

# **Youth Challenge Competition Fund**

## **External Evaluation**

**Report by**

**Centre for Social Action  
De Montfort University**

**June 2007**

**actions  
speak  
louder.**

National awards for amazing young people  
Funded by the Department for Education and Skills

# **Actions Speak Louder Evaluation**

**Report prepared by Centre for Social Action, De Montfort  
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## Executive Summary

1. The National Youth Agency in partnership with YouthBankUK and Corporate Culture ran the Actions Speak Louder (ASL) competition on behalf of the former DfES (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families - DCSF). Each local authority was invited to apply for a sum of £6k to be used for: running a local competition to be judged by young people; identifying a youth project funded under YOF/YCF to submit to a national panel for judging; and arranging a local celebration event for their YOF/YCF funded projects.
2. A total of 65 local authorities submitted bids to the competition, which were assessed and scored by a Youth Empowerment Panel (YEP) of 22 young people with previous experience of grant making. At an earlier residential the YEP had devised the rules for the competition and contributed much of the wording of the information packs for local authorities. A total of 15 winners and 15 highly commended - were declared who all received extra funding for their projects. The winners attended a national celebration event in London based on suggestions put forward by members of the YEP and organised by Corporate Culture.
3. The Centre for Social Action at De Montfort University was commissioned to carry out the evaluation of ASL. Young people including YEP members were part of the team of evaluators who designed the evaluation and collected information from adults and young people in 28 of the authorities who were winners and runners up. A lead officer in an additional five local authorities, who had not been short listed, was also interviewed. **The focus of the evaluation was on the degree to which young people had taken the key decisions at local and national level, the impact it had had at both local and national level on those who took part and the opportunities for further youth participation within local authorities it had stimulated.**
4. A key finding from all involved in this evaluation was that the short time scale allowed for the competition and the time of year it had taken place (in the run up to the end of the financial year) had affected key aspects of the planning and delivery of the competition particularly:
  - Numbers of local authorities able to take part.
  - Members of the YEP having a very pressured first residential to devise the rules of the competition which they had not found comfortable.
  - Time pressures leading to considerable variations in the way in which the competition was organised at the local level.
5. Nevertheless all the adults and young people interviewed reported that there had been significant benefits arising from being part of ASL, including, well attended local celebration events and greater youth participation opportunities, as well as the impact on young people judging and taking part. However, it was clear that the competition had built on benefits which were starting to emerge as a result of young people taking part in the YOF/YCF application and judging process.
6. YEP members reported that they felt that the competition was a very important initiative and taking part in the judging had been a valuable experience. They had enjoyed the process of working together, had learnt new skills, enjoyed planning and, taking part in

the national event and in some cases, had found that their involvement had led on to new opportunities for employment and participation.

7. Some young judges reported that they had:

- Made all the key judging decisions supported by their youth workers.
- Made personal gains such as becoming more mature and more confident, gained social skills such as the ability to communicate with people and public speaking as well as more grant giving knowledge.
- Worked with and become friends with a wider range of young people than they would usually meet.
- In some cases had been given the opportunity to participate in other decision-making bodies within the local authority such as youthbank panels or other types of youth forum.

8. Young people in local projects have particularly benefited from a number of effects from the competition: extra publicity because of their win; greater respect as role models from their local peers; skills learnt in taking part in local celebrations; greater visibility as potential youth council and youth forum members.

9. Youth workers reported:

- They now had contact with more projects from the voluntary and independent sectors as a result of YOF/YCF or ASL and had built relationships with those attending the local celebration.
- As a result of being obliged to target certain groups as recruits to their YOF/YCF panels, they now had more contact with a diverse range of young people including disabled young people, looked after young people and those working with Youth Offending Teams who they might not previously have known.
- Some authorities had had more applications for YOF/YCF funding since the local celebration.

10. Lead Officers and councillors reported:

- More appreciation of young people's skill and responsibility in judging and grant making for their peers on the part of elected members and a greater awareness of their potential capacity.
- Youth services who were wanting to promote Hear by Right initiatives within their local authorities now had good evidence of young people's achievements to back this up.
- With the creation of new structures within local authorities, local authority officials had been stimulated to consider giving young people wider opportunities to participate in decision making such as a new Children's and Young People's Cabinet and a Young People's Trust Board.
- More opportunities opening up to involve young people in commissioning of young people's services such as teenage pregnancy prevention and in recruiting and training young people to be involved in the inspection and evaluation of services. Young people were also being involved in interviews for senior officers.

- Young people being considered to help decide how new funding from Neighbourhood Renewal received in the authority should be spent on young people.

11. Local authorities benefited sufficiently from ASL to want to continue with it in subsequent years but felt the impact could be even more extensive if it could be done at a slower, more considered pace, with more advanced notice, at a different time of year.

# 1. Methodology

1.1 The Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University was commissioned by the National Youth Agency to evaluate young people's participation in the Actions Speak Louder... Competition. As all aspects of the competition were youth led this approach was also adopted for the evaluation. The brief from The NYA was that the evaluation should focus on:

- The participation of young people in the development of the competition at a national level.
- The participation of young people as judges both nationally and locally, particularly disadvantaged young people.
- The impact of the competition in terms of encouraging wider participation of young people.
- Key learning points.

The underpinning principles were to be that young people were to be involved in the evaluation:

- in setting the specification
- as members of the evaluation team
- as readers of and commentators on the report

1.2 Four members of the Youth Empowerment Panel (YEP) volunteered to be part of the evaluation team, These included young people with learning disabilities. They were joined by two others and took part in an evaluation workshop during which they developed their skills as young evaluators, devised the question schedules and agreed the people who should be interviewed. The evaluation team, which included adults as well as the young people, then conducted interviews with adults and young people, using the questions developed at the workshop.

1.3 It was agreed to interview people in the 15 winning and 15 highly commended local authorities face to face or by telephone. It was decided that the target interviewees in each authority (LA) would be young people from winning and highly commended projects, young people who had acted as young judges, a local authority officer, youth workers who supported the young judges, young people from local projects and a local elected member. An officer of the then Department for Education and Skills was also interviewed by one of the young people.

1.4 It was decided that young people would conduct as many of the interviews in winning local authorities as possible and that CSA staff would conduct interviews in the local authorities who were runners up. This was ambitious in terms of the numbers of interviews involved, the time scale over which they had to be conducted – two months - and the logistics for local authorities. For the authorities, this involved ensuring that key members of staff and appropriate young people were available and accessible on one named day for visiting interviewers to speak with, or arranging telephone interviews. We are very grateful for the work done by the LAs, which has made it possible for this report to be based on contributions from 27 different authorities. The total numbers interviewed were as follows:

Local Judges

38

Project Leads	33
Youth Workers	32
Local Authority Lead Officers	24
Councillors	12
Other support workers	2

The lower numbers of councillors interviewed in comparison with other groups reflects a number of factors. These included variation within the 27 authorities of the degree to which elected members were involved in ASL, local election campaigning at the time, difficulties in being available for interview and sickness in a couple of cases where members were not available for interview.

- 1.5 It proved more difficult to match YEP members to the interview days offered by local authorities than full-time CSA and The NYA staff, as exams started and other demands were made on their time, but young people conducted all the interviews in five different authorities and shared the interviewing with The NYA and CSA staff in three others. CSA and The NYA staff did the rest of the interviews. In order to get a different perspective, five local authorities, who were not short listed, were interviewed about their experiences.
- 1.6 At least one local judge or project lead was interviewed in every local authority, sometimes more than one. It was not possible to interview representatives from both groups in only four cases. We do not have demographic information about all the young people we spoke with, but from those we do, the young judges interviewed were evenly balanced between male and female, two thirds were white British, while a third were from minority ethnic groups. Around two thirds were aged 13-16, a third 17-19. Just under half were from disadvantaged groups such as looked after young people, young carers, Black and minority ethnic groups, disabled young people and those from rural areas.
- 1.7 The project leads interviewed were a little more likely to be male than female. In contrast to the young judges, two thirds were aged 17-19 and a third 13-16. Similar to young judges, two-thirds were white British with a third from minority ethnic groups. They were more likely than the young judges to identify themselves as coming from a disadvantaged group and a much wider range of groups were represented. These comprised young care leavers, looked after young people, young offenders, young carers, young people excluded from school, lesbian, gay and bi-sexual young people, Black and minority ethnic groups, young travellers, disabled young people and those coming from rural areas. Over three quarters of those we have this information for identified they came from one or more of these groups.
- 1.8 To gather information from the young people judging the national competition, CSA staff held focus groups with YEP members at one of their residentials, invited members to complete individual interview schedules with half responding via email or telephone interviews and also drew on evaluation notes from the workshops to assess their views. One young evaluator who was not part of the YEP attended the judging residential as an observer and produced a report of the event (see Appendix 1). Three members of the NYA staff team and a member of staff from Corporate Culture were also interviewed.



- 1.9 Within the report the term 'youth services' when used usually refers to both the statutory and voluntary youth service, but lead officers and youth workers interviewed were mostly but not exclusively from the statutory sector so their comments will usually reflect this perspective.
- 1.10 Within local authorities we expect that many young judges from panels had been judging bids from both the Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF), but both adults and young people in conversation tended to refer solely to YOF.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The competition was originally entitled The Youth Challenge Competition Fund but was later branded as Actions Speak Louder... (ASL) following the decision of the YEP.
- 2.2 The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provided a £2m fund to be used for a local and national competition and celebratory events for projects funded through the Youth Opportunity Fund and the Youth Capital Fund.
- 2.3 The rationale for the competition was twofold:
- To recognise the achievement of young people in developing innovative projects through the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and the Youth Capital Fund (YCF).
  - To build on the success of these projects by expanding, developing and copying the approach locally using the prize money and as part of this sharing good practice more broadly.
- 2.4 The NYA were chosen to run the competition and they worked in partnership with YouthBank UK and Corporate Culture who were to be responsible for translating young people's ideas into the national celebration event and for the communications plan. From the £2m budget each local authority was invited to run a local competition to select their nomination for the national competition. There was a £6k budget for running the local competition, hosting a local celebration event and recognising local projects. Young people were encouraged to play a key role in the initiative, especially setting up the process and judging the winners of the competition locally and nationally.
- 2.5 YOF/YCF leads (from both the statutory and the voluntary sectors) were alerted to and briefed about the Youth Challenge Competition at the Round 2 seminars run by The NYA with the DfES in November and December 06. The first part of the pack was sent out to local authorities at the beginning of December based on decisions by the Youth Empowerment Panel. A Youth Empowerment Panel (YEP) of 22 young people from diverse backgrounds were recruited, who developed the rules for the competition. These were the criteria by which the national projects would be judged. They all had relevant experience, either as local YOF/YCF decision makers or national grant givers through their involvement with YouthBank UK or as UK Youth Parliament members.
- 2.6 The rules were that the nominated projects should be:

- Youth led.
- Fun for both young people running the project and benefiting from it.
- Benefiting others by:
  - contributing to bringing people from different groups and backgrounds together and/or
  - Benefiting young people from different backgrounds or groups who do not normally have opportunities to get involved.

Winning projects would be expected to use the prize money to:

- Continue the same project on a larger scale or
- Add new elements to the project or
- Spread the project out into a new local area.

2.7 The timescale was very tight. Local authorities were first notified about the competition on 8 December 2006, expected to submit their local authority project entry to The NYA by 12 February, asked to hold their local celebration by 12 March 2007 and arrange for members of winning and highly commended projects to attend the national celebration event on 29 March 2007.

2.8 During this time some local authorities reported they were still dealing with their YOF/YCF finances. The period also coincided with elections to the UK Youth Parliament, which was another key participation event for young people many youth services wished to support. In the end 65 local authorities submitted their entries by the deadline, which were then judged by the YEP and the 15 winners received up to £45,000, and were invited to a national celebration event.

2.9 Initially the 'highly commended' authorities were not going to receive any further funding, however because the revised budget allowed it all the authorities in this category received up to £13,500 prize money.

### **3. The experience of the Youth Empowerment Panel**

3.1 The National Youth Agency recruited 22 young people to form a Youth Empowerment Panel to set the criteria for the competition, judge the entries, host the national celebration event, and take part in a number of specific virtual working groups of which the evaluation was one. Monitoring forms show that 75% of the members of the YEP were from the disadvantaged groups that had been targeted. They were supported by their own youth workers and The NYA staff. Four of the facilitators at the two YEP residencies were also under 25 years old.

3.2 The whole YEP took part in two residential workshops. The first, held on 2/3 December 2006 was the most pressured as the competition paperwork had to be completed to a very tight time schedule. This used a range of group work exercises to enable the YEP to create the criteria for selecting the competition entry, which they felt embodied and promoted a youth led approach to project work. This formed the basis of

the information pack sent out to local authorities, which also included advice on how to use youth friendly language in their paperwork to local projects.

- 3.3 The residential workshop on 3/4 February 2007 was used to prepare the young people from the YEP who had expressed an interest in the evaluation as young interviewers. They also shaped the evaluation at this weekend – agreeing who would be interviewed, by whom and with what questions.
- 3.4 The second YEP workshop held on 24/25 February 2007 was devoted to the judging with a short time on decisions about the national celebration event and on evaluation. Members of the panel had each read and scored three different applications and within the group they again used a variety of exercises to score and rank the entries until they had created a short list of 15 national winners, together with 15 runners up.

### **What YEP members thought about their experiences**

- 3.5 All the young people questioned had a strong sense that they had taken all the key decisions in relation to running the competition, but while one said, *“it was one of the most youth led things I have ever done”*, a few thought that they had really only been asked to run a process, which had essentially been determined elsewhere.

*“We as a group decided the rules that we thought were important and ranked them, we decided who went into the short list and who won in small groups. The YEP panel were also involved in the national event and could take on roles. We told Corporate Culture what we wanted to happen at the event and they planned it around what we said. The NYA and Corporate Culture sent out the information pack to the local authorities, but we wrote the letters and young people guidelines.”*

- 3.6 The evidence recorded at each of the workshops confirms that the wording which emerged from the different groups and exercises on the day was translated into the formal information disseminated to local authorities.

- 3.7 The NYA staff endorsed the degree of participation by YEP members, including the fact that the outcomes of some of the judging were not what the facilitators would have chosen as an indicator that they were youth led.

*“We were as true to what the young people said as it was possible to be... The publicity was very much their words, they did write a lot of it themselves. The winners were completely their decision – like in the group I facilitated I would not have made all of the choices they did myself, but it was their choice not mine.”*

*“Young people steered most of the significant things within the parameters set by The DfES. Young people did decide that it would be an awards ceremony and an evening part and, we moved money to make that possible. They wanted more money on entertainment and food rather than paying celebrities. The smoothies and non alcoholic cocktails, the red carpet, the detail of event, the feel and the style was all building on their ideas.”*

- 3.8 The following lists the most positive aspects of the Actions Speak Louder experience for Panel members as reported by them. They:

- Enjoyed meeting with each other, working together (mostly) and socialising.
- Enjoyed taking part in the residentials held in good quality hotels away from home.
- Valued the exercises and processes involved in the decision making.
- Felt they were involved in something very important.
- All gained in skills, knowledge and confidence.
- Appreciated that corporate culture had done a lot and had converted their ideas into reality.

## **Further opportunities for YEP members**

3.9 Some YEP members are moving on to take up other opportunities locally and nationally – they have met the Minister, one is on a special work scheme at the DfES, another has a job within the Participation Team at The NYA, some will come to the Youth Summit in June 2007. Others said they were already fully involved in participation work in their local communities, but a few would like to do more but had not yet been offered anything additional. They were asked however only two months after completing the judging.

## **Issues for YEP members arising from the competition process**

### **Time pressures**

3.10 Many of the difficulties experienced and mentioned by YEP members were a consequence of the time pressures involved in making the event happen on time and are recognised as such by The NYA staff.

- All the key processes involved in running the competition had to be fitted into two residentials – some Panel members felt there should have been more time to spread this decision making across more meetings.
- The first residential was especially experienced by many young people as a very pressured event. The NYA had to get key things done to time with the consequences that it was felt to be a crowded event without enough breaks.
- One member felt that the facilitating at the first residential had not been sensitive enough to ensure that quieter YEP members were given a chance to air their views, in contrast to more self confident members. There was also a feeling that there had been insufficient team building between Corporate Culture, The NYA staff and panel members at this event.
- The second residential was felt to be much better in all respects and the contribution of a new member of the staff team and the energy he had brought to it was especially appreciated, although the passion of all the staff involved was mentioned.

3.11 These points were also recognised by The NYA staff, as well as the young people.

*“We learnt as we went along, so the second residential was different from the first because of the things we learnt from the first. This was because of feedback from young people and also our own observation. The first residential was just so full on,*

*we were really pushing it with all that had to be done, but they did manage it, they got through it.”*

- At times there was insufficient communication between The NYA and Corporate Culture with Panel members so not everyone always knew what was going on. An example of this is that Corporate Culture only consulted with a few Panel members who had particularly requested to be involved with the venue when all the YEP members were asked what additional tasks they wanted to be involved with. More members would have liked to be more involved in this decision.
- Some Panel members would have liked to do more tasks in relation to the competition but did not know how to make this known outside the meetings.

*“I would have liked there to be more people deciding on the event – we had set up a few people from the YEP panel who had said they wanted to be part of that decision who were consulted – if there was more time we could have consulted more people, but they (Corporate Culture) gave us a lot of what the young people wanted.”* **The NYA staff**

*“They (YEP) were involved in the design and the big questions to get a feel of what they thought the event should be, a wish list of things they would like to see. There were design workshops and we got ideas about the look and feel of the day. At this stage we did not know what venues might be available, the exact budget etc and we knew when we all got together again the meeting would have to be focused on decision making because of the timescales. So we had to be very forward thinking and get as much of an idea as we could of what it could be like. We used this to inform all our discussions from the very beginning and have what they wanted in mind.”* **Corporate Culture Staff**

### **3.12 Recognition and responsibility**

- A few Panel members wanted more significant financial remuneration for their involvement, because of loss of earnings and increased pressure of work at college or university as a result of their participation in the workshops.
- While generally there were very positive comments from the independent young assessor at the judging event, there was a perception that a few of the parts of this residential could have been more young people led, such as the icebreaker exercise or facilitating workshops.

3.13 YEP members who gave their views on the national event were almost unanimous in praise of it, with the only criticisms mentioned being that young people could have led more of the activities on the night and because of delays they had less time with the disco at the after party than they would have wished. One YEP member expressed some disappointment that some of her experiences on the day were different from what she had expected.

## **4. Conducting the local competition**

4.1 All local authorities in England were invited to take part in the Actions Speak Louder... competition and it is clear from the evidence available that all felt that this would be a very demanding exercise in the time available – over half ruled themselves out of the

process altogether. Some reasons given at the time communicated to The NYA via email include:

- End of year Youth Opportunity Fund event already planned and time demands of managing YOF and the competition were judged to be too great.
- Participation Team in local authority did not have the capacity for an extra major piece of work.
- Young people decided not to take part – they judged there was insufficient time for their involvement in the light of the UKYP elections and school exams/coursework. They also felt the process was too rushed and that it would have been better to have left the competition until the approved YOF grants were completed and evaluated. They felt it would be difficult to pick a winner based solely on applications at that early stage.

4.2 The 65 local authorities who entered the competition felt very pressured and they also felt that the time scale was unrealistic, but they decided that the positive advantages outweighed the challenges. Generally LA officers felt:

- It was a chance to get positive publicity for the particular authority and if they won this would be good for them.
- The competition would have a strategic influence.
- Someone was giving them money with which to do it.
- Young people thought it was a good idea.

4.3 In running Actions Speak Louder local authorities were faced with a number of tasks:

- To recruit a number of young people to act as the judging panel.
- To apply the ASL criteria to the YOF applications they had received and decide a winner.
- To discuss and organise a celebration event.

4.4 Some authorities chose to circulate projects that had received YOF/YCF funding to submit an application for ASL and these were judged. For the 65 authorities who completed the process on time this entailed making a number of tactical decisions concerning how to achieve the maximum result in the time available. The comments which follow refer to the 15 winners and 15 highly commended authorities. It is not known how many would also apply to the remaining 35 authorities. In the majority of cases the work on the competition was undertaken by statutory or voluntary participation youth workers or other youth work staff, but a couple were able to make use of alternative staff working in the statutory youth service. Two authorities out of the 30 seconded a young person in their 20s from their central youth office to support the project. One was employed as an administrator and another was a management trainee from a different department. Both liaised with their respective youth panels and coordinated meetings and arrangements, thereby saving the time of the full-time youth workers who had other commitments and without this would not otherwise have been able to run the competition in their authority. These young people gained their own special benefits from the process. The young woman who was the management trainee changed direction afterwards and decided to train to be a youth worker, while another became more interested in voluntary work.

## **Recruiting the local judges**

4.5 Local authorities, by and large, opted to use their existing participative and decision making structures. Most involved young people who were already trained in the techniques of decision-making and grant giving to judge the competition. They involved young people from existing Youth Opportunities Fund/Youth Capital Fund (YOF/YCF) panels (some of whom were in fact local YouthBanks) and Youth Parliament. In two cases however young people with no previous experience of any of these groups were recruited from across their local authority and given training in the skills that they would need.

4.6 Although we do not have data on the background of all the young judges from all these panels, it is clear from comments made by local authority staff that, in line with the YOF/YCF grant requirements, many young people on judging panels came from backgrounds which were less represented on decision making bodies of this kind.

*“They (the youth workers) had already targeted before we got to the residential – we were from different areas and projects. At the next meeting more new people joined we all got involved in different ways.”* **Local Judge**

*“We strongly targeted young disabled people they got involved. There was a young lady who was deaf so we had an interpreter, there were black and minority ethnic groups also involved. Everyone had their say, all voted, we had a diverse range of people on the panel.”* **Local Judge**

### **Running the local competition**

4.7 In the vast majority of cases local authorities arranged for the judging panel to take a second look at the YOF/YCF applications, which they had already received and apply the new ASL competition criteria to them. Where the numbers were recorded, in three areas there were between 20-24 projects, but there were also reports of 50, 120 and 150 projects being considered.

4.8 Around 13 local authorities circulated previously funded projects, invited new applications and judged one winner from these submissions. Some young judges in this group devised their own versions of the supporting information and circulated this to projects. Where this information was recorded it is notable that the submissions received in this way were relatively low in number – in four cases ranging from 5-12 with one having 18, indicating that the shortage of time acted as a deterrent to some projects taking part, a fact mentioned by a few lead officers. Projects making submissions often had no more than a week to do so, and felt very pressured. One project for disabled young people made a formal complaint to their youth service about the lack of time to put in an application which they felt at the time disadvantaged themselves and groups like them. However an accommodation was made and this project was ultimately a winner.

### **Judging the competition**

4.9 All the young panellists had a youth worker from the statutory or voluntary sector to support them. These workers in some cases provided basic training in assessment techniques. Where young people were already trained and experienced in assessing applications, the workers went over the ASL criteria, which were to be applied to the bids within the competition. These were reiterated regularly. Because of the logistics

involved in bringing significant numbers of young people together, in most cases the judging was carried out in a few hours on one particular day. However some made their decision during a residential.

- 4.10 Where existing YOF/YCF applications were being considered, in some cases a pre-sifting was done where youth workers went through the YOF/YCF bids and eliminated those which they judged not to fit the ASL criteria and the young people judged the remaining bids. In one case, an administrative worker summarised the details of all the bids for young people to judge. In one authority, staff customised a new application form which the youth panel then completed using information from the original bids, adding a score.
- 4.11 A variation on this theme in one authority was e the young people's panel decided to submit the YOF bid, which had originally been given the highest score by them, without any additional scrutiny of the other applications and to concentrate on planning the celebration event.

### **Deciding the local winner**

- 4.12 The process of deciding the winner varied according to the number of young people on the panel and the number of bids being considered. Some small panels looked at all the bids together while other larger panels split into groups and considered and scored a number of different bids.
- 4.13 Most youth panels short listed small number of projects and then either voted or agreed via discussion on the winner. In one authority the panel changed their minds. Having voted and selected a winner, the youth panel passed their shortlist to a scrutiny panel of young people, which had been set up to shadow them. This scrutiny panel challenged the original youth panel's judgement in one case, highlighting the merits of a particular project evidenced in their application, which they felt had been overlooked and not fully appreciated. The youth panel looked again at the project in relation to their shortlist in the light of this and re-voted, unanimously reaching a different decision this time. This went on until around 11pm at night.
- 4.14 In a few cases, it was decided to delegate the actual decision to another group of young people. In most cases this was a panel decision agreed in order to ensure that there was no bias from members of the panel who might have special knowledge of a particular project. For example, members of a local YouthBank passed their shortlist to a YouthBank in a neighbouring authority to make the actual decision. In another case, details of the six top scored projects by local judges were given to members of a Pupil Referral Unit, who as part of a classroom exercise had the competition criteria explained to them and then decided the winner from the short list given to them. All the winners selected by other groups were judged fair and acceptable by the original panel.
- 4.15 In two cases the chance to vote on the national competition was widened to include other young people, but it is not clear what criteria they may have been using to choose the winner.
- All successful bids were put on a council young people's website and for two weeks young people could vote online. The votes of the panel were combined with the votes of the public to produce an agreed winner.



- In one case the young people's panel short listed projects, which then made a presentation at the local celebration. Then 200 young people voted to produce the nomination to the national competition.

While the majority of young judges had clearly found this a challenging but stimulating process, two local judges said that they wished that projects did not have to take part in a competition in order to get funding, as they had found it uncomfortable and difficult having to choose one project over another.

### **Contact with winning projects**

- 4.16 The evidence shows that young people and youth workers in local projects had little involvement in the competition process, apart from the minority who did put in a second application to the competition, or made a presentation at the celebration event which was then voted on by other young people. Where the winner was chosen from a YOF/YCF application already submitted, many did not even know they were in a competition until they were told their project would be submitted to ASL.
- 4.17 Due to the need to run the competition in the financial 2006-2007 year the process of completing the ASL entry form was not always as participative a process as it might have been. Some young people from local projects were vague about the details of how this happened, although they clearly remembered being fully involved in their first application to YOF/YCF. Local youth workers often provided the key information to headquarters staff.
- 4.18 While most eventually knew that young people had selected the winners, the vast majority of young people in the local projects did not meet their local judges until the local celebration event.

### **Involvement of young people as judges**

- 4.19 Virtually all of the young judges questioned were very clear that they had made the ultimate decision about the competition entries without interference or influence from adults, apart from the decisions delegated elsewhere, and that the adult workers had supported and facilitated them to do so. They were proud of the amount of care and effort they had taken to do a good job, to be fair and achieve a result which would benefit their communities.

*"We had a residential then meeting and looked at bids – did it in groups, discussed as a whole – had a process, everyone had their say. We were very involved – all our points were put across. I went to the big event in London – saw the projects in action and felt very involved."* **Local Judge**

*"Us young people made the decisions – didn't get help from anywhere else – regarding the decision making. There was a lot of us at the local event – the chair (youth panel) led it. I helped out on food, it was what you wanted to do – it was all of us really."* **Local Judge**

### **Case study**

One county council has six districts – each area had a YOF panel to administer the funds. The judging panel was made up of young people nominated from each of the area YOF

panels. They were brought together for a number of training meetings prior to the judging to learn about the criteria for ASL and the issues involved. They were supported by a youth worker from the voluntary sector and a young worker from the Youth Service who provided administrative support. All areas were circulated with information about the competition and invited to nominate a project for the competition. Six areas nominated nine projects. Each project nominated was invited to county hall on a particular day to make a face-to-face presentation to the young judges. They then voted and made their decision. The winners were announced at the celebration event.

### **Case study**

In one area there were two competitions. The judging panel who were young people belonging to YouthBank chose 6 projects out of the 24 YOF funded projects to be voted on at the local celebration and to be a local winner. The voters, around 270, were young people from the audience who included young people from schools and those interested in applying to YOF/YCF. For the nomination to the national competition the YouthBank panel made their own decision from the same applications. The authority employed an arts worker to work with local projects for the local celebration to create it as an artist event. She is mainly a dancer and so worked with young people closely e.g. choreographing the basketball team for their display on stage at the event. There was also some filming of the projects. The youth panel ran a stall at the event and gave out information about YOF/YCF and YouthBank.

4.20 However, in one case young people seem not to have been fully involved in the final choice. In one authority there was some original sifting of bids by statutory youth workers, following which three young people from the YOF panel went through the bids, applied the competition criteria, identified the last three but were not able to make the final choice between them. The final selection was made by the Head of the Youth Service, Head of Education and a Councillor at a separate meeting, applying the criteria. The councillor noted that there was a history of partnership between adults and young people in this local authority regarding decision making and felt it was a fair result. It was difficult to tell the degree to which young people from the original panel had been fully aware of and party to this process.

4.21 There were some very positive comments about the documentation sent out to support the running of the competition and the adaptability of the organisers.

*“There was good stuff sent out about the competition – we could customise it from our own experience. At a very early stage when we had trouble with the time scale – organisers were pragmatic, clear and supportive.”*

*“What was good is the pack – they need to do stuff like that. The specimen press release was helpful for our support worker.”*

### **The Local Celebration**

4.22 Each authority that entered was given £6,000 to run a local ASL celebration event. The vast majority organised well attended, memorable occasions with presentations by young people. In three authorities however there were some variation from this norm – in one, which had had a late start on YOF, two much smaller meetings for young people were organised, a second held a much more low key event as the young people had not wished to make public presentations and a third hardly

mentioned ASL at all and did not provide any transport support for young people or groups to attend the event.

- 4.23 Most of the local celebrations were planned by the same group that selected the local project winners. Some youth workers said that they regretted that young people could not be more involved in the arrangements but because of the short timescale they had to deal with many of the practical details themselves. Many young judges however confirmed that they had done a lot of the planning, chosen the type of venue and the style of event, specified the food in some cases, the music and the programme and adults had helped to make it happen and dealt with the budget.
- 4.24 Many events took place in hotels or clubs and used the Oscar ceremonies as a model. Many local projects short listed made presentations and this was the occasion for the award of the smaller prizes for other projects. In some cases the youth panel had made the selection for smaller prizes or young people voted on the night. In two cases winners of the local event were chosen by ballot of all young people attending the local celebration. One authority mentioned that they had had many young people at the event and they had subsequently had an increase in applications to YOF.
- 4.25 Most young people from local projects did not contribute to the planning of the local celebration other than consenting to make a presentation at the event if they had been a winner or short listed.
- 4.26 These events were very significant at the local level and virtually all the young people questioned had enjoyed the evening thoroughly and had found it a unique experience. There were many comments from both adults and young people concerning the scale of the events and how it had brought different groups of young people together.

*"The evening was all young people – young people were on the stage all night. We did the comparing, the arrangements, everything. We even knew about the health and safety and the fire exits and stuff. We wanted the local event to be a real celebration and wanted to get young people involved who were not part of YOF or YouthBank already."* **Local Judge**

*"The worker booked the venue for the event but young people decided the content of it (speaker, processes, disco, adults invited). We also planned the publicity."* **Local Judge**

*"Main benefit of competition – local young people were recognised for being innovative, got recognition. Getting 550 young people to the event was a huge achievement. Young people decided on details, staging in a nightclub, having envelopes etc. Had to keep the secret of who had won, couldn't tell people. They put a lot of work into planning the event, local radio station was involved."* **Youth Worker**

- 4.27 The only critical comments made by young people or adults on local celebrations concerned:

- The nature of the venue chosen (a school hall rather than anywhere more glitzy in one case).
- A perception by a local youth worker that too many adults, in proportion to young people, had been invited to one celebration for political purposes and were asking questions, using language that young people did not understand.
- Lack of communication regarding dress code for one local celebration which left young people from one project feeling rather under dressed.

4.28 It was particularly important from a youth work point of view that the local celebration helped involve a more disparate group of young people.

*“At the celebration event we had sixteen different groups, nine of them ones that the Youth Service had had no previous contact with at all.” Youth Worker*

### **Spending the prize money**

4.29 As stipulated in the ASL entry forms most of the young people questioned in the projects confirmed that they had been fully involved in deciding how the prize money was going to be spent.

## **5. The impact of the competition on young people locally**

5.1 Adult workers and young people contributed information concerning the impact of both the competition and the YOF/YCF process on the young people who took part, on youth work practice and on general participation within the local authority. A number of points need to be made at this stage:

- The information gathering for the evaluation was taking place only one or two months after the winners had been officially announced, so it is likely that the full extent of the impact of the competition is not apparent yet.
- Unsurprisingly many respondents, both adults and young people, were not able to distinguish the impact of the ASL competition very clearly from the impact of the YOF/YCF grant making process as a whole.

### **Impact on local young judges**

5.2 Some young judges reported that they had:

- Become more knowledgeable about the range of funding available for young people.
- Learnt about decision making.
- Made personal gains such as becoming more mature and more confident.
- Gained social skills such as the ability to communicate with people and public speaking.
- Worked with and become friends with a wider range of young people than they would usually meet.

5.3 The extent to which local judges had gone on to do more in their local communities, or been asked to get involved in other consultative bodies, depended on the extent to

which they already volunteered or served on various youth bodies. A number of the young judges were already very involved, served on various youth forums and were active volunteers. Many of them were not involved in any additional activity as a result of YOF/YCF or ASL as they said they had no more time available.

Some young judges who were from seldom heard groups and had proved their decision making abilities as part of YOF/YCF and ASL were invited to serve on other bodies. Some were asked to join local YouthBank panels or other types of youth forum. One young judge was invited to participate in a disability focus group.

### **Case Study**

A young man attached to an alternative education centre was recruited to the YOF panel, judged the ASL competition and was then elected to the local Youth Parliament.

### **Impact on young people in local projects**

5.4 The main involvement of these young people had been completing the YOF/YCF form (and ASL applications where applicable) setting up and running their projects, making a presentation at the local celebration and attending the national event.

5.5 One young project lead was able to summarise his experience in the competition and the effect it has had on both himself and other young people who know him and what he has achieved as follows:

*"It was very important asking people like me and others up to 16 to get involved and listen to us. It opened up people's eyes –there is money out there – you need to go out and get it and use it for a good cause. The competition was very exciting – it has given me a lot more confidence – I now know I can speak out. It feels like a great achievement. Young people at the youth centre and others have been made aware of the Youth Capital Fund and YOF – have been encouraged to follow up and do things. We had a residential – involved in filling out forms. They are now much more up for it because they have seen how others have got money."* **Project Lead**

5.6 Other young people reported they had:

- Become more involved in project and voluntary work.
- Had more involvement in decision making opportunities, team work, life skills.
- Joined the youth panel and been asked to join the hear by right group.
- As a disability group been asked to be more involved in a wider youth council and bring their experience to this.
- Started on new projects.
- Acquired new skills, made new friends, gained confidence – worked with new people.
- Had received a lot of positive publicity for their projects, which were attracting more interest, membership and participation from other young people. They acknowledged that they could not have got so much publicity on their own.

5.7 Adult workers said that young people in their projects:

- Had been invited on a police ward panel, done a presentation for the youth council, some now volunteer – teach their skills to younger age groups – had been to the annual youth conference, were now more vocal and part of the community.
- Had gained new friends and skills, grown enormously and become young leaders.
- Had benefited as winners from the London event because the sights they saw and the young people they had met were quite outside their normal experience.
- Had learnt new skills: one individual had wanted to do a powerpoint presentation for an awards evening and was helped to learn how to do that.
- Built better relationships with a parish council, which had originally viewed them as a threat.

### **Youth services involving and contacting new groups of young people**

5.8 The local authority officers and youth workers questioned, were very clear that it was the YOF/YCF process and framework that had had the most far reaching effect in bringing new groups of young people into contact with the statutory and voluntary youth service. The ASL competition built on what had been achieved already, and seemed so much a part of what had gone before that some young people questioned, had difficulty in separating the two processes in their minds. The YOF/YCF regulations set out the kind of projects and young people to be invited to apply for funds and to be recruited on to panels and these predominately were the young people and projects who took part in the competition. People from these projects then came to the local celebration events, which were attended by local authority officers and elected members. Youth workers then met these young people and have kept in touch with them. In some cases however the celebration event brought in young people who were not previously involved.

*“With YOF we targeted disabled young people, those from ex mining villages, homeless young people, young parents and travellers.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“Via YOF the opportunity to fund locally helped us to target and attract and contact a lot more groups than the youth service would normally be involved with. Got a lot of applications from groups which are independent and not necessarily connected to the youth service and voluntary sector groups - some were more isolated originally and now feel more connected to something.”* **Local Authority Officer**

5.9 Statutory youth workers reported:

- They now had contact with more projects from the voluntary sector, to the extent of 45 new groups in the county due to YOF, which were constituted and recognised.
- They had more contact with looked after young people.
- The competition had helped groups to realise there is money available for their biggest goals. Usually people get £1000 here and there but to get £45,000 or even £13,500 makes a huge difference to the groups.
- The competition helped build relationships with the groups who entered and the statutory and voluntary youth service now has a better working relationship with them.
- They had had more applications for YOF/YCF funding since the local celebration.

5.10 A councillor reported he now had more contact with the local youth council and Youth Parliament and more links and relationships with various groups and organisations.

### **Changes in youth work practice**

5.11 The work of youth workers both statutory and voluntary was very important in ensuring that young people were brought together, and supported to submit their project to the ASL competition and to judge the entries at the local level, so they were questioned about any longer term impact on their own practice. The majority of youth workers supporting young judges claimed not to have made many, if any, changes to their practice as a result of ASL. Many were participation workers who felt a participative approach to work with young people was already fundamental to their work.

5.12 Some of the adjustments reported have been made by local statutory and voluntary youth workers supporting local projects. For some this entails giving young people more responsibility.

*“Youth worker now more confident – now asks us more about what we’d like to do – we set our programme at youth centre.”* **Project Lead**

*“The competition has made us raise issues like cultural diversity and global issues like Sri Lanka. Through the coming months, young people will learn more about European culture. Young people are willing to come forward as positive role models from the steering group.”*  
**Youth Worker**

*“I was new to youth work so this was the first time I realised I had to lead them on and encourage them to do things rather than taking the lead. It was a nice experience – I had to get them motivated – I put a lot of myself into the project and my spare time – everything had to be explained.”* **Youth Worker**

## **6. Impact on local authority participation strategy and structures.**

6.1 The combination of the YOF/YCF process, and the high profile ASL competition with its attendant celebration event, and media publicity does seem to have raised the profile of youth participation and decision making within local authorities and stimulated more thinking about new possibilities in this arena.

6.2 There is currently a strong policy drive in local authorities concerning youth participation and all youth workers said that they worked within a very participative culture. However, two councillors interviewed struck a cautionary note, reflecting on the way in which elected members are inclined to view consultation with young people and warning young people not to accept anything less than full participation.

*“Young people are often consulted but it is not real participation. The county youth forum came to a full council meeting and the members said ‘yes’ to everything they asked for, although they could not really give these things as they were not all priorities*

*for the council. It is just that the members (adult) did not know how to work with the young people. Young people don't learn anything from this – it does not get them to understand how decisions are made or how to make priorities – what we need is active dialogue with young people.”* **Councillor**

*“The celebration created lots of interest concerning young people’s participation. For example, the strategic development group wanted to consult young people about issues but they did not want them to make decisions - they wanted to hold on to that themselves. But young people said ‘if you want to do any selection do it first and then let us make the decisions from within what you have agreed.”* **Councillor**

6.3 Despite these comments the local authorities who took part in the competition appear to have been very committed to participation by young people. Local authority officers and councillors described a range of initiatives which existed including use of Hear by Right standards and a range of youth forums, panels and councils. Many local authorities reported having a very well developed participation strategy already. In these circumstances ASL built on what was already there.

*“We have young people on scrutiny group, reps on the cabinet, Youth Parliament. We have a participation strategy and very strong links with Connexions – now equal numbers of young people and adults are on the District Council Youth Assemblies and Pioneers (disabled young people). YOF built on this process.”* **Local Authority Officer**

A young judge from the same authority commented

*“Decision making here is pretty strong – there are loads of groups where young people make decisions and young people run it. So I think the only thing that could have changed is that there are young people in other groups who have been allowed to make decisions and that has been conveyed to the local councillors.”*

6.4 In some cases the YOF/YCF process had imposed good practice in settings where it was less commonly practised.

*“We have a participation strategy, YOF enabled us to spread good practice into other groups e.g. schools where teachers had to take a back seat - sports groups – more participation in settings where this is not common. Youth Forums meet councillors re CYPS but not about money.”* **Local Authority Officer**

6.5 However involvement in the ASL helped some to find new members for existing bodies – sometimes widening the representation of young people; and in some cases the YOF/YCF model had stimulated the development of new participation structures as the competition and YOF/YCF decision-making had demonstrated the ability of young people to take on these roles.

### **Building on existing process and raising awareness of decision-makers**

6.6 The publicity surrounding the competition had enabled youth services to raise awareness concerning the capacity of young people to be involved in making important decisions and on issues of importance to them.



*“Recently launched participation strategy – a multi-agency strategy that cuts across all young people’s services. Doing a lot here already and this added to what we do at a strategic level.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“Competition’s achievement enables Youth Service to push Hear by Right process –put it up the agenda”* **Local Authority Officer**

6.7 Other benefits of involvement in ASL noted by adult workers included:

- Raised awareness of officers and elected members. Parish councillors are now far more aware of young people and responding to them.
- Raised profile of other young people led approaches locally. Could lead to something more.

### **Creation of new structures with opportunities for youth participation**

6.8 Local authority officers and councillors reported that new structures were being set up within local authorities, not necessarily associated with YOF/YCF or ASL, but as a consequence of other types of reorganisation and the policy drive for youth participation. These provided opportunities for youth participation which elected members were now prepared to promote as a result of their observation of young people’s involvement in YOF/YCF and ASL such as:

- Children’s and Young People’s cabinet is being set up – success of steering group helped highlight a working model of young people’s involvement.
- Working on setting up Young People’s Trust Board and young people being involved in that.
- Could use the YOF/YCF model in other contexts – capital investment, playgrounds and children’s centres.
- Hoping to involve young people in commissioning of young people’s services and in the Quality Assurance of delivery. Will have a multi agency team next year. Want to devise an inspection framework for young people.
- Teenage pregnancy service did commissioning – got young people involved in this. Talking with commissioners about how young people can be involved in further commissioning.
- Young judge was asked to set up a new panel of young people who were involved in a local officer interview process. The person appointed was so impressed that she asked the panel to do another interview for another position.
- Expect more formalised approach to recruiting and training young people to be involved in the inspection and evaluation of services.
- Spreading good practice into other departments.

### **Impact of YOF/YCF and ASL on further involvement of young people in grant making**

6.9 Some Local Authority Officers were clear that both ASL and the YOF/YCF process had helped to change the views of councillors concerning the capacity of young people to undertake grant making in a responsible manner and disperse large sums of money in a way that benefited local youth projects. This was likely to create new opportunities for young people if other money became available. In response to a query about any increase in grant making by young people, Local Authority Officers and councillors noted:

*“Not yet but may be – YOF process made councillors look at the way young people can make decisions.”* **Councillor**

*“Helped to convince people that young people can take decisions – there was some unease (in the council about YOF/YCF/ASL) I went to a tricky meeting with members and they were originally unconvinced – but both councillors and officers have had their views changed.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“It was wonderful to watch young people make money decisions. In 20 years this was the bravest experience of my career to date – to put money in the hands of young people and listen to them.”* **Local Authority Officer**

- 6.10 For a number of authorities, although they applauded the YOF/YCF and ASL model of grant making by young people, they thought it was unlikely that this would be continued in the future unless there were continued central government funds. Some of them also reported funding cuts.

*“As a model want to sustain it – depends what happens when YOF ends – we can’t replicate that much –the money’s not there”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“Give us the money and we will keep doing it. In the south budgets are tight.”* **Local Authority Officer**

- 6.11 One councillor was critical about the number of different two year government initiatives that local authorities were expected to sustain once central funding ended.

*“Money gets given for specific purpose in different initiatives, it then gets turned off and authorities are expected to make it sustainable. Could make one of them sustainable but can’t make everything sustainable.”* **Councillor**

- 6.12 Some authorities however thought they might be able to sustain the YOF/YCF grant making model themselves.

*“In principle we would sustain grant giving, we will continue the model – would like a celebratory event next year definitely, this is good practice if possible to persuade people.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“If the money for the grants stopped it would be a real loss because we have process for young people to have power and control and then it would be snatched away. We would have to find some sort of money but don’t know where it would come from – but I will make sure it continues somehow, how can I not?”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“Yes, a small steering group suggestion about how to spend money coming through – follow same model as it has been successful.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“There is always money to be found somewhere (for competition) and we will continue to have it if we can find the money.”* **Local Authority Officer**

#### **New money available which young people could participate in spending**

- 6.13 Some authorities had been able to attract new funding to their area which young people might be involved in spending.

*“Got an extra £60k to be used targeting deprived areas.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“Neighbourhood Renewal have approached us about some underspend money they have they want to be spent on young people’s projects and have young people involved in its allocation. Play have recently said they have some money earmarked they want young people to be in charge of.”* **Local Authority Officer**

- 6.14 Local Authorities reported that the YOF/YCF grant making model had sometimes stimulated the development of local YouthBanks or confirmed the importance of keeping current ones going because the young people from YouthBanks who had been involved in YOF/YCF grant making and judging the ASL competition had proved their ability to take responsible financial decisions. This reflected their views when interviewed – a time when the future of YOF/YCF funding was still unclear.

*“We will be looking for money to keep the YouthBank going. They have started something – young people know they can make a difference.”* **Youth Worker**

*“Have started to talk about YouthBank model – if no further YOF money, will take further.”* **Local Authority Officer**

- 6.15 It was suggested in some places that more of the personal budgets of £5,000 under the control of county councillors might be spent on young people’s issues.

## **7. Experience of Local Authorities who were not short listed**

- 7.1 Principal Officers in five Local Authorities which were not short listed were interviewed. These were very similar in profile to the winning and short listed authorities in that they largely operated within a participative ethos, some conducted local competitions while others looked again at all their YOF applications. Local celebrations were universally praised as very useful events putting youth workers in touch with new groups, with 600 young people attending in one case. Most would want to continue this as an annual event and would fund it from their own resources if necessary. Within some authorities more opportunities for young people to participate in decision making were being planned since they had demonstrated their capacity.

- 7.2 In three cases Local Authorities felt they had not really had sufficient time to polish their entry to the competition and in one case the selected project was not very developed as it only received its funding in January. In two cases however the authority had expected to win and questioned the criteria for success which was being applied. There was a view in two cases that young people should have been given a more detailed explanation as to why their submission had not been placed. Some young people from losing projects were said to be very disappointed; in one they had beaten other projects in a local competition and received a lot of local publicity for their project and the national competition, but then had to report their lack of success. In other cases young people had been less concerned about the national results, had enjoyed their local celebrations and would be prepared to have another go next year. One officer called the time scale ridiculous and said they would not enter again unless this was changed. While not winning extra funding for their nominated project,

unsuccessful projects nevertheless reported similar strategic benefits from taking part in the competition as winning ones and young judges and young people enjoyed well organised local events and received increasing recognition for their decision-making capacity.

## 8. Learning Points

8.1 The following section gathers together some of the key learning points and suggestions for future competitions contributed by participants at various levels in the competition about the running of the national and local events.

### Timing

8.2 The key learning point from the 2007 ASL competition was that any future event of this kind would benefit from more time being allowed to run the local competition and celebration event, with more notice being given to local authorities and it being held at a different time of year than the run-up to the end of the financial year in March. This would have many positive benefits as suggested by interviewees from all groups:

- A less pressured experience for young people judging the event.
- More time to attend to all the organisational and communication issues on the part of the organisers.
- More time for the partners running the event to develop relationships, team building and a shared understanding and value base.
- More notice to local authorities would allow them to build the competition into their annual work programme, so that more would feel able to take part with consequent benefits to their young people.
- More time and notice in running the local competition would enable
  - young judges to visit projects in person.
  - staff to target more groups and a wider range of young people e.g. in schools
  - staff to get more entries to the local competition
  - staff to consult more with young people
  - staff to get young people more involved in the design of the local competition
- Longer notice would also ensure that all youth workers would be able to prioritise the date of the national event and not miss it as some had had to do.
- A longer lead in time should also enable the competition to have a more logical sequence so that authorities would do the local judging first, then hold the local celebration event where the winners were announced, then winners would be put forward to the national panel for judging. While some authorities were able to do this, others were not able to time their judging and local events in this sequence in the time available.
- YEP members suggested that with more time it would have been possible to give more responsibility for young people during the course of the competition and event.

8.3 Adult organisers' additional suggestions:

- More time was needed to check venues at first hand and involve more young people in the choice of these.
- Plan more how to involve the appropriately outspoken young people and the more quiet and thoughtful ones.
- More time to work with the venue about disability access and room allocations so workers could be closer to their young people.

*“If we were scoping out this project from the beginning– say over a year, there could have been more involvement of young people. For example, we could have had young people on the Board and met at times suitable to them, we could have had young people on work experience at Corporate Culture as part of this project – we have done this before - we could have had an online platform for keeping young people up to date and checking things out as they developed, or a national online vote for the winners.”*

### **Scope of the Competition**

8.4 YEP members would like to see more projects funded as part of any future competition.

### **Running the National Event**

8.5 While some who attended the national celebration would not make any changes to the event, some other respondents did have other suggestions for improvement:

- A workers’ briefing in London beforehand so they knew what to expect.
- Perhaps two full days at the national event to talk to other youth workers and young people about their projects (although others felt young people having to be out of school for 2 days was too much already).
- Clearer communication about how much money the winning local authorities had won. (All LAs got what they asked for up to the maximum figure although The NYA did talk through amendments to some of their draft budgets).
- Greater clarity of roles for any councillors attending on the day (this point was made by a youth worker who had brought a councillor with him to the national event and was then embarrassed that there was nothing much for him to do, although the councillor himself had not apparently complained).
- Better allocation of bedrooms to ensure young people and workers were near each other.
- A regional celebration event in the south west in recognition of the distance they have to travel to London based events, which might also apply to some other areas.
- More attention to the needs of disabled project members who discovered that the venue was not fully accessible on the day, although it should be recognised that there was very little time available between the confirmation of which projects would be attending the national celebration and the event itself in which to make arrangements to meet their needs. However this is a serious concern and would need to be given consideration if such an event was to happen again.

### **Running the local competitions**

8.6A key finding of the evaluation is the variety of processes used to obtain the project nomination. Virtually all authorities have been faithful to the principle of supporting young people to make the final decision. Beyond that however there have been significant variations in how the project applications have been gathered in order to

produce the pool from which the final judgements have been made. There have also been a range of different places and ways in which the judging has taken place. Some authorities considered all their existing YOF/YCF submissions while others invited further nominations from the projects funded. The consequence of this was that some judging panels were choosing their nomination from a smaller number of applicants than others where all the YOF/YCF applications were considered.

8.7 The contrast therefore is between one form of practice that actively involved some, but not all, local projects in a participative process and another form of practice that was much less participative for local projects, but ensured that all of them had the opportunity to be considered. While the majority of processes ensured that young judges applied the competition criteria in controlled circumstances, in a small minority of cases voting took place in settings which were far less controlled regarding the motivation of those voting. It is inescapable therefore to conclude that there has been a substantial difference between authorities in the way the competition has been conducted at the local level. All the approaches adopted in these 30 authorities however have clearly resulted in project nominations which were regarded as award winning when judged nationally according to consistent criteria.

8.8 Some consequent learning points suggested by interviewees therefore if the competition is to be repeated, are as follows:

- Provide very clear guidelines concerning the conduct of the competition and acceptable practices regarding voting.
- Have examples of the sort of thing that might win or had won in the past. Since all the paper work was a barrier to some young people getting directly involved, perhaps a video showing what things they could do could be used as an application.
- Have even clearer wording on entry forms than the yep had suggested to accommodate young people with a range of abilities.

### **Impact on young people**

8.9 The YOF/YCF process has had a far reaching impact in recruiting and training a group of young people in decision making and grant making skills who have subsequently worked together. Some of these young people are already active volunteers and well embedded in participative groups of various kinds, while others have come from seldom heard groups with little or no previous experience in decision-making. A number of youth workers commented that YOF/YCF panels had achieved a far more diverse mix of people than other pre-existing structures such as youth councils and local Youth Parliaments. The contact between these groups, who do not usually encounter each other, seems to have been particularly productive for all concerned in widening friendship networks. This has contributed to the broad community cohesion agenda.

8.10 The competition provided wider publicity for the skills being exercised by these young judges within YOF/YCF which has enabled two processes to take place – some young judges have been recruited to other and greater responsibilities, while other young people have been stimulated by the publicity to take their place on YOF/YCF panels.

- 8.11 Young people in local projects have particularly benefited from a number of effects from the competition: extra publicity because of their win; greater respect as role models from their local peers; skills learnt in taking part in local celebrations; greater visibility as potential youth council and youth forum members.

### **Impact on Local Authority structures**

- 8.12 The model of grant making by young people demonstrated in the YOF/YCF process has clearly had a far reaching effect on Local Authority staff and councillors in this particular sample. In a number of cases, from a position of initial scepticism, elected members have seen young people exercising responsible decision –making both in year 1 of YOF/YCF and the more publicised ASL competition. This has had a number of effects:

- Authorities wanting to implement Hear by Right standards have seen that there is a potential pool of young people who are in a position to work alongside elected members in a number of roles and have been encouraged to move forward on this. Where youth services have wanted to push this up the agenda, the competition has provided useful evidence.
- Authorities who have already taken initial steps to implement youth participation have been stimulated to consider other settings where young people could be involved in commissioning services to support young people in need.

*“Don’t underestimate the value of publicity to sell the concept of young people being involved in decision making.”* **Local Authority Officer**

- 8.13 The predominant comments by adults such as youth workers, councillors and Local Authority Officers about what they have learnt from being part of the competition focused on how much young people could achieve when given support and responsibility. For many from the youth work world this reinforced their deeply held beliefs.

*“Process is time consuming especially when genuinely young person led, but that’s where you get the best results. The growth of skills and confidence in months has been massive”* **Youth Worker**

*“Young people are discerning and smart about the process of appraising projects and deciding what makes a good project for and by young people. How valuable and important it is to have young people at the centre of the process – it shouldn’t be tokenistic or manipulative. Should be genuine and that needs staff time to support and sustain.”* **Local Authority Officer**

*“It reinforced my view that young people are able to make decisions, be responsible and should be consulted with.”* **Councillor**

- 8.14 Young judges commented on what they had learnt about decision making, other projects and the impact of funding.

*“Definitely learnt more about young people – really impressive to see how they are dedicated to their projects – lots have been looking for funding. Learnt about the area and the opportunities for young people.”*

*“Hard to make decisions especially if six of you with conflicting views. Can see how important the money is to all the groups. Learning about all the different needs and groups there are and range of people who are in the area and you might not see as you are just walking down the street.”*

## **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 The fact that Actions Speak Louder achieved a significant amount in a short time should not be taken as an indication that its delivery and achievements have therefore been entirely trouble free. As a result of the tight timescale allocated, it has relied extensively on the professionalism and dedication of all the people at all levels concerned with it to work at all.
- 9.2 Over half the potential local authority participants did not take part, and a small proportion of those authorities who did opt in felt that they had not achieved quite as much participation on the part of young people as they would have liked because of tight timescales.
- 9.3 Despite this many authorities have displayed a considerable degree of creativity and imagination in running the competition, in ways which were fun for young people and valuable for themselves in making YOF/YCF and young people's role in decision making more known to a wider range of people. Some were appreciative of the way in which ASL could be adapted to their local circumstances.
- 9.4 Young people have participated extensively at both local and national levels in judging and planning the local and national celebrations with minimal adult influence, but maximum support, which is a notable achievement.
- 9.5 This was acknowledged by an official from the DfES.

*“Young people are capable of far more than imagined. They were very responsible, came up with great ideas. They were very fair about sharing the money with different groups and thinking about other young people. If you give young people responsibility and support then they can do amazing things.”*

- 9.6 The message from all involved in this evaluation is that this has been a valuable initiative which has brought considerable benefits in its wake to young people and youth services, but the impact could be even more extensive if it could be done at a slower, more considered pace, with more advanced notice, at a different time of year.
- 9.7 Local authorities have welcomed local celebration events as a valuable means of showcasing what young people can achieve. The greater publicity given to young people's decision making has been a valuable demonstration to elected members of the benefits of involving young people significantly in further local authority grant giving and decision making. Much of this relies on the far reaching effects of the YOF/YCF process which preceded the competition and other influential initiatives such as Hear by Right, but ASL helped to bring all these strands into sharp focus which attracted attention and revealed opportunities. YOF/YCF and ASL complement each other, with the added publicity making more obvious the grant making activity which might



otherwise go unnoticed, happening as it does between a small group of young people behind closed doors.

9.8 If, as we suspect, the LAs who did take part are those with well-embedded participation strategies already, then the next challenge facing DCSF/The NYA is how to share the learning and good practice identified by ASL with those who are perhaps finding it harder to develop youth participation strategies to ensure that this has not solely been a reward for those who have done well, but can help others develop similar good practice.

9.9 From our perspective as the Centre for Social Action, Actions Speak Louder does appear to have been a very participative event involving young people from the authorities taking part at all stages and levels. However it is unfortunate that less than half the authorities felt able to take part.

There was a genuine attempt on all sides to recruit young people from diverse groups, support them to work together both locally and nationally, give them a responsibility to pass judgement on their peers and to ensure that these judgements were totally their own within an agreed framework. The essence of this approach is that it reflects young people's views, choices and opinions – an outcome which is all too rare - and their perceptions of the types of youth practice which are creative and involving are based on their own wisdom and insight.

9.10 The evidence from these particular authorities reveals that the YOF/YCF funding combined with the ASL competition has had a far reaching effect on young people's active engagement in decision making locally.

Given the success of youth grant giving it is encouraging to now know that the YOF/YCF funding is to be continued as part of the new Ten Year Youth Strategy, allowing for this to be sustained in the future. The 10 Year Strategy also talks of supporting young people organising events to celebrate their achievements, and for those wishing to do that, this report is important reading.

[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/docs/10\\_Year\\_Youth\\_Strat\\_Rep.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/docs/10_Year_Youth_Strat_Rep.pdf) (Young People's version)

[http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/docs/cyp\\_tenyearstrategy\\_26O707.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/tenyearyouthstrategy/docs/cyp_tenyearstrategy_26O707.pdf)

## **Appendix 1**

### **Independent Report on the Judging Process**

*This report is written by a young woman who was asked to provide an independent perspective on the residential workshop at which the ASL judging took place. She attended one of the three residential workshops arranged for young people which*

***were all slightly different regarding the activities and how they were organised. This is a record of her own observations and views.***

My name is Ghina Morgan and I am part of the Evaluation panel for *Actions speak louder*. I attended the weekend residential where the Youth Empowerment Panel judged the applications for the competition and cut the entries down to the winners and the runners up.

The session started with an icebreaker, although the main place for youth involvement lies within the judging of the actually applications being youth led, I feel it is still important for the whole residential and all the working activities involving young people to be if not totally, mostly youth led. The icebreaking activity used as a warm up for the young people was led by an adult who mentioned that some young people present had completed it before and I felt that this could have been a peer-led activity by the young people who had already done it.

During the introductory session there was a recap on decisions made at the last residential mostly involving the design aspects of the logo. Young people were given feedback on how their participation in activities last time influenced the logo and how other young people had also been involved in the development of the logo.

Another thing I noted during feedback sessions explaining what had happened since the last residential was with regards to the selection of the location. At the last residential young people made notes and diagrams detailing words they wanted to be associated with their event. The location of the venue seemed to have been influenced by the role of the ministers, the need for the venue to be within locality of the House of Commons. I am unaware of how much the youth empowerment panel were involved with short listing venues for the event although there was suggestion that consultation had occurred with some other young people.

An adult facilitated the judging process however; many young people attending had experience with judging grant applications it would have been nice if the facilitation had been peer-led. A young person not on the panel who could be flexible enough to move around groups monitoring and ensuring young people were ok and on task etc could have been employed to do this.

Young people were given feedback on all areas that had been worked on during the time between the last residential. The Youth Empowerment Panel were asked their opinion on all decisions that had been made and were able to make further suggestions.

For the actual judging process young people worked in small groups with a facilitator. The young people had reviewed applications between the residential and reported back to the

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group the applications they had looked at. Young people had to mark the applications against the criteria. Young people took notes to be used in a voting process. In all groups all the young people made notes but I found in a one group the facilitator worked on the official form filling not including young people in the actual writing. During the “*Sticky Wall*” activity I am happy to report that young people were actively involved in filling out the ‘official’ forms in all groups.

In some groups young people were involved in writing up discussions on flip chart paper, filling in names on forms etc. taking on a more active role in all jobs which I think contributed to the whole ethos of young people being involved in every aspect of the decision making.

On the whole facilitators worked well in getting young people to continue to refer to the criteria when assessing the applications to avoid young people picking projects based on what they liked best. The importance of sticking to the rules was also highlighted in the “Sticky Wall” activity that involved young people rating and ranking the applications they looked at in order of strength.

Many positive things that I noted during the judging process included:

- Young people were able to practice communication skills talking to a small group of their peers.
- Young people are also getting the chance to look at the other side of the application process and being able to see the importance of referring to the criteria when making and assessing applications.
- Young people scrutinised budgets.
- Really strong discussions between young people in order to make decisions during these discussions facilitators worked more in a chair capacity not so much leading but encouraging which was very positive.
- Young people were given personal time to make decisions when it came to the “Sticky Wall” activity, this allowed young people to make their own decisions without pressure from other members of the group.

The second round of judging was focussed on the panel members looking at applications that had rated the highest on the “Sticky Wall” activity. The young people rated the criteria with points looking at what they felt were the more important parts of the criteria where more points would be rewarded to applications that rated highly in those areas.

Young people rated each application against the individual criteria areas individually and those scores were used to find an average score insuring that all of the individual views of group members directly impacted on the overall decisions.

The young people all graded the applications against the following areas of the criteria:

- Youth led
- Fun, enjoy and learn
- Benefiting others
- Open and accessible to a wide range of young people
- Innovative
- Be able to use the prize money
- Is wanted and used locally by young people.

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The facilitators were given calculators to total all the scores but in some groups the young people worked together to do the calculations. In some groups young people chaired while facilitators monitored time keeping and just offered overall supervision and support strengthening the group led structure.

During this part of the judging process young people were again involved in lively discussions. Facilitators took a back seat in most groups and allowed the young people to make all the decisions, discuss applications and grade accordingly. It was clear that the young people were enjoying themselves when scrutinising entries in areas such as equal opportunities, adult involvement, health and safety among others.

Young people were given the opportunity to take breaks whenever they felt they wanted one to help themselves stay concentrated and focused making the structure of the sessions young person friendly.

When the final decisions had been made young people reviewed the judging process they had been a part of looking at surprising results that came up from the second stage.

## **Conclusion**

When it came to judging the applicants this was totally youth led with young people making all the decisions. It was encouraging the minimal amount of adult involvement; the adults involved worked mostly in a support capacity then in any dominating or controlling way.

With regards to the judging of the competition all of the suggestions I have made are merely for improvement of an already strong youth led structure.