in my community and Australia.” Anon, 17.

# 3

## Housing affordability

was raised frequently  
“I feel like politicians talk about the cost of housing and tell people to move away from cities but don’t actually spend money making places outside of cities better to live.” Ollie, 14.

# 4

## Education standards

are important  
“I think that the government should actually listen to current students when it comes to making decisions about education change.” Ryan, 16.

# 5

## Climate change

was mentioned often  
“We need to stop denying climate change and get on with fixing it.” Nathan, 19.

# 82%

are interested in learning more about current events

# 69%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

# 61%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions