

EU / UK Youth

Stronger Together

Network of Youth Organisations

Background paper

31 January 2025



EU-UK Youth Stronger Together

Towards a Network of Youth Organisations

➤ Consultation Period

This background paper details the process of the creation of a Network of EU/UK youth organisations which was part of a longer consultation for the development of the [EU/UK Youth Recommendations](#) and the conversations, priorities and ideas that emerged from it. One of the four key Recommendations outlines the will for the creation of a Network of EU/UK Youth Organisations.

The consultation was part of the [EU/UK Youth Stronger Together](#), a two-year (Feb 23 – Jan 25) EU funded project led by the British Council in cooperation the European Movement International, which aimed at connecting young people and youth organisations across the UK and the EU in meaningful and productive ways.

These discussions carried out from mid-2023 to end of 2024, directly involving more than 120 youth organisations and young people (aged 16 – 30) across the UK, as well as with sector specialists and with the support of our Youth Advisory Board (see Annex II). The consultation also included youth organisations from across the EU, who have contributed their perspectives and who support the final recommendations.

From the beginning of the consultation, there was widespread support for continuous dialogue between youth in the UK and the EU. It was recognised that there are limited opportunities for UK / European collaboration and collective voice and action; and in the UK, there is very little funding and support for European engagement. There are currently many networks, organisations, and groups in the UK, and based in the EU with UK members, whose aims align with the recommendations in this report. However, they are not connected and not maximising the potential to generate, for example, learning and insights, partnership opportunities, or accessible pathways for different groups of young people.

- **Phase 1: Understanding the Context**

What is the current situation and what are the priorities for young people and youth organisations?

June 2023 – June 2024

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- Initial consultation at national events. Interviews with representatives from youth organisations at events in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. We asked about their current and future priorities and needs, their perspectives about relations with the EU, and how closer EU relations might contribute to their aims. We also asked what else existed that supported EU-UK relations, what gaps there were and what they would like to see in the future.
 - In-person focus groups with young people and representatives from youth organisations from across the UK at the 2023 Youth Gathering organised by the EU Delegation to the UK in London.
 - Online focus groups for young people. Two focus groups with a specially recruited cross-section of young people, aged 18 – 24, from across the UK in cooperation with the European Movement International and their research experts.

- **Phase 2: Shaping the Recommendations**

What specific recommendations would further young people and youth organisations' needs and priorities?

June 2024 – September 2024

- Online focus groups with representatives from a cross-section of youth organisations from across the UK and EU to inform the initial recommendations. Participants responded to initial themes identified in Phase 1 and helped shape the key headline recommendations, sharing ideas about what might be included in the details of each recommendation.
- Recommendations review, through a Partnership with Dr Dan Moxon of People Dialogue and Change. Dr Moxon advised on the framing and drafting of the recommendations in the context of the current policy landscape and other initiatives in the EU and UK.

- **Phase 3: Validation and Endorsement**

Are the recommendations relevant, and how could they be more specific and more targeted?

September 2024 – October 2024

- Online national focus groups. Representatives of youth organisations took part in five focus groups, one for Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and the EU. Participants were asked to validate and question the recommendations and how they might be made more specific and targeted to work for them. They also gave us insights into the national / devolved context and specific examples of needs and opportunities for change and what might be possible.

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- Interviews with targeted organisations. We talked directly to representatives from organisations active on EU-UK relations that had not been involved in the consultation up to this point.

- **Phase 4: Dissemination and Action**

Oct 2024 – January 2025

- Youth Dialogue Event. The Stronger Together programme participated at the EU-UK 2024 Youth Dialogue event organised by the EU Delegation to the UK in London in November 2024. Members of the Youth Advisory Board presented the findings and recommendations at the event and facilitated side events on the issues in the report.
- Workshop to inform the EU-UK Network of Youth Organisations. We brought 30 representatives from UK and EU youth organisations together in London to work on the Terms of Reference for the proposed network.

➤ **A Workshop for EU/UK Youth Organisations**

Aims

- Strengthen evidence and narrative for EU-UK youth collaboration
- Build support for and commitment to a network of EU and UK Youth Organisations
- Develop terms of reference and considerations for the network

Agenda

On 6 November 2024, 30 participants coming from across the UK and EU countries, gathered for the Stronger Together Workshop in London.

Held at the London School of Economics the workshop brought together representatives from youth organisations focused on the impact of EU/UK youth relations. The Workshop's agenda included strengthening the narrative of youth collaboration, exploring the current EU and UK civil society and policy landscape, establishing a commitment to an EU-UK network, and drafting terms of reference and considerations for the network's future.

Lead facilitators included James Edleston (Create Adapt), Dan Moxon (People Dialogue and Change), and Ife Obasa (Ifeonetwork), with support from Eirini Kareta (EU Programme Manager and Business Development, British Council) and other British Council team members. The day concluded with a final event celebrating the achievements and impact of the Stronger Together project on EU/UK youth relations, also hosted at The London School of Economics.

See Annex I for a list of participating organisations.

Summary of discussions

The workshop supported the development of plans for a network aimed at strengthening connections between EU and UK youth organisations. The agenda focused on building relationships between participants, exploring the current landscape of youth organisations, and developing a shared purpose and terms of reference for the network. Key areas of discussion included who should be involved in the network, the network's goals and activities, operational structure and governance, volunteer activation as well as sustainability and funding.

The workshop concluded with an interactive session during which terms of reference were established. This explored key considerations for the network's structure and future development, encompassing aspects such as purpose, coordination, strategy, locus of change, membership, development, and youth participation. Participants were asked to contribute to a network that would facilitate learning and exchange, and contribute to a collective voice on UK-EU youth relations work; and one which was:

- EU-UK focused
- Youth-led
- Inclusive

Conclusions and next steps

The workshop was successful in bringing together a diversity of organisations from across the UK and EU and generating commitment to, and ideas for, a future network. Participants from the event will now volunteer to help take the work forward, to co-design and lead the next steps as an initial working group, embedding ownership with the group from the start, with support from the British Council over the first few months.

Following the event, the team of facilitators put together a Terms of Reference (ToR) for the network, drawing on the outcomes from the Workshop (see Annex III). We further consolidated the ToR in December by consultation with the Youth Advisory Board and the volunteer working group who helped finalise the ToR.

In addition, we gathered interest from involved organisations in taking up the role of Network chairs for the first six months of the Network operation. The British Youth Council and Young European Movement UK representatives put themselves forth for this role and were identified as the first co-chairs of the Network. They organised the first Network meeting on 28 January 2025.

Initial priorities for the network will include pursuing the Stronger Together Youth Recommendations, identifying potential network members, especially where there are significant gaps in representation, and to establish the ways of operation, the focused working streams as well as the opportunities for the support for the network.

➤ An EU-UK network of youth organisations: an explicit request coming from youth

As the creation of the Network was outlined among the [four key Youth Recommendations](#) that were put forth as part of the EU/UK Youth Stronger Together programme, we include hereby the concept behind it as well as elements of the discussions which formed the recommendation.

Support a UK-EU network of youth organisations for ongoing dialogue and collaboration

- **Provide support and funding for a UK-EU network of youth organisations and youth representatives, ensuring diverse representation.** Key roles of this network would include:
 - Facilitating learning and exchange between youth organisations and young people.
 - Addressing the barriers that some young people face in accessing learning mobility and resources.
 - Providing a collective voice on UK-EU youth relations, learning mobility and opportunities.
 - Identifying, sourcing and signposting to resources and funding opportunities.

Embedding diversity and ensuring accessibility from the inception of the network was seen as crucial. This included outreach to organisations who work with different groups of young people and reducing barriers to entry.

“And through smaller organisations and local youth groups, to reach out to young people in rural areas and small communities can help bridge the gap. And connect local groups to other local groups in EU. Look at what already exists.”

“Let’s try and meet young people, particularly in rural Scotland, where they are with what they need. Part of that is strengthening local communities, and that enables wider engagement.”

Learning and exchange between youth organisations

There was a clear desire to find spaces for ongoing dialogue between youth organisations, including about the post-Brexit future itself, and to explore possibilities together.

There was a spread of opinion about the relative value of the exchange itself – through which opportunities may emerge – and the provision of specific opportunities, e.g. skills training or thematic group working. On all counts, participants supported the idea of a network that enabled new relationships, facilitated regular conversations and collective learning, seeded collaboration and that could pool information and resources.

Participants also noted that positive, existing organisational relationships provide a strong foundation for the future and to continue the dialogue and that some networks already exist. There was a question about how this network might serve the existing ecosystem and how it might be a “*network of networks.*”

“There are lots of EU-UK friendships that can develop into GREAT opportunities for future projects and networks!”

“It’s good to use pre-existing platforms and networks to share things.”

Learning and exchange for young people

Many participants promoted the idea of the network directly engaging young people, around three specific areas.

- Providing a forum for intercultural and international dialogue. There was concern at the growing isolation of young people in the UK from Europe (and globally) and the lack of opportunities for meaningful exchange.
- A forum for practical exchange of ideas and practice, with the aim of supporting shared learning and action-oriented relationships. Also mentioned was the possibility of mentoring relationships, both peer-to-peer and between young people and organisations or experts.
- A space for young people to easily find and access (free) courses and other relevant skills-building and other opportunities. These may also be delivered directly by network members.

An information hub and resourcing youth initiatives

There is a clear need and desire for support for EU / UK youth initiatives, especially after the closure of Erasmus+. It was felt that the network could

play a key role in leveraging, sourcing or drawing together resources, if not directly providing funding.

In the first instance, it was suggested that the network could pool and share existing opportunities and important information. Some initiatives participants shared as examples they are involved in or are familiar with included Europeers UK and InterCom, run by the Centre for International Leadership and Learning (CILL); E-twinning initiatives, national platforms, for example the Young Scot platform; informal social enterprises that facilitate cultural exchanges, for example, Gotoco; and young professional networks.

Other politically oriented forums mentioned that are of interest to the network include the Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth, the European Youth Work Agenda (EU and CoE) and the Bonn Process of implementation, European Youth Parliament, International Youth Policy Dialogue Network and the OSCE Youth Forum.

It was advocated by many that the network should focus on supporting inclusion in EU-UK youth opportunities and push for greater access to funding for small and minority organisations as well as funding to widen participation. Support to the network for overcoming other barriers to mobility was also discussed, for example, *“Working with partners on entry requirements and the visa system.”*

“Especially for young people who are not EU or UK citizens, it’s really difficult to know about initiatives and what is possible with visas and travel.”

Policy and Advocacy

The potential for a stronger, collective voice and influence was a priority for some. This included:

- Creating a forum for policy dialogue amongst organisations, to which decision-makers could be invited.
- Developing specific policy recommendations, in response to changing needs and context, and opportunities for shared advocacy.
- An opportunity to “unify policy” – to seek alignment in policies and procedures to make EU/UK collaboration easier, for example about safeguarding.

It was believed that the network could be a relatively straightforward and low-cost approach to supporting all the recommendations. It might require a small investment to incubate and to provide a coordination role but would draw on the energy and existing work of its members. It is responding to demand, and through carrying out this research some foundations are already in place, as it

connected with and between organisations, young people and groups as part of the process.

“This recommendation stood out the most for me. This is something that the young people we work with will find really really valuable.”

“Awareness and network opportunities need to be strengthened. It doesn't feel like things are being shared with everyone. People are also doing the same things - need more joined up working, realising we all have the same aim. At the end of the day, it's about getting young people the information. That's why we're all in this role.”

Annex I:

Participating Organisations at the Workshop and first online meeting

- #IWill Scotland
- British Youth Council
- Cairngorms Youth Action Team
- Camphill Community Glencraig
- ConnectFutures
- Cyprus Youth Council
- European Economic and Social Committee, EESC
- European Movement Finland (JEF Finland)
- European Movement Ireland
- European Students' Union
- Forth Valley & Lomond Youth Local Action Group, YLAG, Scotland
- Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow
- GMYCA
- Green And Away
- Human Rights Consortium Scotland
- InStone, UK
- Irvine Royal Academy
- Live Love Paris
- National Youth Advocacy Service Cymru
- National Youth Agency, UK
- National Youth Council of Hungary
- NYCI
- RWE Supply and Trading
- Scottish Young Greens
- Scottish Advisory Forum on Europe
- The Health and Social Care Alliance (The ALLIANCE)
- The Mighty Creatives
- UK National Commission for UNESCO
- Ulster Wildlife
- Undivided Training and Consultancy and Trans in the City
- Volunteer Now, Youth Advisory Partnership
- WCIA
- Welsh Youth Parliament
- World Food Forum
- Y4IE- Youth For Inclusive Europe (former INCLUSIVE EUROPE PROJECT)
- Young Advisors
- Young European Movement UK
- Youth Council of Brdovec Municipality, Croatia

Annex II:

The Youth Advisory Board

Throughout all phases of the consultation the process has been shaped and supported by our Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The YAB comprised representatives of UK and EU organisations.

- British Youth Council – Maurizio Cuttin, Zara Okusi
- European Youth Forum – Ismael Paez Civico, Lauren Mason
- Northern Ireland Youth Forum – Oisín Tomás Reilly, Cohen Taylor, Aoife Murphy
- Scottish Youth Parliament - Matt McDonald
- Senedd Cymru / Welsh Youth Parliament - Amber Lewis
- Young European Movement UK - Stella Mavropoulou, Klajdi Selimi, Cecilia Jastrzemska

Along with the institutional remit of organisations in the Youth Advisory Board, there has been a pool of young representatives who stood as critical friends since the very beginning of the project and have passionately supported its vision and purpose by supporting the process with their genius. We would like to acknowledge:

- Gloria Gelsica, Founder of Y4IE, Human Rights Educator
- Ismael Paez Civico, Executive Director at CESES/ Founder of Civic Space EU
- Maurizio Cuttin, Vice-Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe
- Rory Scott Chapman, External Affairs and Outreach Officer, Scottish Advisory Forum on Europe
- Stella Mavropoulou, EDI Coordinator, Goldsmith's University

Annex III:

EU-UK Network of Youth Organisations

Terms of Reference

A network of UK and EU youth organisations was one of the key recommendations from the Stronger Together consultation. Its establishment would respond to demand from the youth sector and would draw on the energy and existing work of its members.

The network is a practical, effective way of supporting ongoing EU-UK dialogue and acting in support of the other youth recommendations:

- Advancing negotiations on UK-EU youth learning mobility
- Strengthening opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between young people in the UK and the EU
- Strengthening youth participation in public debate and policy dialogue on the future of EU-UK relations.

This is an opportunity to connect the many networks, organisations and groups in the UK and EU whose aims align with the recommendations and maximise their collective potential to generate learning, action and influence.

This Terms of Reference sets out the initial working arrangements for the proposed EU-UK network of youth organisations.

PURPOSE OF THE NETWORK

- To build a sustainable community of EU and UK youth organisations
- To enable youth organisations to support and advocate for:
 - Greater access for young people to quality opportunities for EU-UK youth exchanges and intercultural education
 - Young people's involvement and participation in shaping the EU-UK relationship

OBJECTIVES

The scope of objectives is informed by the Stronger Together Youth Recommendations and will include:

- **Connection:** Strengthening the connection and sense of unity amongst UK and EU youth organisations
- **Cooperation:** Increasing cooperation in the youth field between the UK, the EU and its Member States
- **Opportunity:** Enabling youth organisations to create more inclusive and accessible opportunities and experiences for young people across the EU and UK to learn, live, work and study

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- **Advocacy:** Carrying out collective advocacy on shared organisational and youth priorities
 - **Learning:** Sharing experience and insights and facilitating mutual learning between youth organisations

Additional specific priorities for the network may also be determined by its members and may shift over time in response to the context and needs.

FOUNDATIONS

The network will be established with these parameters and principles.

- **EU-UK** – The network is for organisations based in the UK and EU member states. A balance between EU and UK organisations will be sought
- **UK wide** – There will be representation from across the UK and will recognise devolved issues.
- **Youth focused** - It is by and for young people
- **Inclusive** – The network strives for a diverse membership and to be accessible to all. We wish to develop a membership that will represent the diversity of young people living in the UK and EU, including for example, young people from low-income backgrounds, disabled individuals, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ youth and migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Adding value** – The network will connect with and contribute to the wider eco-system.

MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

Full membership of the network will be open to all organisations who are committed to the purpose and objectives of the network and who are and EU or UK youth focused organisations.

Associate membership will be open to individuals, aged 16 or over, who are committed to the purpose and objectives of the network, accepted on a case-by-case basis.

Age

The network is taking a broad definition of youth, as young people aged 11 to 35, in order to be inclusive across different definitions of youth in the UK, devolved nations, and the EU. However, representatives of organisations in their role as participating members of the network should be between 16 and 35.

Membership application and termination

Interested parties can apply to join the network by responding to a simple application form. This will include:

- A statement that the organisation meets the basic criteria outlined above
- Details of the named person or people who will represent the organisation
- A short explanation of why they would like to join the network.

Membership will be refused to any applicant that does not meet the membership criteria above or does not represent the principles of the network. For example, an organisation that does not specifically serve young people, or is discriminatory in any way.

There is no fixed term for membership. The co-chairs may jointly remove members of the network who are inactive, or who no longer meet the membership criteria, following a review and an invitation to consultation with the member in question.

The network will be proactive in regularly reviewing its membership, particularly for organisations which have not yet been reached or groups who are not yet represented in the groups and will endeavour to reach out and engage them. Diversity and accessibility will be embedded from the start.

GOVERNANCE

Roles

The network will be member-led, with members taking up two rotating Co-chair positions, supported by a working group, or working groups, as necessary.

Co-chairs

2 Co-chairs will be selected from amongst the members on an annual basis – one from the UK and one from the EU.

The Chairs will take responsibility for the day to day running of the network, ensuring it is fulfilling its purpose. They will act as a point of contact for potential partners, funders and members. Chairs will have the power and responsibility to:

- Organise and set the agenda for network meetings
- Notify members of network meetings, at least 14 days before the meeting takes place.
- Maintain a list of members of the network
- Approve new network members
- Convene working groups to support them in their duties or to lead on specific discussion and actions as necessary

All Members will have the right to:

- Take part in network meetings and activities
- Contribute their experience and expertise
- Take an active role in shared network communication and actions

Full members will have the right to:

- Elect the chairs on an annual basis at the AGM
- Propose amendments to the TOR, for approval by membership vote.

In the matters above, all full members will be entitled to one vote, proxy voting will be allowed. One third of membership participating in a vote will be considered quorate.

Network Meetings

- At least one annual general meeting and three network meetings will take place per year
- Meetings will predominantly take place online, enabling wider participation and minimising costs. However, in-person meetings may be arranged, where funding permits, to strengthen relationships and enable deeper conversations and more focused planning and collaboration
- Where face to face meetings take place, they will be held in different locations to enable the widest possible participation.
- Member organisations will be able to send multiple representatives to meetings. Member organisations are encouraged to identify young people who are able to represent their organisation within network meetings. Where member organisations wish to be represented by a young person under 18, the representative must be accompanied and provide a supporting adult from the member organisations to take responsibility for the safeguarding, welfare and general support of the young person.