

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: THE YOUTH CITIZENSHIP COMMISSION: CHAIRED BY PROFESSOR JONATHAN TONGE

I was the Cabinet Office Minister for Young Citizens and Youth Engagement in the Labour government until 2010. In this capacity, I was responsible for devising the implementation plan for the Youth Citizenship Commission's recommendations to the government to improve youth political literacy, engagement and volunteering. The Prime Minister and Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Justice, oversaw the establishment of the Commission and I then assumed responsibility for developing a timetabled introduction plan. As the proposals often involved several government departments, this involved considerable inter-departmental liaison.

The government accepted almost all of the Youth Citizenship Commission's proposals and I met several times with Professor Jonathan Tonge, Chair of the Commission and other senior Commissioners, to facilitate the introduction of recommendations. The Commissioners were drawn from a variety of backgrounds and I found them to be committed individuals, anxious to extend their specialist knowledge to improving the public policy sphere.

I found the Commission's recommendations were based upon solid evidential foundations, gathered from a combination of academic research, submissions from interested parties, reviews of existing policies, exhaustive quantitative and qualitative evidence-gathering from young people and 'road-testing' of draft ideas with stakeholders. From this body of evidence, the Commission drew serious and important conclusions, also based upon considerable original thinking.

The key proposals of the Commission were of the utmost importance in improving the participation of young people in our polity. They included improvements in the delivery of citizenship education; the involvement of schools in the electoral registration of young people (non-registration of 16 and 17 year olds is a serious issue, adding to the more-publicised problem of non-voting); the introduction of representative advisory policy and scrutiny panels comprising young people; the introduction of national civic service and improved promotion of volunteering; national citizenship awards and improvements in communication from elected representatives. The Commission also led a consultation on whether the voting age should be lowered.

The Youth Citizenship Commission produced serious and deliverable ideas on the vital themes of empowered citizenship; connecting with young people and changing the way decision-makers and institutions work. Although the Youth Citizenship Commission was independent, I am proud that my Labour government oversaw its establishment and followed up its recommendations, which ought to have enduring impact. I am also proud that all sides of the house saw the importance of educating

young citizens and were supportive of the remit set by the commission. The Commission played a key role in better involving and integrating young people into our political system, a truly vital task.

Yours faithfully

Dawn Butler