

An examination of the work of the National Health Service [NHS] England Youth Forum

A research study commissioned by NHS England and
undertaken by the University of Hertfordshire

Executive Summary

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Background

The concept of a Youth Forum is now well recognised. The Northern Ireland Youth Forum has been acknowledged as one of the longest running within the United Kingdom [UK]; it was established in 1979 by the Department of Education and has continued to develop, having a very active membership (Northern Ireland Youth Forum, 2016). In 1999, a youth forum was held in The Hague to enable 132 young people, who represented 111 countries, to offer their thoughts and opinions to a range of key organisations (including the United Nations as well as governmental and non-governmental bodies) about areas such as health, human rights and education (Youth Forum, 1999). In the same year, UNESCO introduced their first youth forum event - this has since been held every two years at the headquarters in Paris; it is open to all young people and aims to provide:

“an innovative, ongoing opportunity for youth to work in dialogue with UNESCO, to shape and direct the Organization’s approach and to present their concerns and ideas to Member States.”

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-forums/>

There are now more than 620 youth councils and forums in the UK – these include those related to local government as well as Community, Borough and County Councils (National Health Service [NHS] England, 2015), thus enabling young people to be involved in a range of decision-making within the community in which they live. In order to allow young people to participate in decision-making about NHS strategies, and improve health services for them, the NHS England Youth Forum was established in 2014.

Research focus

This report summarises an evaluative mixed methods research study (entitled: *An examination of the work of the National Health Service [NHS] England Youth Forum*) that was commissioned by NHS England in July 2015 and undertaken by the

University of Hertfordshire [UH] between July 2015 and September 2016; this work is Research Phase II, stages I and II; Research Phase I was completed in March 2015 (Whiting et al, 2015; 2016).

The overall aim of Research Phase II, Stages I and II was:

To utilise quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches to examine the role of the NHS England Youth Forum members and the strategies being used to influence service provision for children and young people.

In addition, the research team developed the following objectives and key questions in order to refine the focus of the project:

Research Phase II, Stage I objective:

To use Activity Logs to collect quantitative data relating to the activities undertaken by the NHS England Youth Forum members.

Research Phase II, Stage I key questions

- *How many activities are being undertaken by the NHS England Youth Forum members?*
- *How much time is spent undertaking the activities?*
- *What types of activities are being undertaken?*
- *Where are the activities taking place?*
- *How much cost is associated with undertaking the activities?*

Research Phase II, Stage II objective

To undertake qualitative data collection with the NHS England Youth Forum members to gain further insight into their role.

Methods

Information in this report is derived from both quantitative and qualitative data collection that was undertaken in two stages:

- Stage I: Quantitative data collection: Activity Logs that were completed by nine members of the NHS England Youth Forum;
- Stage II: Qualitative data collection: Semi-structured interviews with eight members of the NHS England Youth Forum.

Key findings

Summary of the findings from Research Phase II, Stage I: Activity Logs

Activity Logs were returned by nine (36%) of the twenty-five NHS England Youth Forum members.

- Of the returned Activity Logs, 44% were completed by females and 56% by males. The age range that had the highest representation was the 16-18 years bracket (44%), with just one person being over 25 years of age. There was no evidence of any gender or age differentiation in the activities that were undertaken.
- The participants were from a wide range of areas across England; however, there were no noticeable differences in terms of the type of work that was being undertaken in geographical terms.
- The majority of the participants were in full-time education; all were undertaking activities in their personal time – this would indicate a strong commitment to the roles and responsibilities associated with the NHS England Youth Forum. In addition, most (n = 6) of the participants were involved in other organisations, thus reinforcing this motivation and commitment.
- The NHS England Youth Forum members undertook a vast range of activities, sixty-one were recorded between the nine respondents over the three month time period; activities were undertaken both locally (such as hospital committee membership; local youth forum events; seminars) and nationally (for example, the National Children's Inpatient Survey; NHS Citizen Assembly and national conferences); many of the activities included high profile events as well as consultancy type roles.
- The activities undertaken were done so in a range of locations, but the home environment was the site primarily used - the participants would, for example, engage in social media activities, respond to emails/documents and write papers from their home-base.
- The data obtained indicated that the majority of activities took more than an hour, but less than three hours. Those that took less than 60 minutes all related to email communication and/or telephone calls.
- The funding for the activities was challenging to quantify, but the data collated indicated that the costs were not substantive with the majority of activities incurring no costs at all.

Summary of the findings from Research Phase II, Stage II: Interviews

- Eight members of the NHS England Youth Forum participated in the individual interviews; the findings provided evidence that the young people were not only very capable of being involved in decision-making, but that they were highly motivated and committed to the giving of their personal time and to ensuring that the youth voice was represented and heard. The young people were, undoubtedly, totally central to the NHS England Youth Forum; there was evidence of their personal growth and development and this may have further facilitated the Youth Forum's success and achievements.
- The young people's knowledge of their home community enabled them to network with others (both professional and peers) in their local area and to facilitate the "*ripple effect*" [Tristan, Whiting et al, 2015; 2016). The collaborative approach of the Youth Forum fostered a community spirit enhancing the committed and positive approach of the members.
- The young people recognised that finances were required to support the running of NHS England Youth Forum, but they did not have knowledge of the specific details. It was very clear that their personal expenses were covered and that there was no expectation, or desire, from any participant to be paid for their Youth Forum role.
- NHS England employees were knowledge experts who had experience and insight into the NHS. Without their expertise, the young people may not have developed sufficient knowledge or confidence to undertake the activities that they were involved in.
- The youth workers played a fundamental role in the operationalisation of the NHS England Youth Forum. Not only were they a clear point of contact for the young people, but they communicated with them on a day-to-day basis and organised key events, including the residential weekends.

Youth Forum Wheel

The data collection and analysis led to the development of the Youth Forum Wheel [YFW] – please see below. The YFW depicts the ‘*components of success*’ (all of which were identified by the young people themselves) that have underpinned the positive achievements and overall success of the NHS England Youth Forum. The representation has a circular structure to illustrate the equal value and connectivity that each component has. The model is offered so that it can potentially be applied to the establishment and organisation of youth forums in other arenas.



The Youth Forum Wheel [YFW]

Recommendations

- Funding for the NHS England Youth Forum has been provided by NHS England, it is strongly recommended that funding continues as there is evidence of the very positive work that has been achieved to date; on-going funding will allow the Forum to further develop so that a broad range of children and young people can benefit in the future.
- Clear documentation of the work of the NHS England Youth Forum should be ongoing to provide evidence of the achievements.
- The NHS England Youth Forum is strongly supported by the work of a number of personnel, both those employed by the British Youth Council [BYC] as well as NHS England itself; it is recommended that this continues as it will enable the young people to maintain their role within a secure, comfortable and informative environment.
- The NHS England Youth Forum appears to be a unique and inspirational model that has the potential to be widely and internationally recognised, it is therefore recommended that its work is strategically disseminated to provide insight to others who may wish to draw on a similar approach.
- The YFW has the potential to be applied to the establishment of youth forums; therefore, the development of a youth friendly version would be beneficial.

References

Whiting, L., Roberts, S. & Etchells, J. (2015) *An evaluation of the National Health Service [NHS] England Youth Forum*. University of Hertfordshire: Hatfield. Available from: <http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/handle/2299/15917> Accessed on 28th September 2016

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