The Impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on its Former Members

“How has the SYP helped you get to where you are today?”

University of Strathclyde Glasgow

AQMeN
Applied Quantitative Methods Network
FOREWORD

As the results of the organisation’s 2011 survey of MSYPs indicate, the SYP engages with and works hard to include and represent a wide variety of Scottish society. In addition to representing geographical constituencies, it also encourages Scottish youth groups and organisations to participate in the Parliament. What is also heartening is the SYP is interested in making an impact to both those who get involved, and more generally, those whom the parliamentarians represent.

I never had anything like this when I was growing up and it is exciting to see how this formal channel has encouraged and facilitated the serious inclusion and impact of youth voices in Scottish politics. Evidence includes: campaigns against raising the purchasing age for alcohol to 21; the Love Equally campaign for marriage equality; and a petition (PE 1367) in the Scottish Parliament calling for the banning of high-pitched youth-orientated sound devices. Of course impact is a multifaceted entity. The SYP is not just about influencing policy, but about education, skills development and engaging youth in the world around them, for instance, through volunteering. Such experiences provide a host of personal and transferable skills (e.g. confidence, social skills, empathy, communication, public speaking and debating, team work, leadership, organization and networking) not to mention contacts that might prove valuable in subsequent job seeking.

Moreover, as this report illustrates, **former MSYPs are overwhelmingly positive about the impact that the SYP has had upon them.** Even so, the SYP is keen to use the data and observations of former MSYPs that are presented in this report to improve and build on its work towards a stronger, more inclusive Scotland in which young people feel empowered. As a fairly new organisation, it has achieved quite a lot and I look forward to seeing it develop upon its many successes to date.

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University of Strathclyde
“How has the SYP helped you get to where you are today?”

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) was inaugurated in 1999, and from its inception it has been driven by the ultimate aim to try and make Scotland a better place for young people.

Through listening to the views and ideas of Scotland’s young people aged between 14 and 25 years old, collected and voiced by elected Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs), and discussed and debated at local consultations and national sittings, the Scottish Youth Parliament seeks to empower young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process. It is a wholly youth-led organisation.

The Scottish Youth Parliament works hard to make sure that all young people in Scotland are represented by its democratically elected and diverse membership. In turn, every member of the youth population is given the opportunity to effect change and ensure that the issues most important to them are given due and fair attention in the political arena, whether on a local, national or even bigger stage.

Importantly however, it is the Scottish Youth Parliament’s belief that its impact can be felt far beyond the world of politics and policy-making. We feel that the time MSYPs spend in the organisation is invaluable in helping them grow and develop as people, and that through serving as an MSYP they can accrue a vast array of skills, knowledge and experiences which benefit them long after they leave.
THE REPORT

In 2012, the Scottish Youth Parliament is celebrating its 13-year anniversary. During this period, many of Scotland’s young people have had the opportunity to be elected and serve as MSYPs. Following its most recent elections held in March 2011, and newly elected MSYPs taking office in June 2011, this figure is fast approaching almost 1,000. Since leaving the organisation, many of our former members have gone on to successful careers in a number of professions while others have achieved highly in their education. Further still, some have developed important life skills or simply gained the confidence to make a positive change in their life.

In this report, the Scottish Youth Parliament presents evidence which demonstrates its long-term impact on MSYPs and shows how its former members feel that their time with the organisation has helped them get to where they are in life today.

KEY FINDINGS

- 83% of former MSYPs\(^1\) are currently either in further education (for example, college) or higher education (for example, university).

- 91% of former MSYPs are either currently employed or have been employed since leaving the Scottish Youth Parliament, some in full-time positions, others working alongside their other activities including voluntary work or studying.

- 91% of former MSYPs believe that the Scottish Youth Parliament had a positive impact on their skills development.

- 90% of former MSYPs feel that the Scottish Youth Parliament had a positive impact on their personal development.

- 75% of MSYPs engage in voluntary work following their time spent in the Scottish Youth Parliament.

- 73% of former MSYPs state that their knowledge and understanding of political processes and systems has increased following their time as an MSYP.

- 96% of eligible former MSYPs have voted in General Elections.

- 90% of former MSYPs rate the long-term of the Scottish Youth Parliament on them as ‘Very positive’ or ‘Positive’.

- 89% of former MSYPs would encourage young people today to become involved in the Scottish Youth Parliament.

\(^1\) 89 former MSYPs responded to the survey with N typically falling between 79 and 89 responses for each question.
POSITIVE ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE

The Scottish Youth Parliament is fully dedicated to delivering positive outcomes for Scotland’s young people and through their direct involvement with the organisation, MSYPs in particular can benefit considerably from its work and activities.

Importantly however, through working with MSYPs the Scottish Youth Parliament believes it also strongly contributes to many national commitments and policy objectives which have been set out by the Scottish Government. This is additional to the part we play in representing and supporting young people across Scotland as a youth parliament. Furthermore, this contribution is not restricted to areas of youth policy only but in the longer-term its effects can be felt much more widely as the Government pursues its overarching goal to create ‘…a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish…’

Today’s young people will inevitably play a leading role in Scotland’s future. It is therefore anticipated that the development of Scotland’s current and future youth population will have a significant long-term impact, not only on the individuals themselves but on Scottish society as a whole.

National Performance Framework

The National Performance Framework reflects the Scottish Government’s move towards a more outcome-focussed performance model, setting out 15 National Outcomes for the delivery of public services. These statements make clear the Government’s priority areas, and it is evident that ‘young people’ as a group have been placed high on the political agenda.

National Outcome 4 plainly demonstrates the Governments commitment to supporting young people’s development and helping them to make successful transitions into adulthood. It is of direct relevance to the work and values of the Scottish Youth Parliament and states:

- NO.4: Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

The achievement of this outcome will have further implications for several of the remaining 14 outcomes, those which are linked in part to the work of the Scottish Youth Parliament and can therefore be considered of secondary relevance for organisation. These include:

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2 www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms
3 www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes.

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Underneath the 15 National Outcomes lie an additional 45 National Indicators. While none of these make direct reference to the principal activities of the Scottish Youth Parliament – youth participation – it is important to note the inclusion of several indicators which confirm some of the Government’s youth policy priorities. For example, NO.7 which seeks to ‘increase the proportion of school leavers in positive and sustained destinations’\(^5\), demonstrates a determined wish for all young people to stay in learning post-16 and to reduce Scotland’s not in education, employment or training (NEET) population.

**Valuing Young People**

In 2009 the Scottish Government backed up its commitment to NO.4 when it published the youth framework *Valuing Young People: Principles and Connections to Support Young People Achieve their Potential*. This presented a fresh approach to how young people in Scotland should be viewed and valued. The new focus looks to ensure that all young people are supported in achieving their full potential through promoting positive engagement, addressing barriers to achievement and boosting aspirations. The framework adopts the view that ‘our young people will flourish if they develop confidence and skills and can grow up as motivated young citizens who contribute to their communities’.\(^6\)

*Valuing Young People* is based around 9 key pillars: Curriculum for Excellence; supporting transitions; youth-friendly health services; services for young people; preventing offending by young people; information and accessible youth-friendly services; youth work opportunities and approaches; young people’s voice and communications; and workforce development.

The Government considers the Scottish Youth Parliament to be a leading organisation in the delivery of the 8th pillar – young people’s voice and communications. However, while youth representation remains one its key activities, the Scottish Youth Parliament believes that it can be highly influential in a number of

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\(^4\) [www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes)

\(^5\) [www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators)

\(^6\) *Valuing Young People: Principles and connections to support young people achieve their potential*, Scottish Government, April 2009.
the Government’s other priority areas, particularly through its engagement with and support of those young people who serve as MSYPs.

**Curriculum for Excellence**

Following several years of discussion, reviewing and planning, 2010 saw the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)* in Scotland. While schools are undoubtedly key players in the delivery of the new Curriculum, youth work organisations and agencies are also expected to play a central role, particularly in the Senior Phase (aged 15 years-old and older). This is because CfE moves beyond a traditional, ‘academic’ curriculum towards one which adopts a more holistic approach focussed on areas such as skills development and personal improvement, with the young person being placed firmly at the centre of their own education. In this model, partnerships with non-school providers such as the Scottish Youth Parliament will be vital.

- **The Four Capacities**

In design, CfE links directly to NO.4, focussing on Four Capacities. Its aim is therefore for children to become: (1) successful learners; (2) confident individuals; (3) responsible citizens; and (4) effective contributors. In pursuing these outcomes, it is hoped that more and more children and young people will be fully equipped with all the necessary skills for learning, for life, and for work. From this, it is anticipated that Scotland will be able to increase the number of young people entering into **positive destinations**.

The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that it will be an important partner in the execution of CfE, already delivering within all four capacities on a number of objectives. Within ‘responsible citizens’ for instance, CfE aspires for all young people to develop a commitment to participating responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life. In part, this may include young people becoming more politically active and/or engaged in voluntary work, two things that the Scottish Youth Parliament promotes amongst its MSYPs.

Similarly, in ‘effective contributors’, CfE wishes for all young people to develop strong communication, team work, problem solving and leadership skills. Again, these are

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10 In its National Indicator set, the Scottish Government defines ‘positive destinations’ for school leavers as further education, higher education, employment, voluntary work or training ([http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators/schoolLeavers](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators/schoolLeavers)).
skills which we believe our MSYPs may be able to gain through carrying out their MSYP duties and engaging in Scottish Youth Parliament events and activities.

- **Experiences and Outcomes**

Within the Four Capacities model, CfE is designed around eight curricular areas which are, made up of various outcomes and experiences describing the expectations for learning and progression that all children and young people should have the chance to achieve across the curriculum. Some outcomes or experiences maintain a more academic focus but others are much more concentrated on the individual and their personal development.

The broad subject areas of CfE are expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, mathematics, religious and moral education, sciences, social studies, and technologies.

On the surface, the Scottish Youth Parliament appears most closely linked to Social Studies where it is intended that individuals ‘develop an understanding of democracy and citizenship’. These principles are inherent in the Scottish Youth Parliament vision. Importantly though, the experiences MSYPs gain and skills they develop during their time in the organisation cover outcomes across all the curricular areas. This is particularly evident in religious and moral education and health and wellbeing but can also be seen in technologies for example, with MSYPs able to improve their ICT confidence through using the Scottish Youth Parliament’s online registration and election systems.

As a non-prescriptive programme, the execution of CfE will likely vary between and within local authorities, and we cannot be sure about how it will be delivered in practice. Equally, due to its recent implementation it is not yet possible to gauge what the long-term effects of the changes will be. Nevertheless, the CfE framework makes clear the Government’s priorities for education and states explicitly their intentions with regard to young people and young people’s learning.

### 16+ Learning Choices

Within CfE, all eligible young people are to be offered a place in post-16 learning, and the Government is strongly of the opinion that this is the best way of improving individuals’ employability. The 16+ Learning Choices framework recognises that it will be important for young people to be given the opportunity to learn through a range of providers, not only schools, colleges and universities but youth sector

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11 *Curriculum for Excellence. Social Studies: Experiences and Outcomes*, Learning and Teaching Scotland.

organisations and community and learning development services too. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of increasing learners’ awareness of future choices alongside raising their expectations and aspirations, so as to encourage as many young people as possible to take up post-16 learning opportunities.

**Determined to Succeed**

With a view to strengthening young people’s employability, and better preparing them for work and life, *Determined to Succeed* was developed to instil an enterprise culture in Scottish schools. This is considered to be a necessary platform upon which Scotland can cultivate a stronger, more productive workforce, and an internationally competitive economy. It is a strategy driven by what it calls a ‘fundamental need to ensure all our young people are outward looking, confident about themselves and their nation and have a modern, enterprising, world view’.

**Skills for Scotland**

In 2010 the Government updated its 2007 Skills Strategy and published *Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth*. One of four key priority themes concentrates on empowering people and ensuring that they are given the opportunity to develop the necessary skills for contributing to and benefitting from future economic growth. In addition to hard skills and qualifications, emphasis is placed on softer skills such as teamwork, communication, problem solving ability and leadership, as well as personal characteristics including confidence and motivation.

**The Volunteering Action Plan**

Launched in 2004, the Scottish Government’s *Volunteering Strategy 2004-2009* demonstrated a firm commitment to the development and encouragement of volunteering in Scotland. Recognition was given to the fact that volunteering not only benefits society but also the individual volunteer. However, the strategy also accepted that there was often a lack of an awareness of volunteering opportunities as well as their potential benefits. To remedy this, it was stated that significant emphasis must be placed on promoting voluntary work amongst young people with volunteering becoming an integral part of growing up in Scotland.

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13 *Determined to Succeed*, Learning and Teaching Scotland, June 2008.
14 *Determined to Succeed*, Learning and Teaching Scotland, June 2008.
Similar statements were made when the Government, as part of its national youth work strategy\textsuperscript{17}, committed itself to working alongside the voluntary sector – notably YouthLink Scotland, Youth Scotland and Volunteer Development Scotland – to develop an action plan for volunteering in the youth work sector. Accordingly the \textit{Volunteering Action Plan}, launched in 2007, came into force with emphasis placed on supporting the development of young volunteers and strengthening voluntary contributions in the youth work sector.

The Scottish Youth Parliament’s\textit{ Change the Picture} manifesto launched on the 12\textsuperscript{th} March 2011 and informed by \textbf{42,804 responses from young people across Scotland}, makes clear the commitments of Scotland’s youth population with regard to volunteering. 72\% of respondents agreed with the statement; ‘\textit{The Scottish Government should develop and implement a national youth volunteering policy for Scotland and should demonstrate how it supports national youth volunteering opportunities which develop skills development for all young people in Scotland}'\textsuperscript{18}. Through including this statement in its manifesto, the Scottish Youth Parliament is looking to influence Scotland’s decision-makers and ensure that volunteering becomes an activity enjoyed by all young people.

\textbf{COMMON THEMES}

From reviewing current guidance and frameworks, a number of common themes can be drawn which the Scottish Youth Parliament believes represent the Scottish Government’s priority areas in youth policy.

- Facilitating skills development
- Supporting personal improvement
- Improving individuals’ employability
- Encouraging responsible and active citizens
- Building individual aspirations
- Ensuring recognition of young people’s achievements and contributions
- Widening participation

These are all areas where the Scottish Youth Parliament feels that it can be influential, a view which is supported by the research which follows in this report.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Moving Forward: a Strategy for Improving Young People’s Chances Through Youth Work, Scottish Executive}, March 2007.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Change the Picture, Scottish Youth Parliament, March 2011}
METHODOLOGY

The majority of data presented in this report has been collected through an online survey (hosted by Survey Monkey, http://www.surveymonkey.com/) with fieldwork conducted between 20th January and 21st February 2011. In design, the survey included various questions covering a number of issues including education, employment, volunteering and political engagement. Opportunities were also given for respondents to rate their experiences, allowing them to expand on their answers and share what they felt the impact of their time in the Scottish Youth Parliament was on them in a broader sense.

Using the Scottish Youth Parliament's membership databases and excluding bounce backs it was possible to contact a significant number of former MSYPs (426) and encourage them to complete the survey through an email invitation. A prize draw was included as part of the invitation and a reminder email was sent out one week before the survey closed.

Announcements advertising the survey were also made on the official Scottish Youth Parliament website and through the official Scottish Youth Parliament Facebook and Twitter accounts, with a view to contacting those former members whose contact details were either incomplete or out-of-date. Such announcements were intended to act as reminders for those individuals who had been contacted by email.

In total, 102 surveys were received, 24% of those contacted. After confirming the validity of completed surveys, the data presented is based on sample size of 89. These were the responses where the contact details provided by respondents could confirm that the surveys were completed by genuine former members. This was important, particularly given the public advertising of and access to the survey.

Using equal opportunities monitoring style questions and tools such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, as well as a number of official statistical reports, analysis was carried out to gauge the representativeness of our sample.

After the survey, a number of follow-up interviews took place with former members and provide in-depth, qualitative case studies. These form part of an ongoing process to keep up-to-date with our former members and what they are doing now. Where possible, these interviews were conducted in person. Where this was not possible, interviews were carried out over the telephone or written answers were submitted by email.

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19 Percentage figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, excepting demographic discussions of ethnicity and religion where figures demand greater specification.
20 The total number of verifiable responses was 89. Individual question response rates varied, falling gradually over the survey to 79 responses for the final questions. Totals for individual questions can be accessed by request to the Scottish Youth Parliament.
A comprehensive desktop literature search of relevant policy, guidance and statistics was also conducted, providing the policy context for this report. This helped to inform our questioning and has also been used to demonstrate how the Scottish Youth Parliament contributes to local and national policy objectives.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT

An analysis of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s former members using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation reveals that our membership has been, and continues to be, broadly reflective of Scotland’s youth population, in the area of socio-economic background.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure of deprivation which divides Scotland into 6,505 geographic areas or datazones, 1 being the most deprived, 6,505 being the least deprived. Such rankings are calculated on the basis of 38 indicators across 7 domains: income; employment; health; education, skills and training; housing; geographic access; and crime. For analysis purposes, datazones are then sorted into 10 equal groups or deciles, with 1 being the most deprived and 10 the least.

Using postcode data collected by the Scottish Youth Parliament since 2002, it can be seen that over the years there has been a fairly even distribution of MSYPs across the 10 deciles, suggesting that members have not been disproportionately drawn from either the most deprived or least deprived areas of Scotland. Furthermore, while clearly not all deprived people live in deprived areas, and not all people living in deprived areas are deprived, these figures confirm that MSYPs are not necessarily drawn from areas and backgrounds typically associated with achieving the most positive outcomes.21

21 A report by the OECD in 2007, Quality and Equity in Schooling in Scotland, revealed that socio-economic status creates the most significant differences between individuals in Scotland, and has the biggest effect on educational attainment, subsequently affecting transitions into positive destinations too.
The figures that feature in this analysis have been calculated using the 2009 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is accepted that these rankings may not be wholly accurate for years preceding 2009, and that the characteristics of some areas will inevitably have changed since the date when our MSYPs were initially elected and resident there.

However, while there have been some movements (both real and those from methodological changes in recording and measurement), analysis shows that many datazones have remained static. For example in 2009, 81% of datazones in the most deprived 15% were those which had fallen in the 15% most deprived areas in 2004 and 2006\(^\text{22}\) too. Equally, where one area may have moved up, another will have gone down, arguably balancing out most shifts in positions. The 2009 Index therefore still offers a fairly accurate rank of deprivation when applied to earlier postcode data.

\(^{22}\) The only other times at which the Index has been compiled, [http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/10/28104046/1](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/10/28104046/1)
Typically, over the years we have also found that the Scottish Youth Parliament is broadly representative of Scotland’s youth population in a number of other areas too, including gender, ethnicity and disability as demonstrated by the Scottish Youth Parliament’s 2009 Member Census which gives a full demographic profile of the current organisation.

THE RESPONDENTS

With MSYPs necessarily aged 14 to 25 years-old while in office, and the SYP having been operational since 1999, former members today can be assumed to be aged between 14 and 37 years inclusive, although we would not expect many respondents to fall in the youngest ages of this spread. Using this model as a point of reference, further analysis has been carried out using our survey responses to gauge how far our sample is representative of Scotland’s 14-37 population.

- **Socio-economic background**

  A further analysis using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation has been carried out on the survey respondents. The results show that more than half of individuals taking part in the survey were from the top five, that is the five least deprived, deciles when first elected as an MSYP.

  However, both the mean and modal averages for the data are the 6th decile suggesting that the “typical” respondent in this survey, while not from a highly deprived background was also not from a particularly privileged background either. Furthermore, there remains a fairly even split between deciles with 41% of respondents still from neighbourhoods in the five most deprived deciles.

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23 The 2009 Member Census can be found on and downloaded from the Scottish Youth Parliament website, [http://www.syp.org.uk/resources/publications/publications.htm](http://www.syp.org.uk/resources/publications/publications.htm)

24 N = 89 for all demographic questions except for Religion where N = 84 and Socio-economic background where N = 67.

25 Scottish Youth Parliament membership records contained the postcodes of 67 of the MSYPs who responded to the survey.
• **Gender**

In our survey, 51% of respondents were female and 49% male. Within Scotland’s 14-37 population, males account for 50% of individuals and females only 50%.\(^{26}\) Our sample therefore appears fairly representative with only a minor deviation from the general population figure.

• **Age**

Within the 14-37 age spread, latest figures for Scotland show the modal age to be 24, closely followed by 23, 22 and 21.\(^{27}\) In our survey, the most common age was 20 (16%), followed by 24, 23 and 22 (12%, 11% and 10%). Our sample, while slightly younger than Scotland’s general 14-37 population, presents a good spread of ages and is broadly representative of wider trends.

• **Disability**

8% of respondents consider themselves to have a disability. This is compared to approximately 5% of the 14-37 population\(^ {28}\) suggesting that individuals with disabilities are well-represented in this survey.

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\(^{26}\) *Mid-2009 Population Estimates*, General Register Office for Scotland April 2010

\(^{27}\) *Mid-2009 Population Estimates*, General Register Office for Scotland April 2010

\(^{28}\) *Scotland’s People Annual Report: Results from 2009 Scottish Household Survey*, Scottish Government August 2010; 5% of 10-19 year-olds, 4% 20-29 year-olds, 7% 30-39 year-olds.
• **Ethnicity**

In Scotland, 96.8% of people describe their ethnicity as White, 0.5% Indian, 0.7% Pakistani, 0.5% Indian, 0.4% Chinese, 0.3% Black African, 0.1% Bangladeshi, 0.1% Black Other, and 1.2% any other background. (A breakdown by age is not available.)

In our survey, 92.1% of former MSYPs stated their ethnicity as White, 2.3% Pakistani, 1.1% Chinese, and 3.3% as “Other” (1.1% White Celtic, 1.1% Arab and 1.1% Vietnamese). 1.1% chose not to answer. These results are relatively close to the general population figures.

• **Religion**

The major religion in Scotland is Christianity, with 72.3% of people reporting it as their religion. 1.2% are Muslim, 0.4% Hindu, 0.2% Buddhist, 0.1% Sikh and 0.1% Jewish, while 0.9% state that they practice another religion and a further 24.7% stating that they are non-religious. A recent survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the British Humanist Association however has found that 56% of people in Scotland claim that they are not religious.

The majority of survey respondents stated that they were not religious (52.8%). In common with Scottish society, the modal religion was Christianity at 33.7%. A further 3.4% were Muslim, 1.1% Jewish and 1.1% Spiritualist while 7.9% chose not to answer.

• **Sexual orientation**

As an arguably sensitive issue, it has been recognised that official statistics often under-report LGBT individuals and as a result, estimates can vary considerably. This has been discussed by recent guidance published by the Scottish Government concerning the collection of information on sexual orientation. Official figures suggest that the percentage of people in Scotland, of all ages, who identify themselves as LGBT is 1.3% while Stonewall Scotland, and organisation working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, estimates that this figure is closer to 6%.

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12.4% individuals in our survey described their sexual orientation as LGBT, suggesting that this group is possibly over-represented in our sample.

Overall, the above data shows that our survey respondents, despite all sharing the common characteristic of being a former MSYP, form a diverse group while also being fairly representative of Scottish society more generally.

It is important to recognise that whilst our respondents form a fairly illustrative sample, they may not be wholly representative of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s former membership. The reach of the survey was limited to those former MSYPs with regular internet access and for whom the contact details on file were still current. Furthermore, individuals’ experiences of the organisation and/or the perceived relevance of the survey may have impacted on their decision to participate, or not. This creates a risk of nonresponse bias.

Nevertheless, the results that follow in this report suggest that former MSYPs with various backgrounds, personal circumstances and experiences, as well as different views of the organisation, took part and have contributed to the report.

MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

With at least two respondents having been elected in each year of the period 1999-2009 inclusive, we can be confident that the findings from our survey reflect the views, experiences and outcomes from every phase of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s history. This is important when recognising that since its inauguration in 1999 the Scottish Youth Parliament has undergone a number of changes in its structure, organisation, staff and activities.

### Chart 4: In which year were you first elected as an MSYP?

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The majority of completed surveys\textsuperscript{35} cover the Scottish Youth Parliament’s more recent history with the most feedback being collected from former MSYPs first elected in either 2005 or 2007 (18% and 14%). Both of these were official Scottish Youth Parliament election years, explaining the high response rates as compared to their adjacent (non-election) years. In non-election years however, new MSYPs can still be and have been elected as the results show in the instance of by-elections for example or because of specific local circumstances. It is only in more recent years, through mechanisms such as online voting, that the Scottish Youth Parliament has been able to coordinate a more stringent and synchronised national election process with local authorities. We envision that in the future, Scottish Youth Parliament elections will become increasingly more coordinated.

Undoubtedly, the high number of former MSYPs in this research elected since 2005 makes assessing the Scottish Youth Parliament’s long-term impact more difficult; many former members may have only left the organisation a relatively short time ago.

However, the survey also reveals that the most popular option for MSYPs is to serve only a single two-year term (45%). Cross-referencing this information with that available on MSYPs’ initial election years suggests that for most MSYPs enough time will have elapsed since leaving the organisation for them to be able to make some kind of judgement as to its impact. For instance, for individuals elected in 2007, if they have served only one term they will have at least a year and a half’s worth of experience of post-MSYP life to draw on to inform their answers.

Furthermore, arguably it is useful that the majority of respondents (55%) refer to the more recent period of 2005 to 2009. This is because the Scottish Youth Parliament of this period is more akin to the organisation that exists today. This suggests that many of our responses can thus relate to a Scottish Youth Parliament similar to that which young people are accessing now and in the future.

\textsuperscript{35} N = 85 for all questions referring to former MSYPs membership details.
The majority of respondents served as MSYPs for two, three or four years (81%). The most common response as stated above was to have served for two years, amounting to a single term in office. It is hoped that their feedback will be based on their experiencing a significant number of the opportunities the Scottish Youth Parliament offers its members. Nevertheless, even the 13% who served for only one year will still have potentially undertaken a number of important activities for example induction training, national sittings and elections.

Chart 5: For how many years did you serve, in total, as an MSYP?

![Chart 5: For how many years did you serve, in total, as an MSYP?](chart5.png)

Chart 6: When you were first elected as an MSYP, were you:

- In secondary school? 73%
- In further education (e.g. college)? 4%
- In higher education (e.g. university)? 12%
- Employed (part-time)? 22%
- Employed (full-time)? 9%
- Engaged in voluntary work? 26%
- Not in employment, education or training, and not engaged in voluntary work? 2%

![Chart 6: When you were first elected as an MSYP, were you?](chart6.png)
The majority of respondents were first elected as teenagers, most commonly between the ages of 15 and 17 (66%), and were also more often than not attending secondary school at the time (73%). This is not surprising, MSYPs typically falling into this category. Latest figures, for example, show that just under half our current membership is aged between 15 and 17 (63%). This may in part reflect the focus of many local authorities on targeting MSYP elections at school pupils, but also the arguably wider array of opportunities individuals over the age of 18 have to participate in political and civic life. Where individuals were employed part-time, 84% were also in some form of education.

A final point of note is that the vast majority of respondents were elected and served as Constituency MSYPs (72%). This is unsurprising since historically the Scottish Youth Parliament has focussed on and reserved the most space for these members. This is also the case today with the Scottish Youth Parliament currently having the capacity for 2 MSYPs from each Scottish Parliamentary Constituency (a total of 146) and a further 50 individuals representing national voluntary organisations.

A number of surveys were however completed by those who stood as either Individual or Voluntary Organisations MSYPs (16% and 12%) demonstrating that our sample is reflective of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s organisational composition.

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36 SYP Member Census 2011, http://www.syp.org.uk/msyps-W21page-89-
37 Individual MSYPs were abolished in March 2005 which may account for the smaller figure. This change was driven by a feeling that the continued existence of individual MSYPs (MSYPs through personal applications rather than elections) had the potential to undermine the SYP’s democratic and representative values, particularly in light of the strengthening of the organisation’s election procedures and opportunities for young people to get involved through local authorities and voluntary organisations.
THE RESULTS

In order to better assess the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on its former member within the current policy context, our findings are presented with reference to NO.4 and Curriculum for Excellence’s Four Capacities.

1. Successful Learners

*Education*

83% of former MSYPs are currently either in further education (for example, college) or higher education (for example, university).

82% of former MSYPs state that their involvement with the Scottish Youth Parliament has been of benefit to their education.

The results of our survey show that the majority of former MSYPs go onto study in higher education institutions. 48% of those former MSYPs surveyed are currently in education. This high figure is not surprising given the age demographic of our respondents. Importantly, of these former members 63% are in higher education with a further 20% in further education, a total of 83%. This is in comparison to just 63% of Scotland’s school leavers currently entering either higher or further education.38

For those no longer in education, more than half (58%) have been awarded degrees either at an undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral level. Again, these figures are

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well above the Scottish average with only 26% of the Scottish population holding a degree or professional qualification.  

Such results suggest that the Scottish Youth Parliament can potentially have an extremely positive impact on an individual’s education. A further survey result showing that 82% of former MSYPs believe their time in the organisation to have been of benefit to their education appears to support this inference.

Research suggests that those from poorer backgrounds are more likely to achieve fewer qualifications and less likely to enter higher education. Approximately 41% of former MSYPs completing the survey however were elected when living in those neighbourhoods ranked in Scotland’s five most deprived deciles. This suggests that the Scottish Youth Parliament may also have a positive impact on the widening participation agenda.

“I was in a rut with no jobs, no activities or education under my belt, and having gone through a lot since joining the SYP, I have returned to university in order to make something of myself, and hopefully influence others to do the same.” (Survey respondent)

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40 Taking forward the Government economic strategy: a discussion paper on tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation, Scottish Government, February 2008
Evidently, it cannot be claimed that the Scottish Youth Parliament is solely responsible for the educational successes of its former members. The hard work and commitment of our members and the wider support they have received and continue to receive from other individuals, educational institutions and organisations for example is not undervalued by the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Nevertheless our survey reveals that many former, MSYPs do genuinely feel that the Scottish Youth Parliament has had an important impact on their education, and in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. Particularly common was the belief that the Scottish Youth Parliament had benefitted individuals’ education in more indirect ways by supporting both their personal (77%) and skills development (67%). This can be through some of the specific training courses delivered by the Scottish Youth Parliament, for example ‘Communicating effectively’ or ‘How to be an effective debater’, but as some of our case studies reveal also through simply individuals’ involvement and engagement with the organisation, attendance at events and work with other MSYPs.

Further areas where the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament was fairly widely felt included ‘Improved knowledge of political systems and processes’ (54%) and ‘Something to include on further/higher education applications’ (53%). These are areas where there is a more direct relationship between the Scottish Youth Parliament and individuals’ educations.
Of these, the former is clearly important for students taking Modern Studies or Politics courses at school or university, but also supports some of the identified outcomes featuring in the CfE framework, for example ‘I understand the arrangements for the political decision making at different levels and the factors which shape these arrangements’ (SOC 3-18a).

The latter demonstrates how MSYPs feel that they have been able to use their time in the Scottish Youth Parliament to improve their prospects and further their academic careers by supporting their applications in what is becoming a highly competitive education arena.\textsuperscript{41}

The Scottish Youth Parliament therefore believes that it is and will continue to be an important partner in the CfE model of educational provision in Scotland. Not only does it directly support the delivery of specific experiences and outcomes, many of its former members believe it has been significant in their development of key attributes and capabilities, a central goal for CfE. Furthermore, only 7\% of former MSYPs would argue that their membership of the Scottish Youth Parliament has had no impact on their education.

A small although not insignificant number, one-third, of former MSYPs described their time in the Scottish Youth Parliament as ‘An activity to do outside school, helping me maintain a healthy school-life balance’. This demonstrates the important role the organisation plays in providing young people with a positive leisure pursuit that allows them to stay active and engaged outwith compulsory schooling.

“The SYP gives young people the chance to use their energy and ideas in much more positive ways.” (Interview participant)

This is particularly notable when 22\% of 8 to 21 year-olds in Scotland (33\% for Scotland’s 15\% most deprived areas) are still not involved in any type of extracurricular activity.\textsuperscript{42} Often this can be due to a lack of opportunities that are both attractive and easily accessible. As one survey respondent explained:

“[The Scottish Youth Parliament] [a]llowed me to pursue interests in an active manner (teens who like football can play football, where do the ones who like politics go?)” (Survey respondent)

The Scottish Youth Parliament, open to all young people and free of charge, can help to overcome some of these issues.

\textsuperscript{41} 2010 saw an increase of 20.5\% for Scottish applicants to universities of colleges, compared to 2009 (UCAS, August 2010 - http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2010/020810)

2. Effective Contributors

Employment

91% of former MSYPs are either currently employed or have been employed since leaving the Scottish Youth Parliament, some in full-time positions, others working alongside their other activities including voluntary work or studying.

Only 6% of former MSYPs have experienced a prolonged period not in education, employment or training since leaving the Scottish Youth Parliament.

58% of former MSYPs believe that their membership of the Scottish Youth Parliament has improved their employability, with 69% also stating that it has strengthened their applications.

Our analysis shows that approximately four-fifths (80%) of our former MSYPs are currently employed, with a further 11% having held jobs at some point following their time with the organisation, demonstrating that the vast majority of MSYPs go on to secure employment. These figures include both individuals working full-time as well as those who have held jobs alongside academic studies, training or voluntary work. Furthermore 86% of our former members continue to live in Scotland, showing that while they are supporting their own economic wellbeing they are also contributing positively to the Scottish economy.

Chart 10: Are you currently employed?

Additional questioning has also revealed that only 6% of respondents have experienced prolonged periods (6 months or more) not in education, employment or training since leaving the organisation. Thus it can be inferred that 94% of former MSYPs enter sustained and positive destinations, be this in education, employment
or both. This figure is marginally higher than that achieved by Scotland’s school leavers more generally (87%)\(^4\)3.

Of those respondents who are presently in employment, 50% are earning between £0 and £15,000 p/a. While on the surface this may not appear to present an especially strong success story, it is evident from our survey that many former MSYPs are employed in part-time positions with a fairly high number working alongside studying. Therefore we would not necessarily expect them to be earning in the higher salary brackets. For instance, 68% of former MSYPs currently in education and are also employed. 73% of these work part-time and 89% earn less than £15,000 p/a.

It is also true that many of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s more recent members, particularly those who have spent some time in education since leaving the organisation, are unlikely to be at a stage in their careers where they are earning higher salaries. What remains more important is recognising former MSYPs’ high employment rates.

Of those former MSYPs no longer in education, 90% are employed full-time with 63% earning between £15,000 and £40,000 p/a, suggesting far more positive long-term (employment) outcomes.

Our survey also reveals the wide range of sectors that former MSYPs go on to work in. The list includes charities and voluntary work, health and social care, retail and sales, teaching and education, engineering and manufacturing, law and the public sector. This suggests that the Scottish Youth Parliament can provide its members with a broad range of transferable skills which are relevant and applicable in a number of professions.

“…despite going into sciences, an area that has very little to do with politics on the surface, all the qualifications, experience, knowledge and confidence gained whilst working as an MSYP has put me in good stead, has been used many a time for both university and work, and has certainly got me a job or two (a distinct talking point in interviews for sure)” (Survey respondent)

As with education, many former MSYPs credit the Scottish Youth Parliament as being of benefit to their career or employment prospects in a number of ways. More than half of all respondents state that serving as an MSYP has improved their employability (58%), and 69% have found that they have been able to strengthen job applications by referring to their time spent in the organisation. We would also argue that for all those who have felt a positive impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on their education, there will have been an indirect impact on their employability.

Former MSYPs consistently rate the personal (71%) and skills development (66%) from their time in the Scottish Youth Parliament as important ways in which the organisation has benefitted their career.
Only 10% of those that have been employed since leaving the organisation believe that the Scottish Youth Parliament has been of no benefit at all to their career, a statement which could be impacted on by a wide range of factors for example the length of time spent in the organisation or the amount of training available to them. Nevertheless, future research will be useful to identify areas where the Scottish Youth Parliament can improve to make sure all of its future alumni can feel they have benefited from their membership.

CASE STUDY: CONTACTS AND NETWORKING

Deborah was first elected as an MSYP in 2002 as an Individual MSYP and served in her position for three years. In 2003 she was selected to attend the World Youth Congress, held that year in Morocco on the theme of Sustainable Development.

I remember hearing about the opportunity [Scottish Youth Parliament] at a school assembly and thought it sounded like a great way to meet like-minded young people from around Scotland and a great way to learn about politics without sitting in a classroom passively learning about issues only to be able to regurgitate them in an exam.

I was amazed and delighted to be chosen to attend the World Youth Congress in Morocco in 2003. It’s an event run every 2 or 3 years by Peace Child International in conjunction with the host country’s government with over 1,000 young people attending from around the world. The majority of participants took part in ‘action projects’ located around the country where they spent a few days volunteering in projects linked to the congress’ theme. However, I was selected to sit on the Casablanca Declaration Drafting Committee along with around 15 other young people. We came up with suggestions for a document that would represent the views of young people around the world on Sustainable Development and could subsequently be presented to governments around the world. When everyone else returned from their action projects, the document was debated and voted on. I learnt a huge amount at the Congress, not least how differently people see the world.

It was a great confidence boost to be selected to represent Scotland at the WYC and then to sit on the Casablanca Declaration Committee. It was particularly from my time spent preparing for and attending the WYC in Morocco with another 15 MSYPs that I built friendships with young people from across Scotland, some of whom I am still in touch with almost a decade later.

I met an Argentinean girl at the Congress in Morocco and we became good friends through the years, even spending Christmas with her family during a gap year. She was an intern at Peace Child while I was at university and I went to visit her and met the whole team. I loved the idea of it- a dozen young people from different countries living and working together. When I finished studying I got in touch with the directors and they recommended I applied for one of their openings. I was thrilled to be offered the position of Editor, which mainly involved working on the United Nations Environment Programme’s magazine for young people, TUNZA. I would meet with the publishers once every few weeks and discuss ideas for articles for the upcoming issue and then research and write some of them. It felt brilliant seeing my name in print alongside the United Nations logo in a magazine translated into several languages and distributed around the world. I never imagined I’d have such an opportunity so young.

44 Only in more recent years has training been delivered in a more formal and centralised way, whilst Board Members and Conveners necessarily access more training that MSYPs more generally.


Skills development

91% of former MSYPs believe that the Scottish Youth Parliament had a positive impact on their skills development.

As earlier results indicate, many former MSYPs feel that the development of key skills has been extremely important in their educations and careers alike. It is therefore considered highly significant in their becoming successful learners and effective contributors. However, many ‘key skills’ are not only essential within those specific courses or occupations where they are of direct relevance but also in life more generally where have a wider impact in equipping individuals with the ability to learn, work, adapt and achieve in various different environments and situations.

When questioned on the impact of their time spent with the Scottish Youth Parliament on their skills development, for every single skills category, former MSYPs’ most common response was to rate this impact as ‘Good’. Furthermore, a majority of respondents rated the impact as either ‘Good’ or ‘Fantastic’ in each category, with 91% of former MSYPs also feeling that overall the Scottish Youth Parliament had a positive impact on their skills development. This allows for the fact that only a selection of specific skills was included in the survey.
Arguably, some variation in the skills individual members will have developed during their time in the organisation is inevitable. For example, our respondents will have been involved in some, but not necessarily all Scottish Youth Parliament activities while others may have held positions in the organisation where some specific skills sets would have been particularly developed.

Areas where the Scottish Youth Parliament performed particularly well were communication skills and team work skills where 82% and 73% of respondents rated...
the impact as ‘Good’ or ‘Fantastic’. This clearly links to some of the priorities of CfE where under the ‘Effective contributors’ it is expected that all young people should be supported to be able to ‘communicate in different ways and in different settings’ and ‘work in partnership and in teams’, for example. Thus the Scottish Youth Parliament provides a valuable service in the pursuit of the Scottish Government’s current youth policy.

The work of the Scottish Youth Parliament in supporting its members’ skills development is also important for the Government’s wider Skills for Scotland framework which intends to ensure that individuals of all ages are well-equipped to contribute to both the Scottish economy and wider society.

In the current economic climate, youth unemployment increasing by 79% between August 2007 and August 2010\(^4\), the job market in Scotland is highly competitive. Through the skills they develop during their time in the Scottish Youth Parliament, former MSYPs are well-placed to compete for jobs while employers can also expect to benefit from former MSYP applicants possessing the necessary attributes to meet the demands of their vacancies.

3. Confident Individuals

*Personal development*

90% of former MSYPs feel that the Scottish Youth Parliament had a positive impact on their skills development.

As with skills development, a significant number of former MSYPs believe that serving as an MSYP has had a positive impact on various aspects of their personal development. This is particularly true for individuals’ self-esteem with 35% of respondents describing the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on this as ‘Fantastic’. In all other areas included in the survey, the most common response was to rate the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament as ‘Good’.

Additionally, in previous questions aimed at understanding how the Scottish Youth Parliament had affected individuals’ education and careers, ‘Personal development’ was on both occasions the most popular answer.

In all areas except ‘Relationships with friends and family’, approximately 70% or more respondents rated the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament as either ‘Good’ or ‘Fantastic’.

\(^4\) *Being young being heard*, Citizens Advice Scotland, February 2011
Importantly however, while less than half of our former MSYPs rated the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on ‘Relationships with friends and family’ as ‘Good’ or ‘Fantastic’, it should not be inferred that the organisation has tended to perform badly in this area. Approximately 43% state that there was ‘No impact’ or that the impact was ‘Not great but not bad’ suggesting that for many members their experience was not negative but that it was simply not an area where the Scottish Youth Parliament will always have a noticeable effect. Arguably, it is more closely related to an
individual’s personal circumstances. It is also not an area that the Scottish Youth Parliament includes in its strategic objectives.

Nevertheless, for those who have seen their relationships with friends and family improve, this impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament as a positive influence should not be overlooked.

4. Responsible Citizens

Voluntary work

75% of MSYPs engage in voluntary work following their time spent in the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Our research shows that 75% of former MSYPs have been engaged in voluntary work since leaving the organisation which for many has been in past five years. This is in stark comparison to figures for Scotland as a whole where only 28% of adults consider themselves to have been recently involved in voluntary activity. Similarly for the 16-24 population, within which the majority of our survey respondents fall, only 29% of males and 21% of females report engaging in voluntary activity. Former MSYPs are therefore performing well above the Scottish average.

Of particular note is that only approximately one-quarter (25%) of our former members were engaged in voluntary work before serving as an MSYP. This suggests that the Scottish Youth Parliament can be influential in introducing young people to and encouraging them to take up volunteering opportunities. The Scottish Youth Parliament is therefore supporting the work and aims that feature in the Government’s Volunteering Action Plan. This role has also been recognised in the Scottish Youth Parliament being awarded Investor in Volunteering status.

“…being an MSYP helped me learn that I enjoyed helping people…” (Survey respondent)

Research shows that on average, an individual is less likely to volunteer if they come from a deprived area. As demonstrated earlier however, whilst the majority of surveys were completed by individuals from neighbourhoods in the five least deprived deciles, a significant proportion of members (41%) served as MSYPs from Scotland’s more deprived areas. Again, this implies that the Scottish Youth Parliament has a role to play in widening participation by supporting Government plans to promote volunteering amongst all groups and in every community.

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In line with Scottish trends, youth work is by far the most popular area for volunteering amongst former MSYPs. However, it is much more dominant in our research at 63%. For volunteers in Scotland as whole the figure is only 44%, 22% working through schools and 22% through youth and children’s organisations.\(^{48}\)

In part, this may be the result of many individuals joining the Scottish Youth Parliament because of their already strong interest in youth participation and youth work, but also the influence of other youth organisations, youth forums and their support workers with whom they come into contact and work closely with when serving as an MSYP.

Other popular areas for volunteering were community projects (35%), environment and conservation (11%) and health and social care (10%).

“[The Scottish Youth Parliament] has also fired my interest in effecting change for different community groups and given me the belief that I can do so.” (Survey respondent)

**Political Engagement**

73% of former MSYPs state that their knowledge and understanding of political processes and systems has increased following their time as an MSYP.

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96% of eligible former MSYPs have voted in General Elections.

27% of former MSYPs are currently members of a political party.

Our results show that serving as an MSYP can be extremely beneficial in teaching young people about political processes and systems, with only 3% of respondents claiming that their knowledge and understanding decreased as a result of serving in the Scottish Youth Parliament. It provides them with an opportunity to gain firsthand experience of elections, political procedures and campaigning.

![Chart 16: Has your level of interest/knowledge and understanding of politics increased, decreased or stayed the same following your time spent with the SYP?](chart.png)

For most respondents (48%) their level of interest in politics increased too, however for a significant number (43%) their level of interest merely stayed the same. Arguably however, many young people are attracted to the Scottish Youth Parliament because they already possess a strong interest in politics and current affairs. We would therefore expect the number of former MSYPs stating that their interest increased to be lower than that for those whose understanding increased.

Nevertheless, for almost half of MSYPs, their interest increases, something which many hope will encourage young people to become more politically active within formal political processes, most notably elections. This is important when research shows that only 48% of 17-25 year-olds are of the opinion that it is ‘important to vote as it helps decide how things are done’ for example. 49

Following this, our results also show a high level of electoral turnout amongst our former members. 89% of former members report voting in General Elections. This

figure grows to an impressive 96% when ineligible voters are excluded from the results. In contrast, at the 2010 General Election, turnout for the Scottish electorate as a whole was only 64%. Turnout rates for former MSYPs appears even more impressive when compared to UK-wide figures for comparable 18-24 and 25-34 populations, just 44% and 55% respectively.

While voting in devolved, European and local elections appears less common amongst former MSYPs this is in-keeping with general voting trends, turnout typically highest at General Elections. Furthermore, the different timings of these elections mean that a higher number of former MSYPs were ineligible to vote in these other elections. It can still therefore be argued that individuals who have served in Scotland’s youth parliament are more likely to engage in electoral processes.

Our survey also sought to find out how many former MSYPs are members of political parties. Just over one-quarter revealed that they were. There are few official statistics for political party membership, but a recent report by the House of Commons Library found that only 1% of the electorate is a member of one of the three main UK parties. Arguably in Scotland there are four main parties but party membership figures are unlikely to vary too considerably. This suggests that MSYPs are more likely than many in the electorate to engage in politics beyond the world of elections.

52 'Membership of UK Political Parties’ Standard Note: SN/S125. House of Commons Library. 17 August 2009.
5. In summary

90% of former MSYPs rate the long-term of the Scottish Youth Parliament on them as ‘Very positive’ or ‘Positive’.

89% of former MSYPs would encourage young people today to become involved in the Scottish Youth Parliament.

The survey also asked our former MSYPs some more general questions about their time in the organisation, and the results were extremely positive. Almost 90% of respondents rated the long-term impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on them as either ‘Very positive’ or ‘Positive’.

Overall, how would you rate the long-term impact of your time spent in the SYP on you?

- Neither positive nor negative, 8%
- Positive, 48%
- Very positive, 42%
- No impact, 1%
- Very negative, 1%

Chart 18: Are you currently a member of a political party?

- Yes, 27%
- No, 70%
- Prefer not to say, 4%
Furthermore, almost 90% of respondents have also stated that they would recommend becoming involved in the Scottish Youth Parliament to young people today, suggesting a positive and beneficial experience.

Finally we asked our former MSYPs the question; ‘Overall, how far do you feel that the skills and experience you developed during your time in the SYP have helped you get to where you are today?’.

Once more, almost 90% of former MSYPs felt that the Scottish Youth Parliament had played some part in helping them get to where they are today, be this in education, employment or life more generally.

The most common response was ‘Some’ (48%). The Scottish Youth Parliament recognises that young people are supported by many individuals and agencies and that the successes our former members have achieved will not be wholly the result of their time as an MSYP but the result of their and others’ hard work and commitment. Nevertheless, the results of this research clearly illustrate that for many former MSYPs the Scottish Youth Parliament has been an integral part of their development and helped them on their way to positive outcomes.
OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Youth Parliament provides its members with numerous opportunities to get involved in different types of activities and events. Much of the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on its former members, as reported in the results of our survey, will be the result of their engagement with these.

For example, on a local level, key tasks and activities carried out by MSYPs can include: involvement with their local youth forum; consulting with young people in their area; promoting the Scottish Youth Parliament; representing the views of young people at local meetings and engage with the local media.

On a national level, key MSYPs can be involved in: representing the views of their constituents at national meetings; representing the Scottish Youth Parliament at external events and working in partnership with other organisations to further the aims of the Scottish Youth Parliament; promoting the Scottish Youth Parliament’s national campaigns; engaging with a Scottish Youth Parliament Subject Committee.

All of these tasks and activities provide MSYPs with, amongst other things, chances to learn new or develop existing skills, grow in confidence, meet and work alongside new people, pursue their interests, be introduced to new ideas and opportunities, and travel throughout Scotland.

There are a number of specific opportunities offered to MSYPs which provide evidence of this.

• **National Sittings**
  The Scottish Youth Parliament holds three national sittings every year, at which all MSYPs can come together to discuss and debate the issues important to them and their constituents. Sittings consist of a wide range of activities, including: debates on topical issues of interest to young people; campaign activities; question-and-answer sessions with parliamentarians and other decision-makers; meetings of the SYP’s ten Subject Committees; workshops on topical issues; giving evidence to Scottish Parliament Committees; electing the SYP Board and other office bearers.

  Through this MSYPs are able to meet their fellow MSYPs, learn about the issues affecting other young people in Scotland, and gain experience of things such as debating, committee work, campaigning and elections.

• **Campaigns**
  The Scottish Youth Parliament runs a number of campaigns where MSYPs can take part in events, put their views to policy makers, and lead petitions, getting directly involved in politics on both a local and national stage. Recent successes
have included a campaign against the purchase age of alcohol being raised to 21 and an ongoing petition to the Scottish Public Petitions Committee to ban the discriminatory Mosquito device. In turn, this allows MSYPs to experience politics and democracy firsthand, and to see themselves making a difference in their community and across Scotland.

CASE STUDY: ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Gillian was elected as an MSYP in 2007 at the age of 17 and served for two years as the MSYP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. She is currently studying Politics and Social Policy at the University of Stirling and working as a part-time youth worker for Stirling Council.

While I was an MSYP I was the Convener of the Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee. I was heavily involved in our activities which included things like petitioning, but in this position I was also appointed as the youth representative for the Scottish Government’s Rural Development Council and the Scotland Without Nuclear Weapons Working Group. Attending meetings was nerve-wracking at first because I was by far the youngest person on both of these committees but as it went on I grew in confidence. From sitting on these committees I learnt a lot about the issues being discussed as well as how official meetings in Parliament are conducted.

The Scottish Youth Parliament created a lot of opportunities for me. From being an MSYP, a Subject Committee Convener and on the Board of Directors my name got known and I was appointed Highland Youth Convener for the Highland Council, a paid position. From holding this role I was then able to attend the World Youth Congress in Quebec as a UK representative. I was also contacted by the British Council as a result of the work I’d done with the Scottish Youth Parliament and flew out to Dubai where I was selected as the UK’s Youth Ambassador to the Middle East, meaning I could go to the World Economic Forum being held in Egypt. All of these were great experiences where I was able to develop my skills, widen my knowledge, and grow more independent, as well as have lots of fun. I don’t think I would have had the opportunities though if it hadn’t been for being a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

The Scottish Youth Parliament has also been influential in helping me get my current job with Stirling Council. They had heard about me and the work I’d done as an MSYP, and therefore approached me to get involved in their youth work services. I remember them being very impressed with the wide range of skills and experience I had so I can definitely say that being a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament has improved my employability. It’s a great job I have at the moment too – I run a number of youth clubs and do detached youth work on a Saturday night. The confidence I gained through my time as an MSYP has been invaluable; to be 21 and have confidence to facilitate a group of kids not much younger than me is great!

I have no negative memories of the Scottish Youth Parliament. It was a brilliant two years, I enjoyed every sitting, and ultimately I wouldn’t be the person I am today, or doing what I’m doing, if it wasn’t for the Scottish Youth Parliament. I developed so many skills which have been beneficial in my life and I made a lot of friends, some of which I know will be my best friends for life.

I’m currently studying at the University of Stirling, and while I’m not sure exactly what I want to do when I leave, I do know and feel confident that with the experience I’ve gained through the Scottish Youth Parliament and the subsequent opportunities I’ve had, the world is my oyster.
• **MSYP Training**

Over the course of its history, the Scottish Youth Parliament has offered a number of training opportunities to its MSYPs. In recent history, the Scottish Youth Parliament has been making positive moves towards implementing a compulsory, cohesive and comprehensive training programme where all MSYPs will complete courses in a number of areas. Subjects include, but are not restricted to: how to be an effective debater; research skills; communicating effectively; engaging with young people; organising local events. The Scottish Youth Parliament has recently received accreditation for its training programme which gives MSYPs the chance to be awarded up to five separate Scottish Qualifications Authority recognised certificates.

Consequently, on leaving the organisation, former MSYPs will not only have developed their skills and widened their knowledge, but they will have also be in possession of formal certificates recognising these achievements. It is felt that this will be important in further strengthening their employability.

• **Working with decision-makers**

Locally MSYPs often seek to work with MSPs, MPs and Councillors that cover the same constituencies as them. In the past this has led to joint constituent surgeries and/or joint appearance at events for example. Nationally, the SYP seeks to engage with and influence MSPs on a regular basis and MSYPs can find themselves attending and contributing to events alongside parliamentarians and other notable political figures.

• **SYP Awards**

Each year the Scottish Youth Parliament holds an awards ceremony to acknowledge those individuals who have excelled over the past year. This is important in showing the young people within our organisation that they are valued and that their hardwork, commitment and achievements are recognised.

These are just a few examples of the opportunities open to MSYPs in the Scottish Youth Parliament, and as some of our case studies demonstrate, there are numerous other events, activities and campaigns that members can become involved with.
Whilst this report focuses on MSYPs, notably former MSYPs, the impact of the Scottish Youth Parliament on other young people in Scotland who engage with the organisation is also important. For example, both through its staff team and its MSYPs, the Scottish Youth Parliament runs numerous consultations, focus groups, programmes and training sessions, sometimes alone but also often in partnership with other organisations. These activities present young people, both MSYPs and non-MSYPs to participate in the work of the organisation and in doing so, develop skills, improve their appreciation and understanding of democratic processes and grow in confidence.

Examples include:

- the Scottish Youth Parliament’s 2011 Manifesto consultation which received 42,804 responses from young people across Scotland;
- We-CTV, a programme engaging with young people in four Scottish local authorities areas in a film making competition looking at the consequences of knife crime, part of the Scottish Government’s No Knives, Better Lives initiative; and
- the development of V3 pupil council training to support young people in school’s pupil councils.53

The number of young people who have engaged or been associated with and thus impacted on by the Scottish Youth Parliament is likely therefore to be far bigger than that of our former membership.

53 Further details of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s external activities can be found on the Scottish Youth Parliament website http://www.syp.org.uk/.
CONCLUSION

This report has illustrated the many ways in which the Scottish Youth Parliament has had and continues to have a positive and long-term impact on the young people who serve within the organisation as MSYPs. This impact can be felt in their education and employment, in their volunteering experiences, and in their political engagement. It can also be witnessed more informally in their individual skills development and in their personal growth and improvement.

Not only therefore does the Scottish Youth Parliament play an important role in supporting the representation and participation of Scotland’s youth population in the decision-making process. It also plays a significant role in supporting the development of many of Scotland’s young people through working closely with its Members and offering them a wide range of opportunities through which they can have fun but also enjoy many of the outcomes and experiences set out in the CfE model.

In this way, the Scottish Youth Parliament believes it has made, and will continue to make, a significant contribution to National Outcome 4: Our Young People are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
ANNEX 1: AQMeN Collaborative Small Grants Scheme

Background

During the course of this research, the Scottish Youth Parliament received support and advice from Dr Mark Shephard and Dr Stratos Patrikios in the School of Government and Public Policy at the University of Strathclyde. Through their input and as part of the AQMeN Collaborative Small Grants Scheme, additional analysis of the data collected has been carried out during the period October 2011 to January 2012.

The principal aims of this collaboration were to:

- To take an existing recent dataset on former Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) and to add in other measures from additional Scottish datasets such as Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- To use non-parametric methods to explore whether there are any systematic differences among MSYPs regarding their experiences and the impact of the organisation on their personal and professional development, as well as possible explanations for any differences.
- To use this information to assess how well the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) has achieved its goals and to help inform future improvements and operational policy of the SYP.
- To train and share quantitative methods skills with a representative of the SYP.

The analysis

Despite receiving 102 responses to the survey, 89 of which could be verified as former MSYPs, from 426 invitations to take part, the sample size was too small for parametric tests to be carried out. Even acknowledging this limitation, it was still possible to explore patterns in the data using non-parametric tests such as the Mann-Whitney U Test and Pearson’s Chi-square Test.

Through this analysis, we have sought to compare groups (e.g. males versus females and those from the most deprived neighbourhoods versus the least deprived neighbourhoods) to see if there are any significant differences across a set of key indicator variables (e.g. overall impact, educational benefit, volunteering, political participation, skills development, and personal development). Overall, the results have documented positive impacts from SYP membership and do not find there to be too many cases in which groups have reported significant inequity of experiences.
Equally, the majority of responses, as shown in the preceding report, are largely positive. However, it has been possible to identify a number of areas which can be used to inform future SYP policy.

What follows is a description of core findings for six key impact areas, selected from the main report and in which lessons can be learnt concerning the differential experiences of MSYPs.

**Volunteering**

Volunteering was one area in which there were particularly notable differences between several identifiable respondent groups. Experiences of post-SYP volunteering have been found to vary according to neighbourhood background, gender, age upon entry to the SYP, disability and religious affiliation.

Whilst the SYP performs well in representing young people across socio-economic groups, as demonstrated by the good distribution of both current and former members across Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation neighbourhood deciles, in terms of subsequent impact indicators, the findings of this analysis suggest that there are some areas in which more attention could be paid to engaging with and encouraging young people from more deprived neighbourhoods.

Sorting individuals into two groups – those from the 50 percent least deprived neighbourhoods and those from the 50 percent most deprived neighbourhoods – we find that former MSYPs from less deprived backgrounds report more positive results.

- 80 percent of those from the least deprived neighbourhoods went on to engage in voluntary work upon leaving the SYP compared to just 61 percent of those from Scotland’s 50 percent most deprived neighbourhoods (Chi-square 3.04 (1 df), \( p = 0.08 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.07).

Testing of further variables shows that:

- Only 64 percent of males reported engaging in voluntary work after their time in the SYP, compared with 86 percent of females (Chi-square 4.27 (1 df), \( p = 0.04 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.02).

- Only 59 percent of individuals joining the organisation at the age of 18 or older were involved in voluntary work following their time in the SYP, whereas 79

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54 All percentages in this annex are rounded to the nearest whole. While the difference is not significant at \( p < 0.05 \), our sample N is low and the figure is close enough to merit attention.
percent of younger members volunteered upon leaving the organisation (Chi-square 3.01 (1 df), \( p = 0.09 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.08).

- 78 percent of former members without any disabilities engaged in voluntary activity after leaving the SYP. Only 43 percent of those with disabilities reported the same experience (Chi-square 4.22 (1 df), \( p = 0.04 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.06).

- 83 percent of former members expressing religious affiliation stated that they had gone on to volunteer as opposed to just 70 percent of non-religious members (Chi-square 1.70 (1 df), \( p = 0.19 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.15).

These findings may be the results of various factors. There may be a lack of awareness amongst some groups as to the opportunities available to them, such as those for individuals with disabilities, living within more deprived neighbourhoods or outside religious organisations often engaged in voluntary work. Equally, MSYPs entering at the organisation at the age of 18 will necessarily have left the organisation as an adult which may mean busier schedules and greater demands on their time. The small \( n \) of this sample does not allow us to fully explore these explanations here. However, clearly there are different hypotheses which may be forwarded, and it could be recommended that these are used to develop future research projects focussed on the groups identified above and their experiences and attitudes towards volunteering.

Either way, these results imply that the SYP should think about developing new and exciting ways to promote volunteering amongst male members, older members, those with disabilities and those who may miss some of the voluntary opportunities a religious affiliation may provide so as to help these individuals discover the volunteering opportunities available to them. Equally, efforts should be made to work more closely with local authorities and community organisations and initiatives to ensure more targeted interventions in deprived areas.

Volunteering therefore clearly represents an area for improvement within the SYP. Interestingly however, the research found there was no difference between MSYPs who were already volunteering in another capacity when they joined the SYP and those who were not. The distribution saw three-quarters of both groups engaged in voluntary work upon leaving the organisation\(^{55}\).

\(^{55}\) Engaged in voluntary activity upon entering the SYP, \( n = 20 \). Not engaged in voluntary activity upon entering the SYP, \( n = 60 \).
Educational benefit
2006 marked an important point in the SYP’s development. In this year the SYP experienced a significant increase in staff numbers and the amount of work organised and carried out by the central office in Edinburgh, moving the organisation closer towards its current set up.

There is a notable difference in the perceived educational benefit of the organisation between cohorts. 96 percent of members joining in or after 2006 stated that their time in the organisation was beneficial to their education, as opposed to just 83 percent of those joining before 2006 (Chi-square 2.67 (1 df), \( p = 0.08 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.08). This would be consistent with the development of the organisation and both the increase and improvement of MSYP training available. The SYP would hope to see this figure improve in the future with the new SCQF accredited e-learning training programme initiated in 2011.

The experiences of former members from both eras suggest that it is in more formal areas, such as MSYP training, where organisational changes have been most impactful. Importantly, this does not equate to a view that throughout its development the SYP has not been improving as it implements changes. The SYP’s success can be measured using many variables, those featuring in the survey data only representing a particular set of these focussed on long-term MSYP impact. Equally, qualitative work could be recommended to explore how former MSYPs’ responses were shaped.

Socio-economic factors also continue to affect educational experiences. For example, 95 percent of those from the least deprived neighbourhoods reported that the SYP had been of benefit to their education, in contrast to 81 percent of those from the most deprived neighbourhoods (Chi-square 3.09 (1 df) \( p = 0.08 \), Fisher’s exact test (one-sided) 0.09).

Political interest

After controlling for ineligible voters, there was little difference to be found between any groups with regards to their election turnout. (The analysis here focussed on the 2010 General Election as the most recent election to the fieldwork period to limit the number of ineligible voters.)

However, within the area of political interest it was discovered that of those entering the organisation at the age of 18 years or older, 65 percent felt that their interest in politics increased during their time in office. Only 44 percent of those who joined before turning 18 stated the same (Mann-Whitney U Test 394.50, \( p = 0.08 \)). Although
the test is not quite significant (P<0.05), this result suggests that the SYP is more successful in promoting politics and political interest among its older members.

Through this exercise however it has become apparent that a longitudinal study, monitoring how political interest changes throughout the duration of an MSYP term, will be useful. This would test whether younger people are simply more interested in politics when they join the organisation, and hence their interest does not increase, or whether the SYP might do more to promote politics amongst its younger members.

The introduction of the MSYP Census in 2009, and repeated in 2011 will provide a good opportunity to do this, although it will rely on collecting reasonable panel data which may be difficult given the high turnover of MSYPs as the organisation continues to collect more data, tracking its membership.

No statistically significant differences were found for neighbourhood background, sex, year of entry, or disability.

**Personal development and Skills development**

Within the survey, respondents were asked to rate the impact of the SYP on various skills and personal traits. For the purposes of this additional analysis, individuals’ overall assessments of whether the organisation benefitted their skills or personal development were tested. The results reveal no statistically significant variation across a number of variables including neighbourhood background, sex, year of entry, number of terms served, sexual orientation, age upon entry and disability.

**Overall impact**

No statistically significant difference was found between respondents’ assessment of the overall impact of the SYP when comparing individuals from more deprived and less deprived neighbourhoods (Mann Whitney U Test 491.00, p = 0.34). With 90 percent of all respondents ranking the long-term impact of the SYP on them as either “Very positive” or “Positive”, this suggests that in the majority of areas the organisation is working well to support all young people.

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56 In the 2011 census, conducted at the March 2011 Scottish Youth Parliament sitting, following elections of the same month across the organisation 79 percent of MSYPs were first time members.
The analysis here also shows no significant difference in self-reported overall impact of the organisation between individuals joining before or after 2006 with 90 and 93 percent ranking it as either ‘very positive’ or ‘positive’ respectively despite the evolution of and changes to the organisation.

A further analysis considering the split between individuals reporting their experiences as ‘very positive’ or ‘positive’ finds no statistically significant differences for sex, age upon entry into the organisation, religion or neighbourhood background.

Disability does however appear to have a marginally significant effect on these responses ($p = 0.09$), with only 86 percent of disabled members rating the impact as ‘positive’ compared to 14 percent ‘very positive’. This is in contrast to the able-bodied respondents of which 52 percent responded with ‘positive’ and 48 percent with ‘very positive’. There is therefore some room for improving the experience of membership for young people with disabilities.

Interestingly, for individuals already engaged in external voluntary work at the time of their joining the SYP, 60 percent rated the impact of the experience as ‘very positive’ in contrast to 37 percent of those for whom the SYP was their first experience of volunteering (Mann Whitney U Test 450.00, $p = 0.08$).

**Conclusion**

The SYP has achieved very good descriptive representation of a variety of societal groups. On the issue of how well each of the groups does post-SYP experience, we find some encouraging evidence; particularly in relation to the overall impact the SYP has on its former members with 90 percent reporting the impact as being either positive or very positive. However, we also find some evidence, particularly in relation to volunteering, that we may need to pay more attention to some groups for example males, older participants, the disabled, and those from more deprived neighbourhoods to reduce imbalances in subsequent achievements. Such findings are helpful in assisting the SYP in the development of its services and support. That said, volunteering is noticeably higher among those who participate in the SYP than the population in general and so identified group differences need to be evaluated more broadly.
Former MSYP’s – Where they are now!

Pamela Nash was elected as an MSYP in 2007 at the age of 22 and served for two years. She was the first member of the Scottish Youth Parliament to pursue a career in Westminster as an MP. In May 2010 Pamela was elected by the people of Airdrie and Shotts to represent them in the House of Commons; at just 25 she became the ‘baby of the house’.

I studied Politics at Glasgow University but I wasn’t involved in party politics or student politics, and it was only after I finished university that I started to campaign on some issues. Really, the crux for me was when I finished university and like many graduates then, and even more now, I couldn’t get a job so I wrote a letter to my MP and asked for a job and asked for some advice in getting a job if he couldn’t give me one. His office contacted me and I started an internship there soon after. It made me realise straight away that this was something I wanted to continue with. It was around then I saw an advert where the Scottish Youth Parliament was looking for candidates and shortly after that I was elected as an MSYP.

The SYP is a really vibrant organisation. I’ve never seen any other youth organisation be so welcoming to different people, it’s very encouraging and every young person appreciated that. My time in the SYP helped me understand debating etiquette, gave me confidence to speak in public and I learnt all about committees and parliamentary structures. What I remember when I was involved is that there were very few people that I spoke to, very, very few who would openly say that they had aspirations to go into politics. Most of them were studying completely different things and wanted to work in Scotland in a variety of different professions, so I think that’s quite interesting.

Former Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament John Loughton had a presumption that the organisation would just be a “middle class debating club” for wannabe politicians, and that it didn’t really reach out to young people from all backgrounds.

How wrong I was. I decided to get involved in the SYP because I wanted to show people that the stereotypes of young people being disinterested in politics and lacking knowledge about the issues that affect them are wrong. SYP was a big opportunity! I wanted to make sure that young people would have the chance to stand up and be counted, not just as tomorrow’s citizens but today’s too.

Once I got involved in the organisation I realised that my original ideas about it were wrong and instead found the SYP to be an amazing opportunity for any young person passionate about an issue to campaign and ensure that young people’s views are truly listened to by politicians and decision makers. On top of that, I gained a lot as a person from being involved in the organisation, mainly you gain those “invisible” skills and experiences that you don’t realise you’re getting until you think about it later on.

The SYP offers young people a brighter future and since the leaving I been blessed with many opportunities. I won’t say it has been easy building a career without a degree-level qualification, because it’s not. But my SYP experiences were in effect my degree. I went on to be appointed to the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution, where we not only informed legislation but I gained first-hand experience of working alongside politicians, peers and judges. I increased my knowledge of political processes in the UK and learnt how to navigate to the media (still learning). I would recommend the SYP to anyone because I think that being in the SYP opens up your thinking to what you can achieve. It allows you to improve our society, to tackle injustice and to be ambitious and believe in yourself.
Gillian, 21, was elected as an MSYP in 2007 at the age of 17 and served for two years as the MSYP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. She is currently studying Politics and Social Policy at the University of Stirling and working as a part-time youth worker for Stirling Council.

From the age of about thirteen I was involved in a number of local youth participation groups such as Highland Youth Voice and so when I heard about the Scottish Youth Parliament it seemed like the natural next step. I could pursue my interests but on national rather than local stage. I’ve always really liked the idea of making sure that young people are well represented, but this was also an opportunity to gain more skills and experience, particularly in politics, and to meet new, but like-minded people. It was great to be able to represent the Highlands too and to make sure that the issues I cared about, and which are important in our area such as public transport and rural affairs, were being talked about.

The Scottish Youth Parliament created a lot of opportunities for me. From being an MSYP, a Subject Committee Convener and on the Board of Directors my name got known and I was appointed Highland Youth Convener for the Highland Council, a paid position. The Scottish Youth Parliament has also been influential in helping me get my current job with Stirling Council. They had heard about me and the work I’d done as an MSYP, and therefore approached me to get involved in their youth work services. I remember them being very impressed with the wide range of skills and experience I had so I can definitely say that being a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament has improved my employability. It’s a great job I have at the moment too – I run a number of youth clubs and do detached youth work on a Saturday night. The confidence I gained through my time as an MSYP has been invaluable; to be 21 and have confidence to facilitate a group of kids not much younger than me is great!

Jamie, 21, was first elected as an MSYP in 2005, representing Central Fife and serving for 4 years. He now works as an Engagement and Youth Participation Officer at Young Scot and is studying for a BSc in Social Sciences through the Open University.

I was first introduced to the Scottish Youth Parliament through being involved in my local youth forum. We were invited to attend a Scottish Youth Parliament sitting in Edinburgh as guests and the whole thing just seemed really interesting and dynamic. I gained a lot through SYP, and I don’t think I’d be where I am now if it hadn’t been for the organisation. My confidence really grew which has been important at work but also in my day-to-day life. I feel much more able to stand up and voice my opinions, as well as to talk to new people. As a result of taking part in debates at the sittings, I also gained public speaking experience which has been useful in my current job where I regularly have to speak in front of large audiences of young people.

All of these experiences and opportunities have been really beneficial in my career. For example, as an Engagement and Participation Officer at Young Scot some of my responsibilities include engaging and meeting with young people from every kind of backgrounds, organising focus groups for various consultations, and running group work sessions with young people on issues that might affect them such as financial education or body image. The Scottish Youth Parliament has therefore been a great stepping stone on which to start building my career. It’s not just the skills you develop either, but the connections you make. I’m still in touch with a lot of people I met through the Scottish Youth Parliament.
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