

Public hearing – 2024 review of the annual reports and other matters of the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People and Office of the Children’s Guardian

9 April 2024

Supplementary questions for witnesses – Youth Advisory Council

1. Please comment on whether the number of elected representatives and the structure of the Youth Advisory Council is adequate for it to perform its functions

As representatives of the 2022-2023 Youth Advisory Council (YAC), we (Dylan, Billy and Sereena) believe that the number of elected representatives and the structure of the Youth Advisory Council is adequate for us to perform our function. During the YAC recruitment selection process, the ACYP team considers members from diverse backgrounds and locations (metropolitan Sydney, regional and rural areas) across NSW.

We believe that twelve members are the requirement needed to carry out the functions of the NSW YAC. If we were to increase the number of members in the YAC, we are concerned that this will reduce the opportunity for quieter members to be heard in YAC meetings. Having twelve members is the best number to allow for everyone in the YAC to have their say and feel heard in meetings.

During our term, the YAC met every 6-8 weeks at the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People’s Office in Surry Hills. There were 6 meetings in total, each consisting of 6 hours with opportunities to engage with ACYP projects and provide advice to external stakeholders.

Although the current frequency and location of the meetings are beneficial for the purposes of our function, we would like to have more face-to-face meetings to create greater time for us to make decisions and give advice to stakeholders.

We recommend that face-to-face YAC meeting should happen bi-monthly, with the option to attend a 3-hour online meeting on the off months. This is the more beneficial option that would allow YAC members to feel less rushed when covering denser topics.

We also note that during our term, we had the special opportunity to conduct a regional meeting in Albury, as one of our YAC members, Amelie, was from the area and her dad owned a farm which was used to engage young people in the community. The regional meeting provided YAC members the opportunity to go into the community and see the great work that local organisations, like Boys to the Bush, do every day. Being able to go into each other’s communities during our term is something we should consider. However, we are aware of the huge cost that is involved with organising a regional meeting. We recommend that regional meetings should happen every couple of years, and we should be mindful of the cost and resources to execute a regional meeting.

2. Do you think there should be any amendments to Part 4 of the Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 to strengthen the role of the Youth Advisory Council?

To strengthen the role of the Youth Advisory Council, we recommend an amendment should be made to Part 4, section 21(3) of the Act to 'at least 12 part-time members who are under the age of 25 at the time of their appointment.' We believe that increasing this requirement from six to 12 members will ensure future YACs, beyond our term, will be under the age of 25 and will more accurately reflect ACYP's YAC remit of 12-24 years.

We understand this is the current practice of the Advocate when recruiting, however amending the legislation would ensure the practice continues indefinitely.

3. Do the former representatives of the Youth Advisory Council stay involve in its work after the end of their 12-month terms?

Whether former representatives of the Youth Advisory Council stay involved beyond their term is dependent on the individual and whether the person is best suited for and interested in certain opportunities.

ACYP keeps in touch with former YAC members by sending emails about future opportunities to engage with their work. Some opportunities are offered to all YAC alumni while other opportunities are offered on the basis of skill, interest and/ or location to previous YAC members selectively chosen by ACYP. Ultimately, it is up to the Advocate's discretion to select who would take on the opportunity. This decision is based on the members' availability and whether they would shine in the roles that they propose.

For example, Dylan received an email about the 2024 YAC recruitment and took the opportunity to reapply as the chair for the 2023-2024 YAC. Billy and Sereena were also given the opportunity to present their YAC's Student Voice report to the Secretary and executives of the NSW Department of Education and appear at the Oversight Committee hearing, with Dylan.

We recommend that ACYP should continue to facilitate opportunities for YAC alumni to stay involved. This process should not be definitive nor formalised. ACYP should continue to invite the YAC alumni to choose the opportunities that they would like to take on.