

Supplementary Questions (YAC - Ms Ellen Armfield)

1. During the hearing, you told us about your work with young people with disability (Transcript, p 13).

a. Is the council aware of any initiatives that have effectively included young people with disability in policy-making processes?

b. If not, do you have any suggestions for opportunities that could facilitate involvement of young people with disability?

From my work in political, advocacy and professional spheres, the most common form of exclusion I have noticed in relation to young people with disabilities is in the policy making processes.

For example, while many able-bodied young people are able to have their say through online surveys or forums, those who are physically unable to command a mouse and keyboard with their hands, or who are vision impaired, are excluded. This is similarly found in interview forums. Most interviews conducted with young people expect verbal communication from both parties, making little adjustments for those who use different forms of communication.

I have also witnessed how young people with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from call outs to have their say in the policy making process. When seeking the voices of young people, government agencies may contact schools, youth organisations, youth advisory groups, or use social media. Often, young people with higher support needs are not involved in the groups that governments extend call outs too.

Government and policy makers should be reaching out to areas where young people with disabilities are; support organisations, Schools for Specific Purposes schools, and families. It is also imperative that policy makers go in with the intent of actually learning from the young people with disabilities themselves, not speaking over them, or assuming what their wants and needs might be. This may mean communicating in atypical ways, such as sign, eye movement, facial expression etc, and it will involve asking questions which may differ in form from those asked to non-disabled young people. However, a young person's form of communication should never prohibit them from being involved in the policy and decisions which affect their lives.

This year the Youth Advisory Council are working on individual projects based in their own community. My personal project is working to set up better communication avenues between young people with disabilities, and policy makers on the Northern Beaches. Young people with disabilities need to have their issues addressed and looked after, and they deserve individual agency and attention, like every other young person. A young person's inability to speak or complete an online survey should in no way prohibit them from having input into policies that affect them.

To do this, I have been in contact with various disability organisations, schools and families who live or work in the Northern Beaches area.

I am currently gathering information, with the aim to understand about how young people with disabilities:

- Feel about their current level of involvement with policy and if they would like more involvement.

- The best ways to communicate with young people about what needs are/are not being met.
- Any Northern Beaches specific issues or concerns they would like to raise.

With this information, I plan to work with the Northern Beaches council and local MPs to set up a continued line of communication between young people with disabilities on the Northern Beaches.

My project will be finalised and ready to present by the 15th of August. I would be happy to present my findings and conclusions any time after this date at the committee's convenience.