

# **Consulting with young people in the North West on Youth Matters**

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**Produced by Beverley Ward, The Reading Agency**

## **Acknowledgements**

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# **1 Background to the consultation**

## **1.1 Aims**

The purpose of the consultation exercise was to solicit the views of a range of young people on issues relating to the Youth Matters green paper. Specifically, MLA North West and The Reading Agency were interested in finding out about the young people's participation in arts and cultural-related activities, their relationship with museums, libraries, archives and other arts venues and their ideas around safer communities, citizenship and volunteering.

## **1.2 Format**

There were three consultation sessions carried out over a period of two days in various venues in the North West. Each session was facilitated by Beverley Ward, an experienced facilitator with extensive experience of working with a range of young people. Each session lasted for approximately 90 minutes and followed a similar format, with some open questions, some restricted (card-sorting) options and an element of free discussion. In reality, the activities were adapted to suit the temperament of each group and more time was spent with the Manchester group than the other two. It was stressed to the young people that there were no right answers and that their views would be extremely valuable to MLA North West and The Reading Agency and ultimately to the government. Attempts were made to ensure that all of the young people were able to contribute to discussions although, inevitably, some voices were heard more than others. A detailed description of the consultation format is attached as Appendix 1.

## **1.3 Groups involved in the consultation**

### Group 1: Manchester – Longsight Library, Levenshulme

The group were all members of a homework club and consisted of approximately 10 young people of wide-ranging ethnic origins, between the ages of 11 and 14. Everyone was familiar with libraries, they had all been in a museum at least once and nobody had heard of archives.

### Group 2: North Cumbria Technology College, Harraby, Carlisle

The group consisted of 15 young people who were all white and from years 9 to 11. Roughly half of the group were male and half female. Everyone had been in library, most had been in museums and nobody knew what an archive is.

### Group 3: Eden Community Outdoors, Appleby, Cumbria

The group consisted of 16 young people who were all white and ranged in age from 13 to 18, mainly 13-14. They were an even mix of male and female. All had been in museums and libraries none had heard of archives.

## 2 Results of the Consultation

### 2.1 How young people spend their time

**The method:** As an ice-breaking activity the young people were asked what proportion of their time they spent watching TV, using computers, doing homework, doing sport and arts activities and hanging out with friends. They apportioned this as part of a cake which we then ate. They also had a general discussion about how they spent their leisure time.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Watch TV	Watch TV	Watch TV
Computers	Computers	Computers
Homework	Homework	Homework
Sport	Arts activities	Arts activities
Arts activities	Sports	Sports
Friends	Friends	Friends
Eating	Reading	Sleeping
Reading	Working	Eating
Shopping	Shopping	Riding bikes
Talking	Music	Sitting in the cloisters (an old, stone covered area outside in the main street – equivalent of a bus shelter)
Writing poems and stories	Cinema	Going to parties
	Doing things with family	Going to pubs and clubs (the 15-18 year olds)
		Listening to music
		Going to youth group

Most of the young people felt that they spent between a third and half of their time watching TV, although a few of them watched less than this. A few boys felt that they used computers more than they watched TV but they were in the minority. The young people pointed out that computer use was partly dependent on the amount of access to technology that they had, but all three groups agreed that computer use took up a sixth of their leisure time. The amount of time spent doing homework varied dramatically and (in Carlisle and Appleby) it was unclear because of peer pressure how much time people really spent doing homework. In Manchester young people claimed to do one or two hours of homework per night – their diligence was unsurprising considering they were part of

a homework club. Responses in Carlisle ranged from 10 minutes to 3 hours a week.

The amount of sport played by the young people also varied dramatically. In both Manchester and Appleby there was only one young person who regularly played sport, while about half of the young people in Carlisle were involved in one sporting activity per week, notably football, gymnastics and netball. The majority of the young people played no sport at all, although a few people in Appleby rode bikes regularly and several of the young people there took part in ECO's circus skills workshops.

The Manchester group were the most keen on the arts. Several said that they spent an hour or two on arts activities every day. Some of these young people took part in a drama club. Only two young people in Carlisle were involved in extra-curricular arts activities, one in drama and one in dance. A few young people at ECO said that they sometimes did arts activities. Reading was an interest of some of the homework club members and one girl in Carlisle, who had also been part of a library club.

The young people universally thought that they spent most of their time hanging out with friends. Talking and shopping were particular preoccupations of the young women in the groups.

## 2.2 Things that stop young people being involved in extra-curricular activities

<b>Group 1</b> (in order of agreed priority)	<b>Group 2</b> (in order of agreed priority)	<b>Group 3</b> (in order of agreed priority)
Timings	Cost	Cost
Homework	Laziness	Transport
Pressure form home life	Timings	Location
Cost	Transport	Laziness
Pressure from friends	Homework	Homework
Transport	Pressure from friends	Pressure from friends
Location	Location	Timings
Laziness	Pressure from home life	Pressure from home life

### Comments

The factors which prevented young people from taking part in activities varied between locations. In Manchester, pressures of homework and parents seemed to be the dominant concerns, with young people's parents worrying that they might get home too late and not approving of the activities. This perhaps reflected the fact that many of the young people had only just started secondary school. They were also concerned

that friends might put them off doing things eg if they didn't think it was cool to go to a drama group.

The influence of other young people was a massively influential factor for young people in Carlisle who claimed that the main reason they wouldn't join activities was bullying. Other young people hanging around in or outside an activity venue appeared to be very intimidating. They were also influenced by the 'cool factor':

"My friends used to take the mickey so I stopped it."  
(Young person in Carlisle)

"If you were a boy dancing people would call you gay."  
(Young person in Carlisle)

The biggest problem for young people in Appleby was the location of activities. A significant number of young people lived on farms and out in rural areas. They said that transport was very poor.

"The buses are very unreliable and the trains come at weird times."  
(Young person in Appleby)

Some of them felt quite isolated. One said that he was the only young person in his village. Two of them lived a mile apart and were each other's nearest neighbours. Although they put timings lower down the list, timings would seem to be relevant when considering the difficulties of transport.

Some members of the group felt that laziness was the main reason they didn't do much but the consensus positioned this in the middle. They also combined this with peer pressure. If friends were lazy then they were less likely to go to things because they would be the only one of their peer group in attendance. They wanted to go to events and activities with friends. People in Appleby also felt strongly that the type of people attending an activity would be significant in putting them off going.

Homework was significant in that the young people felt they weren't given enough warning about homework so they could suddenly find themselves with too much to do on a night when they were normally involved in an activity.

"Teachers shouldn't be able to set homework for the next day."  
(Young person in Appleby)

Whether people prioritised homework or activities seemed to be a personality issue and an indication of how much value they placed on school work.

The young people also felt that activities weren't advertised well enough so they didn't always know what was going on.

### 2.3 Where young people spend their free time.

**The method:** Young people had six stickers each. They put three stickers in the place they would be most likely to be, two stickers in the next most likely and one sticker in the third most likely. Young people in Manchester added 'home' to the map and young people in Appleby discussed the issues without the visual aid of the map.

Place	Number of stickers allocated (Group 1)	Number of stickers allocated (Group 2)	Group 3 (stickers not used)
Church	3	0	
Park	12	6	
Sports Centre	12	6	
Museum	0	0	
Library	13	1	
Home	18	0	
Youth Club	7	2	
Café	5	1	
Shops	18	30	
Streets		15	

In Appleby at least half of the young people spent most of their time hanging around the streets, particularly in the cloisters area. Some spent time in the park. The young man who was keen on sport spent a lot of time in sports venues. Several of the older young people spent significant periods of time in pubs and clubs. Most people spent a significant portion of their time in the Eden Outdoors Project and other youth centres. Only one person said he ever attended a church and five young people said they sometimes go to the library. There was a bit of jeering at this point and it wasn't entirely clear how honest they were being.

The results of the map exercise confirm that young people are active consumers who spend a lot of time shopping. The young people in these groups also spent a lot of time in the streets and other outdoor venues. Aside from the members of the homework club, museums, libraries and archives were not popular venues.

### 2.4 Current involvement in museums, libraries and archives

In Manchester nobody had been involved in activities in museums or libraries except for the homework club but they knew that the library had sometimes done activities during the holidays. They used libraries mainly for the computers and to do homework, although some of them took

books out to read at home. Only one young person in Carlisle was a keen member of the library club at school but a few others used the library occasionally and several had previously belonged to the club, although they claimed that people only used it order to get free CDs and DVDs.

Most of the young people's experiences of museums were through school and (in Manchester) through a club, although a few young people in Manchester had been with families for a Black History Month exhibition on Africa. Some of the young people in Appleby had been to an event at Abbot Hall in Kendal which had an art focus. Several young people had been involved in a drama project.

## **2.5 Reasons for not being involved with museums, libraries and archives**

Some of the young people's reasons for not being involved in activities in museums, libraries and archives were the same as those regarding other activities eg peer pressure and homework.

"If your friends don't like it then you don't go. You'll just follow what you're friends want. If you're in a gang and only one wants to go somewhere and your friends don't like it and you go then they'll make fun of you."

"You've got so much homework and you wish you could go there but you come home and do it and then there's no time."

Although young people in Appleby were not keen museum and library users, they mainly felt that they would go to things if they felt they were interesting, regardless of where they took place. They offered the following thoughts on libraries though:

- they're a bit boring
  - they've got adults always telling you off
  - they should open later
  - they should play music
  - you should be able to make a noise
  - they need better advertising
  - they need to look more colourful and friendly
  - they need special areas for young people
  - (old people shouldn't be allowed)
  - they need more things aimed at young people
  - get more stuff (resources) that young people like
  - computer games
  - more seated areas
  - more modern
  - more computers and more time on computers
- (Young people in Appleby)

They also suggested that the people in libraries would put them off claiming that library users were ‘boring’ and ‘geeky’.

“You’d end up doing something about the Bible”  
(Young person in Appleby)

Again they felt that they would go if their friends went.

They had a strong perception that museums and libraries were places in which you have to be quiet and careful.

“You couldn’t do things in a museum because it’s too dangerous”  
(Young person in Appleby)

## 2.6 What young people would like to do in museums, libraries and archives

	Probably	Possibly	Not likely
All groups in agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make a magazine</li> <li>Take part in a film club</li> <li>Take part in photography projects</li> <li>Use library services</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help to run IT courses for older people</li> <li>Take part in local history projects eg art exhibitions of old photos, memories of older people</li> </ul>
Two out of the three groups in agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research family history</li> <li>Take part in music workshops</li> <li>Take part in a homework club</li> <li>Take part in archaeology projects with a local museum</li> <li>Do art activities eg graffiti, batiq, painting, cartooning</li> <li>Build a website</li> <li>Take part in music workshops</li> <li>Redesign young people’s areas</li> <li>Take part in a homework club</li> <li>Take part in archaeology projects with a local museum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take part in a writing group</li> <li>Take part in a theatre production/drama group</li> <li>Visit a museum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take part in a reading group</li> <li>Volunteer in a museum or library</li> </ul>

### Comments

The activities which most consistently drew a positive response were

making magazines, joining film clubs and redesigning library spaces (“That’d be right cool!”). In general young people seemed less interested in the traditional arts and the literary arts than they did in more modern art forms such as photography, film and IT. Of the literary arts, writing was more popular than reading; of the group who said ‘not likely’ to joining a writing group, there were several people who were positive, although their interest was dependent on the particular form of writing. In Appleby a few young people were interested in reading groups, writing groups and homework clubs but they were the quieter, younger people who were overpowered by the noisier, older young people.

There was very little interest in local history, “sounds right boring,” although one young person in Carlisle suggested that it might be interesting to “find out what life used to be like.” There was also a general lack of interest in helping older people in all three groups.

Whether young people would attend activities depended on interest more than location. People felt they would be keen to do activities they were interested in if they were in the library or wherever, although they found it hard to envisage certain things taking place.

“You can’t do music in the library because you have to be quiet”  
(Young person in Carlisle)

## **2.7 Safe and enjoyable spaces for young people**

There was a clear consensus that there were not enough safe and enjoyable places for young people in all three of the communities, although issues varied from place to place.

Young people in Manchester felt that there were more opportunities in other areas of Manchester and that they found it hard to travel to take part in activities.

“All my friends go to dance classes and things and you can’t do that round here.”

Young people in Carlisle were very clearly the group who had the most difficulties with their local area. They expressed the view that they didn’t feel safe in their local area as a lot of people were hanging around in the streets, there was a high crime rate, too many gangs and generally a divided society. Several young people expressed the view that their area was fine if your family were originally from the local community but that it was hard to move into area.

“It’s not good if you stand out.”  
(Young person in Carlisle)

They didn’t feel there were enough places to go and they suggested that there should be comfier walls to sit on and a skate park.

“Police tell people off for wandering the streets but there’s nowhere to go.”  
(Young person in Carlisle)

Although there were places to go in Carlisle, the young people in the consultation exercise said that there were young people standing outside places like youth clubs which meant that they didn’t feel able to go. There was a strong culture of intimidation.

Young people in Carlisle were also the group who felt least welcome as young people in their community. They talked of security guards following them and library staff “breathing down your neck”. However they generally felt fairly welcome in museums and libraries.

They expressed the view that some young people spoiled their community for everyone confirming the stereotype of young people being up to no good.

In Appleby most young people felt safe in their local community but felt it was boring and that there was nothing to do. They talked again about the difficulty of meeting up with friends when they lived in rural areas. They expressed the feeling that it was quite lonely living where they lived. The Eden Community Outdoors project was seen as the main safe and enjoyable place to go in their area. They felt that more street lighting would make them feel safer.

All of the groups felt that if there were more safe and enjoyable places for young people to go then there would be less young people causing trouble.

“If they went to more clubs they’d make friends and wouldn’t have to be hanging round the streets causing trouble.”

Young people in Carlisle expressed the view that they didn’t necessarily want activities. They just wanted a place to hang out.

“Where can you go to meet up with your friends apart from the youth club or park?”

(Young person in Carlisle)

They also doubted the usefulness of CCTV claiming that young people have competitions to create trouble in places where there are cameras.

## **2.8 Museums, libraries and archives as safe and enjoyable spaces**

There was a wide range of views expressed concerning the roles of museums, libraries and archives as safe and enjoyable spaces for young people. They were considered a “bit boring” by young people in Manchester and Carlisle. However young people were generally positive about their potential, particularly in Carlisle where the very fact of their banality seemed to make them less intimidating than other venues. They

suggested that libraries could be a space where they could just hang out with someone on hand to provide some security but not to interfere. One young person in Carlisle said that libraries never would be seen as safe and enjoyable spaces and another expressed the interesting view that:

“Libraries don’t need to be cool. They’re for books and other things.”  
(Young person in Carlisle)

The groups felt that libraries could be improved by the following:

- having more activities
- having more computers
- being more colourful and fun
- having more posters
- having more artwork by young people lending a sense of ownership
- having better décor
- having free cds and dvds
- not being “full of old people”.

Regarding museums, they expressed the view that “most children aren’t really interested in history,” however they were clear that museums should be interactive and should make extensive use of technology.

## 2.9 Volunteering

Most of the young people felt positive about the idea of volunteering, although no-one was currently involved in voluntary work. There is a strong ethos of responsibility in the ECO centre and one young man pointed out that

“We wouldn’t be here today without the help of people who volunteered here.”

(Young person in Appleby)

They acknowledged that volunteering would potentially make them feel more responsible, valued and useful, as well as giving them something to do. They felt it made them feel good about themselves and that it would improve the reputation of all young people.

## 2.10 Which voluntary activities would young people like to be involved in

	Probably	Possibly	Not likely
All three groups in agreement	Buying books Redesigning young people’s spaces		

<b>Two out of the three groups in agreement</b>	<p>Making community newsletters/magazines</p> <p>Working on the library counter</p> <p>Helping with staff training and recruitment</p> <p>Helping with children's events</p>	<p>Organising local history materials</p> <p>Making community websites</p> <p>Organising books</p> <p>Researching useful websites for young people</p> <p>Putting together useful information for young people</p> <p>Designing publicity</p> <p>Organising books</p> <p>Designing publicity</p>	<p>Organising, cleaning and labelling museum objects</p>
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In addition to buying books and redesigning young people's spaces, many of the young people showed immense enthusiasm for working on the library counter and for helping with staff training and recruitment. These opportunities could easily be provided in libraries.

## **2.11 Information, advice and guidance**

In Manchester, young people felt that the following issues were best helped by the following people:

- education queries – teacher, books, internet, friend
- careers queries – Connexions, friend, teacher
- entertainment queries – internet
- relationship issues – friends and helplines
- creative opportunities – library, youth worker, friend
- drugs information – helplines, internet, friends
- sexual issues – friends, books
- homework queries – teachers, internet, books, librarian

Libraries were felt to be good because of the range of information which was considered well-organised. They felt that it might be embarrassing to ask for certain information from library staff as there was no private space to talk about things. They also felt that other shortcomings of libraries were that there was not enough internet access and that it might be hard to find things. Nobody had been involved in arts projects which dealt with personal or social issues but they liked the idea of it.

Young people in Carlisle and Appleby felt that they would rather get information, advice and guidance directly from people rather than books, although both groups said that they would sometimes use books and the internet for these purposes. Most people didn't see library staff as being particularly knowledgeable and wouldn't expect library services to be confidential. They were more likely to talk to representatives of Connexions, however they did say that the anonymity of books could

sometimes be useful. In order for libraries to be seen as more effective in this department, staff would need training in a range of issues and a private confidential space to talk to young people.

## **2.12 Opportunity Cards**

Opportunity cards were generally received positively by all of the groups and most of the young people felt that their parents would top up their cards.

The young people had a mixed response to the idea of taking privileges away from young people who were in trouble. Most of the young people in Carlisle thought that this would be the only way that “naughty” people “would learn”, although one young person felt strongly that it would discourage troubled young people from trying. In Appleby the people who were never in trouble thought this was a good idea as they resented the fact that young people who were excluded from lessons often got fun things to do. The young people who had been excluded from lessons felt strongly that taking away privileges would just make people feel more alienated.

The young people suggested that they would like to receive the following perks as part of the Opportunity Card offer:

- free cds and dvds
- the ability to keep videos for longer
- arts activities
- more internet access
- free printing
- theatre tickets
- no fines in libraries
- free buses
- activity buses.

## **3 Conclusion**

Museums, libraries and archives could have a lot to offer to young people who are seeking more opportunities to take part in activities and who need more safe spaces to spend time with their friends. In order for this to happen the young people involved in this consultation said that venues need to improve their staffing profile, programming and general atmosphere. Young people would be willing to be involved in the process of updating these venues and would be happy to work in them as volunteers; they perceive that if they had more ownership of these spaces it would improve the image of museums, libraries and archives. Although these young people were largely disengaged from formal activity (particularly in Carlisle and Appleby) they were enthusiastic about a wide-range of cultural activities, suggesting that the right blend of activities with effective marketing could encourage a significant proportion of young people to engage with museums, libraries and archives.

## **Appendix 1: Young people's consultation plan**

### **Background**

This document outlines the approach taken during the consultation sessions, which took place during October 2005 in the North West and South West regions. The format of the consultation varied slightly depending on the needs of the group. Specifically, groups in Plymouth were asked more general questions about the arts, where the groups in the North West focused on provision provided by museums, libraries and archives.

### **Outline Plan of the Consultation Sessions**

#### **1 Introduction**

Introduce concept of Youth Matters. Youth Matters is about how young people spend their time and feel about their local communities at the moment and how the future will look. Government are thinking about what kind of activities should be provided for young people, how they should be paid for and how young people could be encouraged to feel better about where they live and their place in society.

I am paid by MLA North West/SWMLAC (as appropriate) and The Reading Agency (explain) to find out whether you think the government's ideas are any good. Particularly want to hear about how we could use libraries, museums and archives to improve your feelings about community and as places where you could take part in activities.

#### **2 Section focused on Things to do and places to go.**

1 In an average week what proportion of your time do you spend:

- watching TV
- using computers for games, chat rooms, msn etc
- doing homework
- playing sport
- doing arts activities
- hanging out with friends
- other

(Format: Pie chart)

2 What other things do you do in your spare time?

3 If you're involved in activities in library etc do you also use arts centre, theatres etc. Would you like to be?

4 How important are these things in putting you off being involved in activities at the moment? (Format: Card sort – order from most likely to least likely to put you off)

5 Where do you spend your free time?

Stick stickers on map with park, shops, sports centre, library, museum, church, cafe

6 Have you been involved in activities at library, museum or archives? (Arts centres, theatres etc)

7 Would you like to be involved in any of these kind of activities? (Format: Card sort, Probably, possibly, not likely)

8 What puts you off being involved in activities in museums, libraries and archives?

9 Should there be more safe and enjoyable places for young people to spend time outside of school?

10 If there were more safe spaces and activities what would be the impact on you and your friends? Do you think less young people would get into trouble?

11 What would museums, libraries and archives have to do to be seen as safe, enjoyable places for young people to hang out? (Also Arts centres, theatres etc for Plymouth consultation)

### **3 Section focused on Volunteering/being involved**

1 How do you feel about your local community? Do you like where you live? Do you feel safe? Do you feel connected to other people? Like you belong? Feel welcome in most public spaces?

2 What would make you feel more positive about your local community?

3 Do you volunteer/help out in any way at the moment? Coaching kids, visiting old people etc

4 Was it good? What do you think the benefits of volunteering are? Would volunteering help you feel more involved in your community?

5 How do you feel in museums and libraries? (Arts centres, theatres etc)

6 Which of these things would you like to be involved in at museums, libraries, arts centres etc? (Format: Card sort. Probably, possibly, not likely)

7 How would you feel if you were involved in these ways?

8 What else would make you feel more involved in your community?

- 9 Could being involved in making local history projects, interviewing old people, making exhibitions of photos etc make you feel more like you belong, improve relations?
- 10 What kind of recognition/award would encourage you to help out in your community more? Certificate, cds, top-ups, big events, other. Art displayed in gallery/museum, prize giving etc

#### **4 Section on Information, advice and guidance**

- 1 If you need information about the following things where are you most likely to get it? (Format: Card sort – put each issue with the source of information - can go in more than one place)
- 2 Is it better to get information from people or written sources? Pros and cons?
- 3 What role could libraries play in this? Pros and cons of getting information from library?
- 4 Have you ever been involved in an arts activity that helped you to explore personal issues in your life? Could arts be important?

#### **5 Section on Opportunity cards**

Explain what an opportunity card is.

- 1 Would a card that gave you discounts and money to spend on activities encourage you to do more activities in your spare time?
- 2 Would parents top it up?
- 3 Should young people who commit crimes not get their cards topped up?
- 4 What things should be available on the opportunity card? What museums, libraries and archives (Arts) things could we do eg free reservations, more IT time, special events, free cds and dvds, free entry to museum and theatre etc
- 5 Would working towards a recognised qualification eg Young People's Arts Award encourage you to do more arts activities?

#### **6 Wrap up**

Thank you and distribute gift vouchers.