The Youth Cabinet Youth Issues Elections

In February 2015, Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet (YCAB) formed a ballot dedicated to the issues that young people face while in education and what the opinions of the youth have regarding said issues. Across Milton Keynes, 12 schools and over 10,000 students took part in the ballot.

The issues that were brought up were:
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Anti-Bullying
- Childhood Obesity
- Cultural Awareness and International Relationships
- Giving Young People a Voice in Improving their Community
- Increased Participation for Young People as Decision Makers
- Making the Transition Between Education Stages Better (Year 6/ Year 7)
- Road Safety

Every young person that had a vote in this ballot had the opportunity to leave a comment about why they chose that topic. Youth Cabinet spent the following months reading through every comment and creating their campaign regarding the outcome of the ballot and the comments that the young people left.

The final outcome for the votes was as followed:
(In Order, Highest – Lowest)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total no. of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti Bullying</td>
<td>3331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and Alcohol Abuse</td>
<td>2163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Obesity</td>
<td>1508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving Young People a Voice in Improving their Community</td>
<td>846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Safety</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Awareness and International Relations</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Participation for Young People as Decision Makers</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the Transition Between Education Stages Better</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After seeing the results of the ballot, YCAB highlighted that Anti-Bullying and Drug and Alcohol abuse was, in the eyes of the youth, the bigger issue of the list and therefore, based campaigns on boosting their awareness.
Anti- Bullying

In the 2015 YCAB Elections, anti-bullying was voted as the top issue by young people across all schools in Milton Keynes. Their responses from the ballot sheets showed that the three highest topics within Anti-Bullying were: suicide, self-harm and personal experience of being bullied.

Throughout the entirety of the ballot, there were many comments about prejudice and discrimination, however there were very few regarding the LGBT+ community. YCAB believed that part of their Anti-Bullying campaign should cover Homophobic and Transphobic bullying.

Young people have made the issue of anti-bullying as their top priority because many young people still believe that it “is not spoken about enough” and they think it is “horrible and disrespectful” that it is still a major issue. Many young people said that they “hated high school” because they were bullied or someone close to them was bullied. From the comments by students, it is clear that those who have been bullied would not wish that pain upon others.

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people, believe it is important that young people have an understanding of culture, religions, and the LGBT+ community so that bullying can be tackled “as every young person deserves to feel safe”.

Drugs and Alcohol Abuse

The young people of Milton Keynes feel that drugs and alcohol abuse is a key issue. After reading the comments that young people made during the ballot, the Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet has identified the main problems that need to be addressed.

From the comments that the young people made, 104 commented about death through drugs and alcohol abuse; a further 50 noted the need for further awareness on the topic and 43 mentioned problems regarding addiction.

Young people are aware that it is a “contentious problem in the youth community” and has to be tackled as every young person could be affected by this at some point in their life. But young people “should be aware of the long term effect on their lives”. Therefore drugs and alcohol should be educated alongside the effects and consequences of abusing them.

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people believe it is important that young people have an understanding of drugs and alcohol abuse and the consequences of them in the long term.
Child Obesity

Young people have said that childhood obesity is the third biggest issue for them in Milton Keynes. By reading through the comments made by young people, during the Youth Cabinet elections last year, we determined that young people believe that:

Childhood Obesity not only leads to serious health and physical complications but can also result in bullying and low self-esteem which has a long-term effect on someone. Child Obesity is "a growing issue that affects the life and confidence of students, hurting their chances to get the grades they want". Obesity is affecting the future of young people which is why it must be tackled.

Many young people also believe that there isn’t enough support out there to help them tackle obesity and one young person said: “Having been quite large as a child with little help, I feel it would be beneficial to have the help and advice they need”.

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people believe it is important that young people have the help, advice and support that they need to tackle the increasing obesity issue in children and young people.

Give young people a voice in improving their community

Young people have shown their interest in the issue of having a voice in improving their community, following the 2015 YCAB elections. By reading through the comments, from the election, made by young people, YCAB has managed to identify key points within the issue.

Young people in Milton Keynes felt that having a voice in their community is imperative as they can influence decision-makers and make a positive impact locally. One young person commented “We (young people) are regarded as irrelevant and naïve, but we have a better understanding of today’s society”

Young people take pride in their local community and therefore want to be involved with improving the community they love. Young people said, “because it is important for us to have a voice in the community we will grow up in”.

To change this issue, the Youth Cabinet recommends that there is more emphasis on student councils in schools and more opportunities for young people to influence change in schools. This could help with our anti-bullying campaign as we have requested that schools review their anti-bullying policy, listening to the opinions of students.
**Road Safety Statement**

As Youth Cabinet, we have been reading many students’ comments regarding road safety in Milton Keynes. In the 2015 YCAB elections, road safety was voted the fourth most important issue that affects young people. It was made clear from the feedback that students across Milton Keynes are very concerned for the safety of themselves, their families and their friends.

Education regarding road safety was brought up countless times; there is a strong belief that road safety “needs to be publicised” and that young people are “not aware” of the dangers they face near roads.

Furthermore, the fact that students misbehave around roads was frequently mentioned, implying that there should be more adult supervision near roads outside schools. One student said that the roads in MK “could be improved quite a lot”, amongst many other comments about how the poor road conditions are a major contributing factor to the high risk of accidents.

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people believe it is important that young people have the education on road safety.

**Cultural awareness and international relations**

Young people in Milton Keynes voted Cultural Awareness and International Relations as an important issue. The comments showed that young people felt there was not enough education about other cultures, which has resulted in stereotyping, racism and bullying.

It was also found that the ignorance towards other cultures left young people from different cultures feeling a need for their own culture to be understood. We believe that an increase in education would lead to an increased respect between different people and communities and a decrease in conflict.

Young people feel that more education on every culture is important as bullying about cultures has come from not understanding the culture. Young people have pointed out that bullying about culture makes the person feel “depressed and insecure” and that it is “not fair”. Young people believe that “diversity is important” and should be understood.

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people, believe it is important that young people have an understanding of culture and religions around the world.
**Increased participation for young people as decision makers**

Young people have shown their interest in the issue of lacking participation for young people as decision makers, following the 2015 YCAB elections. By reading through the comments made by young people, YCAB has managed to identify key points within the issue.

Many young people feel that they “deserve to have a say” in issues that affect them as they are the “future generation”. Young people should be allowed to grow and have more responsibility which will ultimately help young people in the future. Young people believe that they have “brilliant ideas” to contribute but they feel that adults “dismiss young people views” because of their age.

Young people think that the decisions that affect their future are always in the hands of adults, therefore, young people do not have their voice heard.

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people believe it is important that young people have a say in decision making and that their views are heard within the matters that will have an effect on the future of young people.

**Make the transition between education stages better**

In the 2015 Youth Cabinet elections, the issue of a difficult transition between primary and secondary schools amongst young people was raised. In the statements collected from young people from across MK, the overall theme was that:

Young students found the quality and quantity of homework a “huge difference” and found it difficult to manage and maintain during the transition stages of education. Young people also found it difficult to sustain friendships in an educational environment. As well as that, young people also commented on the general atmosphere and the sudden change in size of the working environment as a hard transition.

Many young people said that “pupils need more support” as the transition is overwhelming and can get confusing at times. Young people also felt that many other pupils are not physically and mentally prepared for the transition, therefore, implying that young people need more support. As well as that, young people were shocked with the sudden change in the difficulty of secondary school life and many said that it was a very “confusing” and felt “anxious and scared”

We, as a Youth Cabinet and representatives of the voice of young people believe it is important to improve the transition between primary and secondary because, as one young person stated, “It’s such a big step up and some people’s legs may not be long enough to reach.”