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# Stronger Together for youth leadership

Recommendations

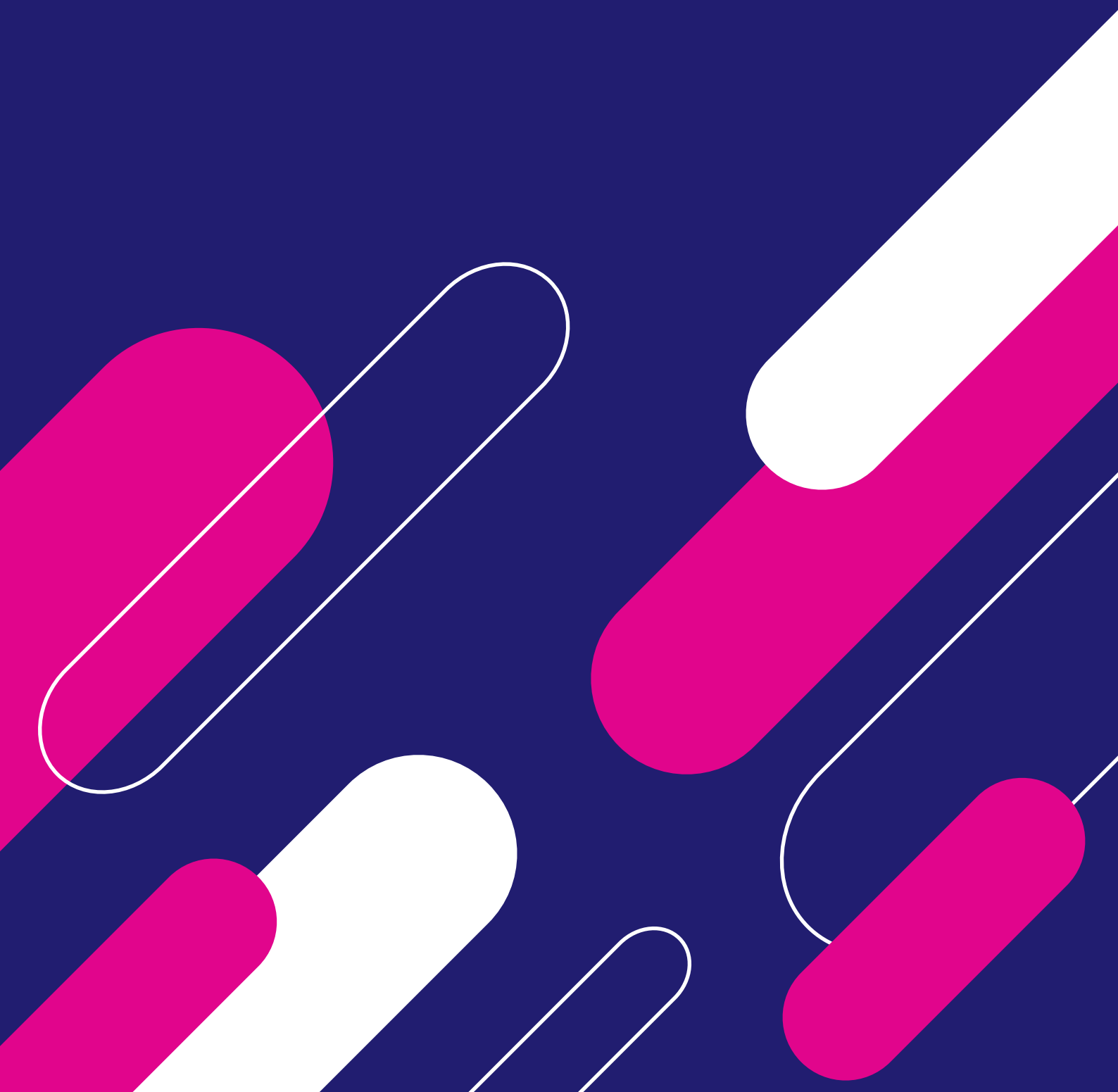
The background features several large, overlapping, rounded rectangular shapes in shades of pink and magenta. White, thin, curved lines are overlaid on these shapes, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall design is modern and dynamic.

# INTRODUCTION

This report represents the voice of the UK youth sector and sets out key recommendations for the future of EU-UK relations in the field of youth.

The report has been informed by a consultation with 120 youth organisations and young people across the UK, as well as with sector specialists and with the support of our Youth Advisory Board (see Consultation participants, pg. 9). The consultation also included youth organisations from across the EU, who have contributed their perspectives and who support the final recommendations. (See page 10 for details)

The picture is clear. Young people and youth organisations in the UK want a closer relationship with the EU. They want to connect and collaborate more, and see the value of this for the country, their organisations and for the lives and concerns of young people.



# Recommendations

There are four central, interconnected recommendations. We call on the UK Government, devolved governments, and the EU to:

1. Advance negotiations on **UK-EU youth learning mobility**.
2. Strengthen opportunities for **cultural exchange and mutual understanding** between young people in the UK and the EU.
3. Strengthen **youth participation** in public debate and policy dialogue on the future of EU-UK relations.
4. Support a **UK-EU network** of youth organisations for ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

See background paper for full details of the approach and findings.

## Why this consultation?

This consultation is part of the British Council's Stronger Together programme, which aims to connect young people and youth organisations across the UK and the EU in meaningful and productive ways.

According to research, young people want the UK to build relations with the EU and express concern about the impact of the referendum to leave the EU, for example, in terms of rising intolerance and discrimination. Only 5% of young people from the UK thought that politicians have listened to their views on Brexit (*Jack Petchey Foundation, 2019*) and there are currently few opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Young people are also clearly interested in and affected by specific issues. They recognise that these are global issues affecting both the UK and EU member states. Some that emerged strongly through the consultation include climate change, the cost of living, economic inequalities, mobility, violence against women and girls, and conflict. In the views of young people, these are transnational issues which require a collective approach. Implementation of these recommendations will enable a collaborative approach to youth dialogue and action on global issues.

These recommendations are focused on strengthening opportunities for young people from the UK and EU to connect, communicate and collaborate, especially through the use of learning mobility programmes and support for young people's participation. There is a clear desire for this, and significant opportunities to move towards a more supportive, joined-up environment, and to make a positive impact.

This consultation was carried out in a spirit of shared purpose; moving forward from divisive Brexit debates, to work together for a positive future for young people and for UK-EU relations.

## Benefits of EU-UK youth relations

Each of the recommendations below details specific benefits, however stronger relations between UK and EU young people will have a wider positive impact on the UK, the EU and on young people.



A closer relationship has a positive effect on supporting a stable, cohesive, and peaceful Europe, and seeding better relations between young people has an impact over generations. Closer relationships also have an economic benefit, including through trade, and also by improving cultural, educational, and scientific exchange and innovation to help support inclusive growth. Ensuring marginalised and disadvantaged groups have access to valuable exchange and learning opportunities advances the UK and EU's commitment to inclusion and equity and enhances social cohesion through fostering mutual understanding and empathy across diverse communities.

Closer EU-UK relations also strengthens the ability to address transnational issues of shared concern, such as social and environmental issues and inequities in our society, through collective action.

The EU recognises the mutual benefit of closer youth relations, evidenced in the recommendation for a Council Decision to open negotiations towards a UK-EU agreement on youth mobility. (*European Commission, 2024*). EU youth organisations also share that they value UK youth sector practice and opportunities for learning exchange with the UK. They also see cultural exchange and language learning as an important benefit of exchange for young people; and they feel better connected to the rest of the world via relations with the UK. Similarly, for UK youth, closer relations with the EU, not only offer valuable opportunities for cultural exchange and language learning but also exposure to diverse perspectives, enhancing their global awareness and employability in an interconnected world.

For the UK, there is a benefit to the country's soft power and international image, for example as a destination for international students and it has positive impact on the economy, through trade as well as through cultural, educational, and scientific exchange and innovation.

The recommendations offer mutually beneficial approaches to UK-EU youth relations through specific opportunities for young people.

The implementation of these recommendations would also contribute to a range of policy priorities for young people. For example, they would:

- Enrich *education and learning*,
- Provide varied *positive opportunities* for young people, particularly those with less access or who experience marginalisation. This includes young people from low-income backgrounds, disabled individuals, young women, LGBTQ+ young people, other minority groups and those in rural or remote areas.
- Widen *young people's horizons*, strengthen their national identity, their identity as global citizens, and ensure they can engage with diverse cultures, identities, and lived experiences.
- Help young people develop core *transferable skills* for their personal, community and professional lives, for example confidence and communication
- Strengthen *active, democratic citizenship*, community involvement and volunteering.

Young people would also feel that their needs and voice are being recognised. They want to feel connected to the wider European community, of which the EU is a central part, exchange with new people, travel and be active on global issues. Responding to this call from young people helps show their Governments are listening to them.





*These recommendations are saying what young people are saying to me.*

— Geoff Phillips, Barnardo's



*Young people from across the EU have expressed a desire to participate in events in the UK, for example, as per the demands of the European Youth Forum members.*

— Lauren Mason, European Youth Forum

## RECOMMENDATION 1

### The UK Government and EU institutions should advance negotiations on UK-EU youth learning mobility

#### With a view to reaching an agreement that will:

1. Pave the way for the UK to rejoin the Erasmus+ programme, while fostering the broader development of concrete UK-EU learning mobility opportunities afforded to young people regardless of background.
2. Provide support and resourcing for youth organisations and youth workers on both sides to enable the development of quality UK-EU learning mobility projects for and with young people. This should include access to sustainable funding and support to participate in international networks of youth organisations and youth workers.
3. Ensure that future UK-EU learning mobility opportunities for young people are inclusive, well supported, and accessible to all, regardless of background. This should include funding specifically for projects that aim to engage diverse groups of young people and address the unique challenges they face in accessing mobility opportunities.
4. Alongside consideration of the Erasmus+ programme, and to address short-term needs through a transition period, take account of the potential for:
  - The promotion and further development of existing UK mobility schemes such as Turing, Taith, and the UK youth mobility scheme. However, the Turing scheme is not considered a replacement for Erasmus+, as it is focused on higher education and because it does not support reciprocal exchange of young people.
  - The development and use of additional complementary programmes to support EU-UK youth mobility, such as Creative Europe.
  - The current Erasmus+ programme to better involve 'Third Countries' associated to the programme.
  - The investment in shorter term projects for maintaining EU-UK youth relations in the non-formal education sector, collaboration between youth organisations and facilitation of youth dialogue.

# Why UK-EU youth learning mobility?

There is a depth of support for learning mobility in general, and the Erasmus+ programme in particular, in recognition of the value it brings to young people, youth organisations, communities and the UK as a whole.

It is important to distinguish between the concepts of learning mobility, migration and the right to free movement and work between the EU and the UK. Learning mobility refers to short-term, fixed-length opportunities for young people to grow and develop. This can be achieved through initiatives such as youth exchanges, which provide young people with the chance to enhance their skills, expand their knowledge and facilitate their personal development.

Supported learning mobility, where young people's participation is facilitated and responsive to their needs, can enable all young people to access these powerful learning opportunities, not only those with existing networks and resources. However, this inclusion requires support, and support requires investment. There is valuable learning and approaches about accessibility from Taith and other schemes for future programmes and National Agencies.

Learning mobility facilitates collaboration between young activists, entrepreneurs and professionals, creating the conditions for innovation and collective impact. It also strengthens the UK youth sector through the exchange of skills, ideas and approaches between youth workers and organisations, as well as providing investment into new programmes in response to changing needs.

The Erasmus+ programme offers opportunities to young people both within and outside the EU, and the UK is one of the few countries in Europe and the rest of the world that misses out completely on this. Rejoining the programme would be a popular and relatively easy option to strengthen UK-EU youth relations, with the possibility of starting as a partner country and becoming a full member in the next programme cycle.



*I was lucky enough to be in the last year of Erasmus. It had a really significant impact on what I felt was available to me. I was the first generation in my family who could go and work and live abroad. I met so many wonderful people, it really helped my education and view on life.*

— Young focus group participant



*Based on the young people we work with, and young people I've worked with in the past, this is a very very important issue. Young people at the moment in Northern Ireland aren't getting access to the same opportunities their parents had. If we could reconnect young people with those opportunities, it would be very very important.*

— Geoff Phillips, Barnardo's





*We need to broaden the outreach and impact of Erasmus+... This includes the re-accession of both the United Kingdom and Switzerland to the programme.*

— European Youth Forum, June 2024



*The DAGs call on both sides to consider prioritising an agreement on youth mobility to allow young people greater opportunities to study and work in the EU and UK. Moreover, the DAGs would welcome further discussions on association to Erasmus+.*

— UK-EU Domestic Advisory Groups Recommendations, 2024

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### Strengthen opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between young people in the UK and the EU

**In addition to supported learning mobility, we recommend that the UK and the EU:**

1. Support wider opportunities for cultural exchange between young people in the UK and the EU. This includes support for organisations and initiatives to provide accessible opportunities for young people to connect, build mutual understanding, dialogue on issues of concern and develop lasting relationships.
2. Strengthen global and European citizenship education, so it reflects the diverse identities and experiences of young people and enables more opportunities for young people to gain intercultural skills in formal and non-formal education and youth work.
3. Tackle division, misinformation, and disinformation. Actively explore ways to address the spread of divisive and harmful narratives and support responsive and tailored support for young people's digital and media literacy skills development.

## Why cultural exchange?

Building understanding and relationships within and between young people in the UK and the EU is a foundation for positive relations and effective, inclusive collaboration, particularly after the divisive debate over Brexit.

Young people want opportunities to broaden their horizons and networks, and many want to explore their own heritage and their shared European cultures, values, and backgrounds. There is a desire to rekindle a collective mindset and the feeling of being part of something bigger – not as part of the EU, but with a common purpose and values.

They also felt that the space for positive dialogue was closing, and they feel less confident to share opinions and engage in constructive democratic debate, particularly online, and with the influence of extremist and populist narratives across the UK and Europe. This has a significant knock-on effect



on the quality and plurality of public debates, and a sense for young people that their rights and freedoms are being eroded. This can also have a negative impact on young people's mental health and encourage democratic backsliding, particularly among those who feel excluded or marginalised. Promoting inclusivity and representation in discussions can help mitigate these effects and foster a sense of belonging.

All sectors can play a role in creating space for positive exchange and supporting the crucial interpersonal, intercultural, and wider life skills, such as critical thinking and media literacy, for all young people to engage confidently and positively with each other and across difference.

“

*As an organisation, this is why we're trying to build a tunnel under the channel! Because the ways of engaging are few and far between.*

— Dr Nick Owen, MBE, CEO, The Mighty Creatives

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*It feels like a really important time for young people to experience differences. Division, the rise of populism, etc. It just feels like reaching out to each other is more important than ever. This recommendation is really close to our hearts at the moment.*

— Samantha Anderson, National Youth Advocacy Service Cymru

“

*It's about being global, about being international. As a nation and as an organisation we have it in our DNA and in our work, but unfortunately, we don't have the sustainable funding to make it as central as we'd like it to be.*

— Catrin James, Urdd Gobaith Cymru

“

*Currently, there's a big wave of international nurses working on wards that are short-staffed, and there's been issues of racism... and there's a lot of misinformation as well. 100% there needs to be more education about different cultures.*

— Adam, Young Focus Group Participant

“

*The more collaboration, the less misunderstanding and the better generation of future young leaders in the EU and the UK.*

— Young focus group participant





## RECOMMENDATION 3

### Strengthen youth participation in dialogue and policy on the future of UK-EU relations

1. Develop mechanisms for young people's participation in dialogue and policy making on the future of UK-EU relations to ensure that young people's views and considerations can be meaningfully considered in all areas. These mechanisms should be inclusive, considering the diverse needs of young people across backgrounds and identities. Such mechanisms might include:
  - Development of a UK-EU Youth Sounding Board to advise on youth priorities for UK-EU relations.
  - Continued UK youth sector representation on the UK Domestic Advisory Groups
  - Engagement with existing structures for youth participation such as the UK Youth Parliament, and local youth councils, as well as independent civil society and youth voice from all UK nations.
2. Enable young people and youth organisations from the UK to access existing structures and spaces for dialogue, including the EU Youth Dialogues and European Youth Events.
3. Carry out a review of the UK and devolved government approaches to youth policy and political participation, including the current opportunities, institutions and funding structures, and the wider public context that may enable or inhibit young people's voice, participation, and civic rights. This review should prioritize addressing barriers faced by marginalized youth and acknowledge the different needs across the population.

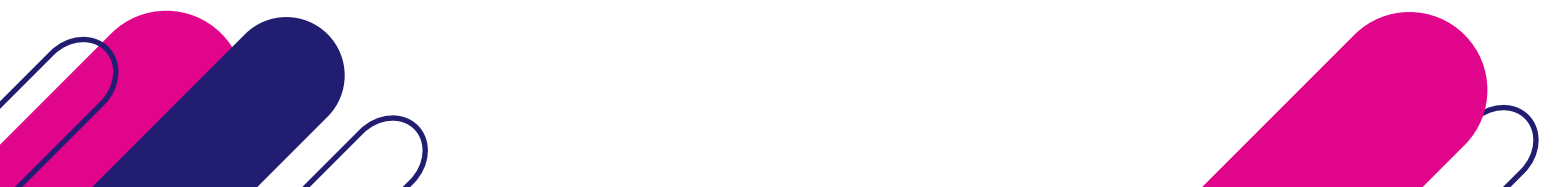
## Why youth participation?

The UK and the EU have long-standing support for young people's rights and engagement in democracy. The negotiations on the future of UK-EU relations are an opportunity to stimulate engagement and must be done in a way that is accessible and that relates to young people's lives and concerns. This may be supported through formal mechanisms, through UK youth organisations involvement in existing EU initiatives, and informal, inclusive, fora for young people's engagement.

It is important for young people to play an active role in the development of future UK-EU relations and to increase the voice of young people in policy and decision-making in this area. Diverse representation is also crucial to ensure these dialogues are inclusive and that policies reflect the realities faced by different groups of young people.

This recommendation should also be seen in the context of democratic backsliding and the reduction in young people's public engagement and the shrinking space for public debate. (For example, See Council of Europe recommendations on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes.) The environment, structures and support for youth participation in the UK have a direct impact on the potential for young people to have a voice on UK-EU relations, as well as on their public and political engagement more broadly.

There was also a clear desire to find spaces for dialogue between youth organisations about the post-Brexit future, and to explore possibilities together. The proposed network detailed in Recommendation four would support this.





*Hold the line, there is nothing about us without us.*

— Young focus group participant



*Where I'm from in Northern Ireland we hear so much about how Brexit will affect us, but I don't feel part of the conversation.*

— Young focus group participant



*It's linked to education and understanding. Accessibility-wise, there's an information gap about what this would actually mean. If you want to involve young people, they need to know what it means to influence policy and whether it would have any kind of impact.*

— Savannah Hanson, ConnectFutures



*Yes! But it's how we go about this. We have to think about what works for young people. Are there ways we can do this less formally, for example through youth or sports clubs, etc.*

— Young focus group participant

## RECOMMENDATION 4

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

1. 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.

## Why a network of youth organisations?

There are currently many networks, organisations and groups in the UK, and many based in the EU with UK members - whose aims align with the recommendations in this report; however, they



are not currently connected. Investment will help coordinate and maximise the potential of this growing network, for example to generate learning, action and partnership opportunities, or create accessible pathways for diverse groups of young people.

This recommendation is a practical, effective response to the needs and ambitions that young people and youth organisations have shared through the consultation. The network would also support the three preceding recommendations. For example, the network would have an interest in engaging in dialogue and consultation on UK-EU relationships, and so support Recommendation Three.

The network would also connect with existing networks, for example, the European Youth Forum, where there is value in UK collaboration, but on which there is no longer a UK member.

The recommendation responds to demand from the sector and would draw on the energy and existing work of its members. Through carrying out this consultation, foundations are already in place for a network, as it has connected with and between organizations, young people, and groups as part of the process. Furthermore, this recommendation suggests leveraging existing platforms and partnerships to support coordinated connections, maximise existing efforts and ensure commitment. Representation from all four nations of the UK -England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland- will guarantee that youth perspectives are inclusive of the unique needs and aspirations within each nation.



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

— Alice Clarke, Student Action for Refugees



*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.*

— Kacey Schultz, National Youth Advocacy Service, Cymru



*You've got to dig and dig and dig.*

— Kyran Wegener, Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authority



*It was interesting to see a consensus amongst participants who thought that there is not enough signposting towards opportunities for young people to network and speak about issues relating to strengthening UK/ Scotland – EU relations.*

— Rory Chapman, The Scottish Advisory Forum on Europe



# REFERENCES

## **EU Youth Strategy**

The framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027.

[https://youth.europa.eu/strategy\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en)

## **The Erasmus Programme, UK Parliamentary Briefing**

This briefing provides information on the UK's involvement in the Erasmus+ programme.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8326/>

## **Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Youth Action Plan in EU external action 2022 – 2027**

Promoting meaningful youth participation and empowerment in EU external action for sustainable development, equality, and peace

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022JC0053>

## **Recommendation for a COUNCIL DECISION authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on youth mobility**

[https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM\(2024\)169&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM(2024)169&lang=en)

## **Questions and answers on the Commission's proposal to open negotiations on EU-UK youth mobility**

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/qanda\\_24\\_2109](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/qanda_24_2109)

## **UK Youth Perspectives and Priorities for Brexit Negotiations.**

(London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017)

<https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/A-Better-Brexit-for-Young-People.pdf>

## **Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on protecting youth civil society and young people and supporting their participation in democratic processes.**

(Council of Europe, 2022)

<https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a5e7f3>

## **EU and UK Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) Joint Statement, September 2024**

DAGs support prioritising an agreement on youth mobility and negotiation on Erasmus+

[https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-09/eu-uk\\_dags\\_joint\\_statement\\_2024-updated.pdf](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-09/eu-uk_dags_joint_statement_2024-updated.pdf)

## **EU-UK Youth Engagement. Technical Report in Support of the Own-Initiative Opinion on EU-UK Youth Engagement**

(European Economic and Social Committee, 2024)

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-05/qe-02-24-275-en-n.pdf>

## **The Future of the Erasmus+ Programme**

(European Youth Forum, June 2024)

<https://www.youthforum.org/policy-library/the-future-of-the-erasmus-programme>

## **Young People's Views on Brexit**

(Jack Petchey Foundation, 2019)

<https://www.jackpetcheyfoundation.org.uk/news/over-6000-young-people-respond-to-survey-on-brexit-in-just-10-days-heres-what-they-think/>



# Consultation participants

120 youth organisations and young people across the UK took part in the consultation, with additional input from representatives from EU youth organisations.

The consultation included:

- Initial consultation through online focus groups with representatives of youth organisations in the UK and the EU.
- Online focus groups with a selected, cross-section of young people from the UK, aged 18 – 24.
- In-person focus groups with representatives from youth organisations at an EU-UK event.
- Interviews with young people and organisations at events in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.
- Online focus groups to validate findings and provide national context and examples with groups from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The consultation and report was supported by a Youth Advisory Board including representatives from:

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



# Contributors to the consultation

Alliance Scotland	Northern Ireland Youth Forum
AMICS/ AC Amics de la Biblioteca de la Fonteta	National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), Wales
Barnardo's	Ocean Youth Trust Scotland
Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales	Partnership for Young London
British Youth Council	Perth and Kinross Local Council
Camphill Community Glengraig	Politics in Action
Centre for International Leadership and Learning (CILL)	Princes Trust
Citizens' Rights Project Scotland	Scottish Advisory Forum on Europe
CoE Advisory Council of Youth	Scottish Government
ConnectFutures	Scottish Youth Parliament
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)	Service Civil International (SCI)
Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS)	Social Enterprise Academy
Creative Learning Programmes UK	South Belfast Alternatives
EA Youth Service	Space Era Germany
Edinburgh University	Streetbeat Youth Project
Education and Learning Institute Greece	Student Action for Refugees
European Students Union	Tenth Stoa
European Youth Parliament UK	The African Parent
Ethnic Minority and Youth Support, Wales	The Office for the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
European Education and Learning Institute Greece	The Scout Association / Scouts Cymru
Girlguiding	the3million
Glasgow University	UK Youth Parliament
Global Vision Initiative	Ulster Wildlife
Goldsmiths University	UNESCO UK Youth Envoy
Greater Manchester Youth Combined Authorities	UNESCO Youth Forum
Human Rights Consortium Scotland	Urdd Gobaith Cymru
I Will	Volunteer Now Youth Advisory Partnership
Include Youth	Warwick Volunteers
Inclusive Europe	Welsh Centre for International Affairs
International English Library	YMCA
Internet Society	Young European Movement UK
Inverclyde youth work services	Young Greens
JEF Europe	Young Scot
King's College London European Society	Youth Action Northern Ireland
Lead The Way Youth Summit	Youth Advisory Partnership, Northern Ireland
Live Love Paris	Youth and Environment Europe
Londonderry YMCA	Youth Climate Ambassadors
London School of Economics	Youth Community Support Agency
Ludek, Polish Community Group	Youth Local Action Groups, Scotland
Mighty Creatives	Youthlink Scotland
National Youth Agency	

This report was drafted  
by James Edleston at Create Adapt  
and Dr Daniel Moxon at People, Dialogue, Change.



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