



Taking forward the Youth Matters Agenda

Background Paper for an Ideas-Building Event at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 14th – 15th March 2006

Welcome

I'm delighted to welcome you to this confidential ideas-building event. The purpose of this event is to explore what we need to do over the coming 24 months or so to turn the proposals outlined in Youth Matters: Next Steps into reality.

As stated today by the Chancellor at the launch of the Youth Matters: Next Steps Consultation Response: "*Youth Matters has pressed a button. Over 20,000 responses were received, 19,000 of them from individual teenagers.*"

There is no doubt that the Green Paper has generated real excitement and expectations about the scope for reshaping public services so that they empower and support the social, civic, career and health development of young people more effectively. Our challenge now is to meet these expectations.

We need to put the '**hidden wiring**' in place so that each local authority can meet the challenge of putting in place an integrated approach that:

- ✓ increases and improves opportunities for young people to enjoy and stretch themselves;
- ✓ gives them power to decide how money is spent on their behalf - what opportunities advice and support services they want, and how these should be run;
- ✓ improves the information, advice and guidance available to help them make the right choices, and
- ✓ ensures that funding reaches the most disadvantaged young people and is spent on a neighbourhood level.

We all know that young people are often the quickest to object loudly if what they believe they were promised isn't delivered! And there is no

quicker way to disengage anyone, but especially young people, if they feel all you are offering are token gestures rather than real change.

This is why we need to ensure that we can deliver what young people say they want – and, from the outset, be **upfront** with them about any difficulties and challenges that will need to be overcome, and anything that can't be done.

Some may challenge the absence of young people themselves at this event. This is not because they were overlooked or, indeed, their views are not seen as important: far from it.

It is because we felt that we need first to challenge and sharpen up with those who are holding the purse strings and delivering provision how they can and will change to deliver the Youth Matters agenda. We want to develop practical ways of how we can do even better in "*putting young people at the heart of our reform programme*"¹, and then test out our ideas with young people – knowing that they may well wish to challenge them and stretch us further!

We want to explore what we must do for us to feel confident about developing open national and local dialogues with young people about the new opportunities that can be created and how far services can be reshaped.

Of course, significant progress in this direction has already been achieved by Connexions and Youth Services in different parts of the country.

But I think we'd all agree that we all still have a way to go before we can feel confident that we are giving **every** young person the opportunity to exercise real power in deciding how money is spent on their behalf.

¹ Youth Matters: Next Steps, para. 2.10

To do this we will have to work differently and break some new ground.

And it is likely to be different types of ground in different parts of the country. There is no one size fits all approach.

This is why we ask everyone joining the event to be prepared to be as open minded as possible, and to accept that we are engaging in areas of debate in which there is **no one solution** and that **no one can be certain of the best way ahead**.

This can sound risky to some – and feel even riskier as we go through the process – but the great pay-off is that it really does give us the opportunity to break new ground in our thinking.

St. George's House

Having worked at the House for some years now, I have found it to be a really valuable and special place for holding ideas building events.

The aim of St. George's House is to create an atmosphere of trust in which well-informed people can bring fresh thinking to key issues that will have impact on our future.

St George's House is **NOT** the sort of place where delegates with badges listen to speeches. It **IS** a place where free spirits can try out new ideas without fearing the consequences.

We are conscious that we're welcoming a number of you to St. George's House for the first time, which is why we'd like to forewarn those booked into the House that when you arrive, you will find that you are not offered a key to your room.

This is quite intentional, and is because *we welcome you to the House, as our home*. We hope that you'll feel that you can enter into the

spirit of the place as a safe and welcoming environment, and that the experience will be both creative and enjoyable. We very much look forward to welcoming you to St George's House on 14th March.

Extra Information

For ease of reference, we have posted YOUTH MATTERS: NEXT STEPS, which is being publicly launched today, on the Open Agenda website. Follow [upcoming events](#), [details](#), [extrainfo](#) to download the document.

Key Timings and Contact Numbers

On pages 3 - 4 are outlined our key timings for the two days. If anyone needs to contact you urgently whilst you're attending the event, the 'phone number for St. George's House is **01753 848848** and the fax number is **01753 848849**. The report of the event will be posted on the Open Agenda website by Tuesday, 28th March.

When you arrive, you will find your name badge on a table in the Patricia Hotung Room, on the ground floor of St. George's House.

We are just putting first names on badges to make it easier to see each other's names, and also to spare us what can be the 'creeping death' of introductions.

We are very keen to create an informal atmosphere during our time together, and we have found that making a point of using each other's names – instead of saying "*I agree or disagree with the person over there, who's name I can't remember!*" really does help people to relax and spark creative discussion. Please don't think we're being over familiar!

Agenda

<p>Tuesday, 14th March</p>	
<p>From 11.30 am onwards</p>	<p>Arrival at St. George's House</p>
<p>12.15 pm</p>	<p>Light sandwich lunch</p>
<p>1.30 – 3.00 pm</p>	<p>Opening session <i>Focus:</i> Identifying what for each of us is the most important proposal in Youth Matters that, in our view, must be brought about early on to gain the trust of young people of a real commitment to empowering them and doing things differently.</p> <p>At this stage, our aim will be to generate a range of ideas that gives us a feel for the characteristics and profile of our priorities for the Youth Matters agenda. What do we think will be important to put into place sooner rather than later from different perspectives – health, citizenship, learning – remembering for young people the pace of change is all important: for a 16 year old – 2 years is an eighth of their lives!</p>
<p>3.00 pm</p>	<p>Short break</p>
<p>3.10 – 4.50 pm</p>	<p>Second Session <i>Focus:</i> Identifying the big challenges we will need to overcome over the next 24 months to bring about the proposals we see as high priority, including how these fit alongside other 14 – 19 strategies and policy changes likely to have an impact on the Youth Matters agenda</p>
<p>4.55 – 5.05pm</p>	<p>Tea</p>
<p>5.15 – 6.15 pm</p>	<p>Sung Eucharist in St. George's Chapel for those who would like to attend</p>
<p>6.15 – 7.45 pm</p>	<p>Third session <i>Focus:</i> In groups, work up in some detail ideas for meeting some of the most difficult challenges we've identified.</p> <p>At this stage, we want to start sharpening up what are the steps that should be taken over the coming 12 months to overcome the challenges. In particular, what needs to be tackled through Local Authorities, stakeholders and/or Government leadership?</p>
<p>7.45 pm</p>	<p>Pre-dinner drinks</p>
<p>8.15 pm</p>	<p>Dinner in St George's House Dining Room</p>
<p>9.45 pm</p>	<p>Private Tour of the Chapel led by Andrew Carter, Warden of St. George's</p>

taking forward the Youth Matters agenda. Our aim is to sketch out what we feel we need to have done in the next couple of years to demonstrate we mean what we say: 'Youth does matter.'

We then want to turn our focus on to the challenges we'll need to overcome if we're going to meet this agenda. But we want to resist the temptation of really getting dug into the issues!

I'm sure you're all familiar with the scene. It is the opportunity to have a real rant about frustrations, especially those outside of our control. And (without making it personal!) if those who do have control are in earshot, so much the better.

The problem is that while letting off steam in this way can make us feel better, it doesn't take us any further forward. If this is to succeed as an ideas building session, we want to give as much time as we can to the ideas – rather than the challenges.

So I'll be looking for your support to be as brief as possible about the challenges we're facing, and agree not use time we spend together (or in groups!) to discuss them in detail, but to begin to generate thinking of how to overcome them.

The toughest challenges

Also, we want to take full advantage of the experience and expertise amongst us and focus on what we see as the **toughest** challenges we need to tackle. And there is no denying that there are some difficult issues that need to be worked through in taking forward the Youth Matters agenda. Just for starters, we could include:

- Taking on the whole of the Youth Matters agenda, all of its strands, and weaving together an integrated approach rather than working in separate silos;
- Reaching all young people, especially those in greatest need of empowerment, direction and support;

- Opening up contestability in delivering services – to get the most appropriate, best quality and best value provision;
- Ensuring we have the skills in the workforce to deliver what young people want and need;
- Fitting the Youth Matters agenda with other reforms and policy developments that will impact on either all or some young people.

These are just some of the challenges. By no means all; others are bound to emerge through our discussions. And each of them is big enough to warrant a 24 hour session on its own.

We don't have this luxury, but we can dig beneath the surface of at least some of these issues and make some real headway by adapting existing and developing new strategies to tackle them.

We determine the agenda

One of the key principles of Open Agenda events is that we determine the agenda as we go, in order to get the most from our time together. This means that, at any stage of our discussions, we can change the structure of a session, if we feel that it will help us achieve stronger outputs from the event. I say this, with one important proviso.

We find that groups go away far more satisfied with what we have accomplished by the end of an event, if we start off with a commitment to achieving **as much clarity as possible** in our discussions, and really push ourselves in **breaking new ground** and **moving ideas forward**.

During our evening session we want to work through in some depth ways in which we can meet some of the challenges that we feel are amongst the most difficult and important to tackle. At this stage, we want to resist the temptation of moving into 'they should' territory!

There may well be things that need to be changed outside of our immediate control, but we want to

spend most of our creative energy and time focusing on **what we can do**. With this in mind, we will ask you to consider what should be done to tackle a particular challenge locally, by different agencies or stakeholders, and nationally, through Government leadership.

The following morning, we want to build on our discussions from the day before and start to firm up action we feel should follow the event. In particular, we want to consider how we can establish strong lines of communication that will require minimum administration and will achieve maximum impact.

Working in idea-generating groups

As an important part of the ideas-building process, we will break into 'idea-generating' groups during the event to tackle key questions raised through our discussions.

The purpose of these groups is to focus on sharpening up the issues and developing ideas that we want to pick up and run with. Please use your time in groups to sound out your ideas and do **not** be tempted into trying to develop a group view.

We use these groups because it gives everyone an opportunity to think through different points of view and have their say, when this would be impossible as one large group because of time constraints. As a result, a number of different – even opposing – ideas can emerge from small group discussions.

This is what we're after: ideas and not a group view. For those who haven't been in on a Windsor event before, it's worth saying that it really helps us to leave the groups behind, if you make a point of **not** sitting with members of your group afterwards, and agree to outlaw the phrases "we think" or "my group thought that".

"We think" makes it difficult for group members to change their minds without feeling disloyal to their group. Also, "we think" has more authority than "I think" and, completely unintentionally, can make it less easy for others to challenge or discard ideas.

We will also break into groups for longer periods of time to 'build ideas'. In this instance, it is more likely (but not certain!) that there will be agreement amongst members of the group.

What we ask is that when you come to share your thinking with the rest of us, you **just give us the idea**. Please don't feel you need to share the journey your group has travelled in developing this idea! If we are not clear about its rationale, we can always ask questions.

Going with the flow

We need to manage our time together carefully as one large group, if we're going to develop the momentum we need to move our discussions forward.

Developing ideas needs careful listening. Let's try and stick to the rule that when someone comes in on the discussion, they **follow on** from what the person before them has said, before moving on and starting a fresh train of thought. Please also resist the temptation of making more than one point! As soon as someone says "*I'd just like to make two or three points at this stage in our discussions*" the ideas stop flowing, as we are drawn to recap on what's gone before.

Of course, when we're together as one large group we want **as many people as possible to participate**: brainstorming is not a spectator event! So I'll try and ensure that the more confident, natural talkers amongst us don't squeeze others out.

Meeting everyone's expectations

We are bound to arrive at Windsor with very different views about what should be our key priorities in taking forward the Youth Matters agenda. This is why we should give ourselves some time early on to work through **as a group** the issues we feel are most important for us to tackle during our time together.

Developing ideas is always a messy process, especially during the opening stages! It can be

frustrating for those who like to focus quickly on what they feel is **the** key issue that needs to be tackled, and want to get on with sorting it out. The difficulty with this approach is that one person's key issue is another's back burner!

So, I would like to ask that we all try to be as relaxed as possible in the opening session, and let as many as possible have their say, so that we can build up a head of steam **as a group** in identifying the issues we want to explore in greater depth.

Overleaf are the Conventions of St. George's House for consultations and brainstorming events held here

at Windsor Castle. At the beginning of the event, I will ask you if you are happy to adopt them as ground rules for our discussions.

I very much hope that you'll be open to giving them a go, as experience has shown that their application can make an enormous difference to both the quality of debate and the ideas that emerge. **And given the diversity, experience and expertise we have between us, who knows what we might achieve by lunchtime on 15th March**

**Krysia Hudek, Open Agenda
8th March 2006**

St. George's House Conventions

1. *Please be open to changing your mind*

We hope that during your time at the House you will see yourself as a “free spirit”, open to the possibility that the opinions you hold most dearly, on the topic under discussion, might actually be wrong. Once we each take that step, we find that it is much easier to persuade others to question their own assumptions, as well.

2. *Please do not attribute remarks to individuals after the event*

At all House events, we ask groups to agree at the outset that comments made in plenary or small group sessions will not be attributed to individuals afterwards. We have a firm convention that people should not be quoted without their permission, and commend this to you most strongly.

3. *Please take risks with ideas*

The most successful Consultations at the House have been those where individuals feel sufficiently relaxed, and supported by others, to be able to take risks with ideas. This requires a high degree of trust among a group, and we hope that from the outset you will seek to build that trust.

4. *Please try and avoid any false consensus*

We hope that if you find a consensus emerging in your discussions, you will check to ensure that it is soundly based. It can sometimes be very difficult for individuals to resist the pressure to agree with their peers, and we hope that healthy debate will not be stifled by a false consensus.

5. *Please use “plain English”*

At just about every event, one of the biggest struggles is with the weight of technical language that some speakers tend to use, and others leave unchallenged for fear of displaying ignorance. We ask **everyone** joining a Consultation at the House to avoid using acronyms, and to be ready to intervene in debate to ask colleagues to use “plain English”.

Andrew Carter

Warden of St. George's House