

# ‘Show me, don’t tell me’

Mapping organisational  
journeys with the  
Power of Youth Charter

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Commissioned by:



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# Authorship and acknowledgements

This report has been written by Annie Caffyn and Katie Turner, based on research carried out by the authors with members of the IVAR team and 23 Young Assessors:

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# Executive Summary

The [Power of Youth Charter](#) (POYC or the Charter), aims to recognise young people's efforts and give more young people across the UK opportunities to shape their future. By signing up to the Charter, organisations are making a public commitment to empowering children and young people. IVAR worked with UK Youth and Volunteering Matters between July 2022 and November 2024 to map organisations' journeys with the Charter, and to explore how different organisations implement the POYC commitments. This report shares findings to support learning about youth social action in practice – insights are from a wide range of organisations that vary in size, geography, and sector. This report shares tips and principles for enhancing and progressing youth social action.

## Findings summary

### Learning about the Power of Youth Charter commitments

Signing the Charter brings a range of benefits to organisations. This includes being part of a national movement and brand, bringing accountability to their approaches to youth social action, and progressing or reinforcing existing practices and values. The Charter also provides spaces to celebrate, learn and connect. Some organisations, while not actively using the Charter as a tool, are still indirectly applying the commitments in their practice.

Organisations' journeys with the Charter vary significantly, often influenced by their size (team and income), and whether they are a youth-sector organisation. Prioritising young people to take social action (Commitment 1) and recognising and celebrating young people's impact (Commitment 5) are the two commitments that organisations have made most progress with. For example: increasing capacity to allow for more time supporting young people in youth social action, and running awards ceremonies to showcase young people's impact.

Evidencing the benefits of youth social action (Commitment 4) and opening up decision-making structures (Commitment 2) are the elements of youth participation that organisations find most challenging. Challenges for these two areas include: limited time, expertise and staffing capacity to track the benefits of youth social action and demonstrate impact; and the challenge making governance processes more accessible and welcoming for young people. Some also find it difficult to ringfence the time and resource required to support young people to step into youth social action opportunities and youth leadership roles. This is linked to challenges securing funding when some funders are focused on reaching large numbers of young people rather than funding for deep, longer-term engagement with smaller groups.

### Resources and support needs

Organisations shared what support and resources would help their organisation to make further progress with the commitments – this included an 'impact tool' for self-assessment, alongside

examples of good practice and peer learning opportunities. Smaller organisations<sup>1</sup> are more likely to want peer learning opportunities and annual visits from #iwill Ambassadors. Larger organisations<sup>2</sup> are most keen for an impact tool.

Other support needs included funding for their work with young people, and support to collaborate with other local organisations. For example: support to ‘connect the dots’ across the organisation and with local initiatives and social action projects. Many signatories are balancing ambitions for youth leadership alongside limited budgets. Organisations shared concerns about the sustainability of youth leadership development work when they are under-resourced.

## What it takes to meaningfully embed youth social action

Drawing on this research, we suggest four good practice principles for embedding youth social action into organisations.

### Four Principles for POYC signatories putting the commitments into action:

- 1. Youth social action needs to be tailored to your organisation:** there is no blueprint. Signatories showcase the importance of customising youth social action to local needs and practice, and making incremental changes to their approach and strategy.
- 2. Explore the potential for local collaboration and place-based youth social action:** adopting a place-based approach to youth social action can be powerful – pooling resources, collaborating on initiatives for young people, and championing each other’s work and ambitions. Connecting with local organisations provides a network of support around young people and a culture of empowering youth voice. Ringfencing time and resource to build a hub of organisations that champion youth voice can be transformative.
- 3. Promote a culture that believes services are better when you work in partnership with the people you are talking about:** Giving young people a seat at the table is both possible and powerful in non-youth focused organisations. Organisations are moving beyond involving young people in one-off delivery, and into decision-making, strategy and organisational culture. Being genuinely youth-led means that young people are actively steering decisions – it is not performative or tokenistic.
- 4. Don’t underestimate young people’s support needs, and respect limitations:** creating enough structure for youth social action opportunities, but with flex, is a core message. Working with young people requires skills, persistence and trust.

<sup>1</sup> Annual income of under £250,000

<sup>2</sup> Annual income above £250,000

# Introduction

Since 2022, The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) has been working with the #iwill Movement (coordinated in partnership by Volunteering Matters and UK Youth) 3 of the Evidence & Impact Strand of the #iwill movement. The aim of Area 2 has been to map organisational journeys with the [Power of Youth Charter](#) (POYC or the Charter), and to explore how different organisations implement their Power of Youth commitments.

The Power of Youth Charter is an expression of the power young people have to lead positive change. It is a collaborative effort, across the UK, which aims to recognise young people for their efforts, empower more young people to make a difference, and give young people opportunities to shape their future. By signing up to the Charter, organisations are making a public commitment and taking meaningful action to empower more children and young people to be active citizens.

## Power of Youth Charter:

- Prioritise supporting young people to take social action
- Open up our decision-making structures
- Work collaboratively with other organisations
- Evidence the benefits of youth social action
- Recognise and celebrate young people's impact

This report shares learning from IVAR's delivery between July 2022 and November 2024. We outline activities and share findings on the Power of Youth Charter commitments, looking at:

- The role of the Charter
- Areas of progress and challenge
- Organisations' support needs
- Tips for getting started with the Charter

In an accompanying report, we share case studies of six POYC signatories outlining their journey with the Charter and youth social action.

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3 UK Youth Invitation to Tender '#iwill Evidence and Impact Strand'.

## Methods & activities

We used a range of methods and activities to design and deliver the research:

- Inception meetings and scoping interviews with key stakeholders (members of UK Youth, Volunteering Matters, a Charter signatory and an #iwill Ambassador).
- Workshop exploring the POYC commitments with seven #iwill Ambassadors Young Assessors and representatives from five Charter signatories to co-design a set of indicators for assessing progress in the five Charter commitments.
- Recruitment, training and fieldwork with three cohorts of Young Assessors (23 Young Assessors across the three waves) who designed and delivered research with 32 signatory organisations. All Young Assessors were #iwill Ambassadors.
- Online survey of signatories, developed in collaboration with Young Assessors, to gather self-assessment and reflection on progress towards the commitments. We received 52 responses to the survey.
- Case studies with eight Charter signatories about journeys with the Charter commitments and how the Charter fits into their wider organisational strategy. Across the case studies we spoke with 20 staff/volunteers and six young people through interviews and focus groups. The second and third wave of case studies explore place-based youth social action – the second wave in Ipswich, and the third wave in Blackpool.
- In total, we have engaged with 97 POYC signatories (through interviews, workshops and surveys).

This report outlines findings from the above activities, using quantitative data and anonymised quotes to illustrate key points.



# Learning about the Power of Youth Charter commitments

This section explores: the role of the Charter; key themes from organisations' journeys; challenges facing signatories as they put the commitments into action; and current support needs.

Findings are based on data collected by Young Assessors and IVAR through workshops and fieldwork with 37 Charter signatories (see Appendix one for participating organisations), survey responses from 52 signatories and case studies with eight signatories. The sample of organisations provided a range in terms of:

- Sector (voluntary/non-profit, public sector/government and private sector)
- Geography (signatories are spread across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- The degree to which young people are the primary delivery focus or organisational mission (i.e. youth-/non-youth focused organisations)
- Annual income (under £250,000; £250,000–£500,000; £500,000–£1million; over £1million)

## 1. Role of the Charter

Becoming a Charter signatory brings a range of benefits to organisations. In this section, we outline organisations' aspirations for signing the Charter, and the added value it brings to their work.

### 1.1 Motivations for signing the Charter

Out of 52 survey respondents, 34% signed up to the Power of Youth Charter in 2022, 20% signed up in 2021 and 30% signed up in 2020 (16% didn't know the year they signed up or preferred not to say.) Our research so far has surfaced four common motivations for signing the Charter:

#### **Being part of a national movement and brand**

Signatories welcomed the prospect of being 'part of something bigger', regardless of the size of their organisations, and valued the 'solidarity' underpinning the Charter. Being connected to a national movement and brand is an attractive part of the offer and acts as a 'quality mark' for some Charter signatories:

*'Being linked to a national programme, partnering with other organisations and so being a part of a bigger initiative rather than our own individual strategies felt quite important.'* (Charter signatory)

*‘To be known as a reputable and reliable industry for our young people.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘We wanted to show other organisations that involving young people in meaningful decisions is possible and effective.’ (Charter signatory)*

### **Accountability**

Signatories wanted to use the Charter to publicly demonstrate their commitment to young people and ‘meaningful youth engagement’:

*‘We wanted to formalise and externally recognise the commitments the organisation has already made to listening to, and engaging with, young people’. (Charter signatory)*

*‘It felt important to make these public commitments as they do hold you accountable.’ (Charter signatory)*

### **Alignment with organisational strategy and practice**

Organisations feel a sense of ‘shared vision and goals’ and ‘alignment with the ethos behind the charter’:

*‘#iwill is what we do! It’s everything we believe in.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘The commitments almost perfectly matched what we were doing with our projects – the commitment to young people, listening to their voice, putting them at the forefront of the work and helping to make them co-creators.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘We see [the Charter] as a framework that echoes our existing practices and our core DNA as an organisation.’ (Charter signatory)*

### **Progressing internal practice**

The Charter is a way to progress practice with youth engagement and to ‘support young people to have a voice within their community’:

*‘It’s a reminder and nudge to see if there are more opportunities to do social action. It reminds us that young people doing great social action can help influence and inspire others to do more.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘To access new ideas and perspectives, while connecting up with other likeminded organisations to work together to have the greatest impact on embracing and growing the power of youth.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘The Charter has helped us to set a standard on how we work with young people.’ (Charter signatory)*

## **1.2 The role and value of the Charter**

In practice, the Charter appears to meet the above expectations of signatories. We found it adds value through:

- Creating opportunities to celebrate
- Leveraging new funding opportunities
- Connection and inspiration
- Acting as a flexible tool for reflection

## Creating opportunities to celebrate

The Charter provides a shared language and chance to spotlight the contributions young people make:

*‘A way to really celebrate the great work so many young people do in their communities across Northern Ireland.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘We don’t look at [our Charter commitments] every week but it gives us focus every year with #iwill week – that’s a chance to reflect on our work and try to celebrate, promote, and give feedback to the young people on their achievements. It is a nice prompt to stand back and reflect.’ (Charter signatory)*

## Leveraging new funding opportunities

The Charter acts as a quality marker for funding applications, with organisations using it as a way to showcase how the commitments are embedded in their work:

*‘It provides a framework for putting funding bids together or to help us frame reports back to funders – the commitments are a good starting place to think through what we want to achieve with a project and help us reflect on what we have achieved.’ (Charter signatory)*

## Connection and inspiration

For some organisations, the Charter has connected them to a community of like-minded people and organisations:

*‘The Power of Youth Charter commitments are a description of methods or processes of doing youth work and working with young people, which has been very affirming.’ (Charter signatory)*

*‘The Power of Youth Charter has connected us to a community of organisations that face similar struggles and understand our challenges.’ (Charter signatory)*

There is an appetite for building on this through more opportunities to learn and share resources with other signatories.

### **Flexible tool for reflection and learning**

For some, the value of the Charter lies in its flexibility. Organisations can adapt and tailor the commitments for different groups of young people – using them as principles rather than as a concrete set of practices. For example, an organisation which works across multiple schools explained the importance of contextualising the commitments to different school environments, capacities and needs.

Some organisations described how the commitments outlined positive ways of working that they have been practising for years:

*‘All the commitments and principles are transferable – they are not just about young people so take time to reflect and learn from work you might be doing with other groups.’ (Charter signatory)*

Another organisation initially used the Charter to shape their youth-led training. This has now progressed to offering regular residential events that have been led by youth advisers.

Some organisations, while not actively using the Charter as a tool, are still indirectly applying the commitments in their approach. For example, using the commitments to inform their strategy; placing value on being part of a national movement; and showcasing their dedication to youth voice and social action.

## 2. Organisational journeys with the Power of Youth Charter

IVAR and 27 Young Assessors have been researching signatories' journeys with the five commitments. This section shares trends from the Assessors' fieldwork, six case studies (see case studies) and survey findings about progress with the commitments.

### 2.1 Confidence levels across signatories

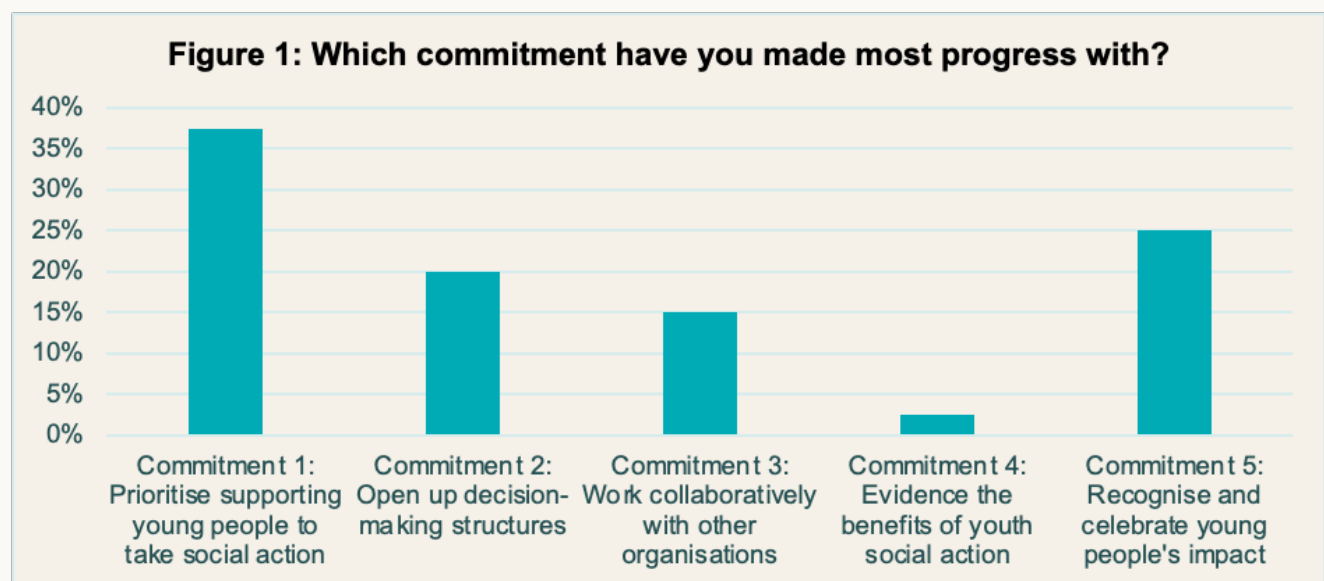
The majority of Charter signatories (82.5%) are confident or very confident in supporting young people to take action in the areas they care about:

- 27.5% of respondents are very confident
- 55% of respondents are confident
- 15% of respondents are somewhat confident
- 2.5% of respondents are neutral
- 0% of respondents are not confident

Organisations with an annual income less than £500,000 were more likely to feel confident (67%) or very confident (33%) in supporting young people to take action than larger organisations (those with an annual income of over £500,000), for whom responses were more mixed (45% confident, 27% very confident).

### 2.2 Progress with commitments

Organisations have made most progress with Commitment 1: Prioritise supporting young people to take social action, followed by Commitment 5: Recognise and celebrate young people's impact (see Figure 1).



This pattern was echoed in conversations with young people during Young Assessor and case study fieldwork:

*'I would describe [organisation] as conscious – they are really trying to become aware of who they're impacting and who they're trying to reach based on what the world is looking like and who is around them. This makes me feel more comfortable and safe in this space.'*

*(Young Assessor)*

*'I also feel equal to the people, it doesn't feel like it is patronising just because I am a young person. There is no divide in that way. I feel very much like I have a valid voice in what I do.'* *(Young person)*



## Examples of progress with Commitment 1: Prioritise supporting young people to take social action

- **Delivery of youth social action (YSA) opportunities:**
  - A mental health ambassador training scheme in partnership with a youth council.
  - Working with young people to create an awareness-raising campaign and magazine on sexual harassment.
  - Supporting young people to produce their own TikTok campaign about violence against women and girls.
  - Setting up a Change Makers Volunteer programme to empower young volunteers to identify the barriers and needs of young people and support them to take action.
- **Consulting young people about their needs and preferences** for engaging in youth social action:
  - *‘Young people working with other young people to get ideas and views on what a Youth Centre could look like’.*
  - A series of internal meetings (including working with an #iwill Ambassador) to discuss how to structure internships and work experience schemes for 2023.
- **Increasing resource/capacity** to allow for more time supporting young people in youth social action.
- **Promoting opportunities for young people to influence policy:** One organisation (a charity that campaigns for affordable and accessible food across the UK) is creating opportunities for young people to campaign, or be involved in media work, around free school meals and engage with members of parliament to shape policy in this field. This includes, for example, meetings with the Department of Education to discuss school food and policies around free school meals.
- **Reviewing the definition of youth social action** to ensure approaches and opportunities for young people remain relevant, meaningful and accessible.
- **Widening engagement:** *‘We’re always mindful that we’re hearing voices but not from all of them’.*
- **Designing resources for other organisations to support young people to take social action:** One organisation developed the [‘Transform Our World’](#) hub initiative for teachers and organisations working to prioritise youth leadership, and set up [‘Dirt is Good’](#) to *‘help young people to see and feel that they’re not alone in caring about social environmental issues’.*

## Examples of progress with Commitment 2: Open up decision-making structures

- **Prioritising youth voice through youth forums, committees and boards:**

- Leading the development of a Young Carers National Voice and supporting young carers to be part of a campaign for young people to be recognised in the Health and Care Act.

Youth led grant-making activities with young people designing funds, e.g. 'Keeping Children and Young People Safe', and sitting on assessment panels for awarding new grants.

- Setting up forums for youth voice and participation. For example, quarterly youth voice participation meetings run and led by young people and attended by local councillors.
- Involving young people in writing a 10-year organisational strategy. This process actively involved around 100 young people across the UK.
- Recruiting young trustees. Nearly 50% of one organisation's board members were previously young volunteers or young participants in projects. Another organisation is going through a process of getting 18– 25-year-olds onto their trustee board.

- **Opening up roles and career opportunities for young people to step into:**

*'We now employ young staff, but we also employ young staff in the more senior roles as well. So, we have got [x], who is our co CEO. He's a young person, he's under 25, and he job shares with [x], who is older, in that most senior position of our organisation. And then we also have board members. We have two chairs of the board and two deputy chairs of the board that job share. Again, each of those pairings, one of them is a younger person under 25 and one of them is a more career experienced person from the sector.'*

- **Sustaining engagement:** *'We've had some brilliant young people join us for the summer school and some of them have actually returned to us as members of our team'.*

- **Making visible changes as a result of young people's work and perspectives:**

*'I actually feel listened to through the programme with 1-1 check ins with the youth engagement officer. Also, I've been presented with opportunities to make lasting change within my community, for example through grant making panels with available funding of over £100k. It's also been a space where I have the freedom to be involved as much or as little as I feel I can be at any given time, without any obligations.'*

**Transparent and open communication with young people:** organisations are making time to feed back about decisions that have been made, especially if the final decision (e.g. about a successful candidate for a new role) was not the young person's shared perspective.

## Examples of progress with Commitment 3: Work collaboratively with other organisations

- **Collaborating with local organisations.** Partnering with local voluntary organisations, statutory partners and young people to create their own version of Children's Services' 'Extra Familial Harm Strategy' – <https://startingpoint.org.uk/uncategorized/the-young-voices-project/>
- **Young Ambassadors from schools in Ipswich are leading the Social Mobility Alliance in Ipswich.** They are collaborating with local schools, health infrastructure organisations and universities to lead and design what the priorities should be.
- **Leading the development of a Young Carers National Voice, working with local MPs and other young carers' services.** Young carers campaigned to be recognised in the Health and Care Act – including speaking at the House of Lords.
- **Working with the National Children's Bureau** to ask whether children felt that learning about loss and bereavement should be included in the curriculum. Through a co-design process, this organisation was able to get young people's voices heard and included in a policy paper recommending change.
- **Partnering with schools and youth organisations** to co-create education projects around food waste and climate change.

## Examples of progress with Commitment 4: Evidence the benefits of youth social action

- **Staying in contact:** Developing processes for staying in touch with young people to hear about their next steps:  
*'It is about having that close relationship with young people we work with so we can follow that story even after they have moved away from Edinburgh and no longer work with us.'*
- **Personal stories from young people to showcase their YSA:** *'Let the young people be your evidence – personal stories are far more interesting and engaging than facts and figures'.*
- **Showcasing young people's impact:** *'We promote the work that we do [youth-led initiatives] across all our social platforms on our website. We talk about it in our annual report'.*

## Examples of progress with Commitment 5: Recognise and celebrate young people's impact

- Awards ceremonies. For example a 'Summer Celebration' event to showcase the different ways Young Ambassadors have provided support and their impact.
- Personalised letters that detail the young person's growth and skill development.
- Celebrating winning awards. One organisation's Youth Panel has been voted into the Shaw Trust Disability Power 100.
- Rewards and recognition. Through prize draws, manager recognition, paid bonuses and gifts.
- Harnessing social media and speaking about young people's achievements on their behalf: *'Recognising the young people's efforts without making them write about it'.*



Adults can make decisions on our behalf without fully understanding the impact. Many decisions they make have a big influence on our future as we grow up, so it is important that our voice is heard! Youth participation matters because it brings young people to the table – giving us a platform to share our ideas, support the work that organisations do and help make decisions that affect us. This way we can have our say and feel like we are being heard.

**Uzi Ahmed,**  
Young assessor for the Power of Youth Charter

**#iwill**  
movement

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**VOLUNTEERING MATTERS**

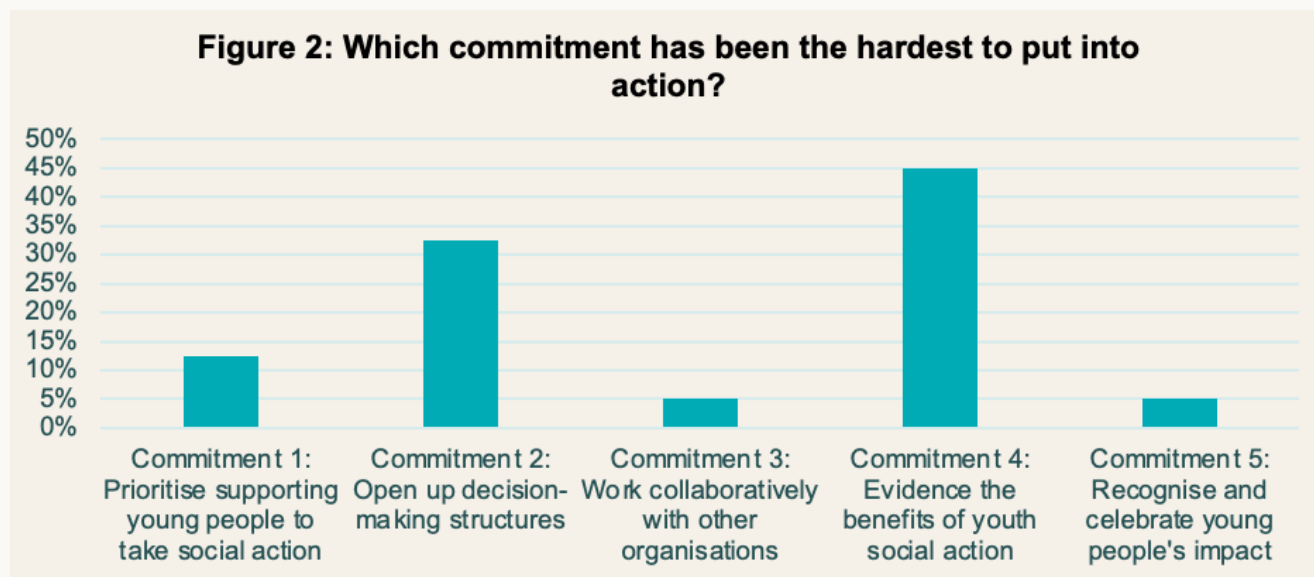
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### 2.3 Commitments where progress has been harder

While there is clear evidence of signatories progressing the commitments, we also heard about challenges. Organisations in the survey said time and internal capacity (40%) and funding (20%) were the main barriers to implementing their Charter commitments. Other barriers included staff turnover (10%) and not enough young people engaging with them (7.5%).

The survey revealed that Charter signatories have made the least progress with Commitment 4: Evidence the benefits of youth social action (45%) and Commitment 2: Open up decision-making structures (30.5%). Below we outline further details on the challenges of progressing the five commitments.



### Commitment 1: Challenges of prioritising support for young people to take social action

Young Assessors' research surfaced two areas of challenge in relation to Commitment 1: ringfencing space and time and finding expertise and allies to draw on.

#### 1. Ringfencing space, resource and time

Ringfencing time to meaningfully support young people to take social action can act as a barrier for organisations. Young Assessors heard from signatories about the hurdle of committing enough time and resources to support young people to step into youth social action opportunities and youth leadership roles:

*'Doing this well requires considerable effort, which requires funding and time. And also, young people lead busy lives, and finding the right balance between their engagements and involvement with the organisation is crucial.'*

One organisation outlined the process they have been through to ensure young people feel supported to share their honest opinions:

*‘When young people and adults are in a space together, it was challenging to make sure that young people felt like they can share what they truly think, and they did not feel like they must adapt to what the adults in the room are saying.’ (Charter signatory)*

To do this effectively, they recognise that it requires significant time and capacity: *‘the payoff is very valuable, but it requires having that knowledge of what needs doing and mindfully investing in that’.*

Young Assessors heard about the financial constraints of meaningfully committing to youth social action, both in terms of engagement and time, but also covering the cost of participation:

*‘It’s expensive to engage deeply with smaller groups of young people over an extended period ... Funders often prefer supporting initiatives that reach a larger number of students rather than investing in more in-depth experiences for a smaller group.’*

## **2. Finding expertise and allies to draw on**

Some signatories face the challenge of finding team members with the necessary skillset and experience to meaningfully support and embed youth social action into their organisation:

*‘We need practitioners with specific skills, such as working with young people with special educational needs or behavioural issues. However, due to budget constraints, it can be tough to hire experienced staff with the necessary qualifications.’*

For other organisations, the challenge lies with wider partners:

*‘One of the major challenges is that the education system doesn’t always value project-based learning and youth social action’.*  
(Charter signatory)

*‘There are no dedicated local youth centres, only community centres, and some are not particularly youth-friendly or accessible. The lack of awareness about the needs of young people with special educational needs poses challenges in providing adequate support initially.’ (Charter signatory)*

## **Commitment 2: Challenges of opening up decision-making structures**

Organisations have found it easier to open up decision-making within projects than organisationally: *‘It’s part of the DNA of doing good youth work – speaking and listening to young people and using their views to develop and guide a project’.*

Challenges of applying this ethos to organisational governance include: an unwillingness to share or relinquish power among some colleagues; uncertainty about how to ensure representation from a diverse range of backgrounds; and the need to make governance processes more accessible and welcoming:

*‘It isn’t as easy as just setting up a youth board or getting a young person or two on your board. To be truly representative of young people from all backgrounds and to constantly reflect the changing nature of society in our governance is hard. Governance can be stuffy, exclusive and in a different language. So, the key is how to shift culture to make things young people friendly and a place that they will get something out of.’ (Charter signatory)*

One organisation working to diversify the membership of their advisory groups and involve more young people has found outreach and partnership working is key:

*‘We pledge to continue to deepen our efforts to ensure our widening-access internship in particular is truly accessible and promoted to people from backgrounds who are often less able to obtain vital opportunities like this to kickstart their careers.’ (Charter signatory)*

One infrastructure organisation faces a challenge unique to organisations working indirectly with young people:

*‘Third parties have not always been sticking to the principles behind the Charter like ensuring young people are involved in the decision-making process.’ (Charter signatory)*

This organisation is a non-youth focused organisation championing youth social action, but it struggles to open up decision-making structures at all levels of the organisation:

*‘[The organisation] would love young people to make all the decisions, but they have struggled due to time, resources, ensuring the engagement is meaningful, and being able to have a good partnership between paid staff and young people. To overcome this, they have looked at how to ensure youth voice is within all purposeful decisions and think about what will we and the young people gain from making this decision.’ (Young Assessor)*

### **Commitment 3: Challenges of working collaboratively with other organisations**

Survey respondents rated this as one of the commitments with fewer challenges associated with it. However, some organisations shared experiences of competition between organisations for funding and a *‘protective mindset’* that can hinder sharing and pooling of resources and approaches.

Others mentioned a disconnect between partners and their own unwillingness to compromise on their values in order to collaborate:

*‘It is important to not just involve young people but also ensure that any collaboration aligns genuinely with the organisation’s values. There have been some challenges in situations where organisations and funders do not prioritize the well-being or interests of young people.’*

#### Commitment 4: Challenges of evidencing the benefits of youth social action

The Young Assessor research uncovered three reasons why organisations find Commitment 4 hard to implement:

- Limited time, resource, expertise and staffing capacity to track the benefits of youth social action and demonstrate impact.
- Lack of ‘*direct access*’ to data for evidencing impact, for example, the impact of a campaign, or change over time in the lives of young people.
- Lack of funding for research/monitoring. ‘*Our main challenge is having the capacity to be able to interpret and evaluate the information and data*’.

There was significant variation between types of organisation when it came to the challenges of evidencing the benefits. 78% of non-youth focused organisations struggled to action this commitment compared to 35.5% of youth focused organisations.

#### Commitment 5: Challenges of celebrating young people’s impact

Carving out time to step back and celebrate young people’s impact is an ongoing challenge, particularly for smaller organisations:

*‘We know they are having an impact, but we need to create the time to step back, record the impact and celebrate the young people.’*  
(Charter signatory)

Another signatory – an organisation with an annual income of under £500,000 – echoed this challenge as a small team with limited resources and capacity:

*‘We are very good at being present for young people, good at linking them in with opportunities that will benefit them but celebrating them is slightly different, and we haven’t absolutely hit the mark due to capacity.’* (Charter signatory)

### 3. Resources and support needs

Throughout interviews, workshops and the survey, we asked POYC signatories what support and resources would help their organisation make further progress with the commitments.

In response to what support would make the greatest difference to progressing the five commitments:

- 41% of survey respondents want an 'impact tool' for self-assessment
- 20% want examples of good practice
- 15% want peer learning opportunities
- 13% want annual visits from trained #iwill Ambassadors for sounding board conversations and advice.<sup>4</sup>

There was not a great deal of difference between youth and non-youth focused organisations or sectors in terms of support needs.<sup>5</sup> However, there was some variation based on organisational income:

- Smaller organisations (annual income of under £250,000) are more likely to want peer learning opportunities (38%) and annual visits from #iwill Ambassadors (38%).<sup>6</sup>
- Larger organisations (annual income above £250,000) were most keen for an impact tool (55% of organisations with an annual income over £250,000 selected an impact tool, compared to 12.5% of organisations with an annual income under £250,000).

Other support needs included funding and financial assistance to help support their work with young people and support to collaborate with other local organisations. Many signatories are balancing ambitions for youth leadership alongside limited budgets. Organisations shared concerns about the sustainability of youth leadership development work when they are under-resourced to hire a venue, cover transport costs or compensate for staff time:

*'We are proactively trying to have younger people on our governing bodies but it can be challenging as a member of staff needs to accompany them to the meeting and support them to feel empowered to contribute. Within the current context of tight school budgets, this can squeeze already stretched staff and needs to be balanced with our existing commitments as a mainstream education provider.'* (Charter signatory)

<sup>4</sup> 11% were unsure about best support needs.

<sup>5</sup> There was a slight difference in appetite for sharing examples of good practice: 16% of youth focused organisations would like to see examples of practice, compared to 33% of non-youth focused organisations.

<sup>6</sup> The figure for larger organisations was 7% interested in peer learning and 7% interested in annual visits from ambassadors.

There isn't a magic bullet to overcome these constraints. Organisations recognised the value of passionate people, determined to champion young people, who help to ease the challenge by going above and beyond. However, this needs to be handled with care to avoid overwhelm and burnout.

Throughout the Young Assessors' research, additional areas of support needs were surfaced:

- **Opportunities to signpost young people to #iwill campaigns and initiatives:** to give a bigger platform to young people's actions, and to learn and feel connected to a national movement:

*'Our young people are really fantastic activists that are looking for opportunities to make a difference. I want to hear more about what #iwill does and how we can link in with it more explicitly.'*

*(Charter signatory)*

- **Support setting up youth social action opportunities:** For many non-youth focused organisations, there is an appetite to access support and information about working with young people. For example, best practice around safeguarding and advice around payment for advisory work.
- **Support connecting the dots:** Some organisations that are further along in their journeys with youth social action would value support to *'connect the dots across our organisation'* and *'link young people's social action projects together'*.



# A guide to the Power of Youth Charter: a resource for young people to use to hold organisations to account

*By Beth Denis, Young Assessor and #iwill Ambassador*

Through the Charter, #iwill aims to inspire and support young people to make a positive impact on their community as well as shape a better future.

## **What happens if my organisation signs the Charter?**

Your organisation is stating that they believe all children and young people should be empowered to make a positive difference on the issues that affect their lives, communities and broader society. Therefore, they will adopt the Charter, committing to growing the Power of Youth. We want the Charter to have a domino effect across society. #iwill does not currently hold organisations accountable for their commitment but signing the Charter should not be tokenistic. We expect meaningful and positive change because this will drive a better today as well as tomorrow.

## **What will your organisation do?**

Alongside signing the POYC, your organisation should write a road map on how they are going to meet these commitments. The commitments should be expanded upon to make them specific to your organisation. For example, a group of young people who represent the population your organisation is serving could write their own charter to work alongside the POYC.

## **Ideas of commitments your organisation could make:**

- Implementing youth quotas, e.g. 20% of the board should be young people under the age of 25.
- For every key decision-making role, there should also be a youth representative, e.g. trustee and youth trustee, chair of the board and youth chair of the board, and secretary and youth secretary.
- Young people are allowed to have an equal vote in decisions alongside the 'key decision makers'.
- The creation of a meaningful youth board that is not seen as an advisory role but is treated with equity alongside the 'main' board.
- Creating a youth engagement officer post so that young people receive the right support to engage in decision-making.

## How can I hold my organisation accountable for their commitments?

- Your voice matters. Professional phrases to help challenge or hold someone accountable:
  - Have you considered ...
  - I understand your perspective but have you considered ...
  - This might be true but I have evidence to suggest ...
  - I am curious why you made that decision?
  - Have you meaningfully engaged with the community affected?
  - Have you involved experts by experience?
- Think about questions like:
  - What issues do you want to hold them accountable for?
  - What is currently working well within your organisation?
  - What is your organisation currently doing to support young people?
  - Where would you like to see change?
  - When signing the Charter could you create a timeline and deadlines on how you are going to meet the commitments? For example, clear shared action logs and signed agreements with specific people or teams who are accountable can help to hold people to account.

### Volunteering Matters POYC example:

[Power of Youth Charter – Volunteering Matters](#) – Volunteering matters provides a good example of their commitments to the POYC:

- Publishing their commitments online supports making their Charter accessible to all so we all can see their commitments, the commitments are easily accessible so that everyone can clearly follow the Charter and anyone from their workforce or community can hold them accountable.
- Volunteering Matters clearly outlines why young people should be involved. It is important to understand your 'why'.
- For each commitment within the Charter, they have written what we are doing and our ambitions are to ... This helps to celebrate the work they are already doing as well as challenge themselves to strive to make more of an impact.

Check out Principle who take a similar approach:

[Principle Consulting signs #iwill Power of Youth Charter – Principle](#)

# What it takes to meaningfully embed youth social action

Since 2022, IVAR and Young Assessors have gathered a wealth of data on what it takes to put the POYC commitments into practice, and to meaningfully champion and embed youth social action into organisations' approaches and cultures.

There have been four recurring themes across this work which we explore in this section as emerging principles. These principles mirror long-standing, perennial challenges across the youth sector, such as the importance of tailoring support needs and the need for more long-term funding for youth social action programmes.

## Four Principles for POYC signatories putting the commitments into action:

1. Youth social action needs to be tailored to your organisation
2. Explore the potential for local collaboration and place-based youth social action
3. Promote a culture that believes services are better when you work in partnership with the people you are talking about
4. Don't underestimate young people's support needs, and respect limitations

Examples of how these principles have been put into practice can be found in the detailed case studies.

## 1. Youth social action needs to be tailored to your organisation – there is no blueprint!

There is clearly no one-size-fits-all for youth social action and practising the POYC commitments, especially in terms of the approach to supporting and creating opportunities for young people. Signatories showcase the importance of customising youth social action to local needs and practice:

*'Social action has to be unique, it has to be tailored.'*

*‘Know your community and your school, and contextualise the commitments.’*

Signatories that have made incremental changes to their approach and strategy – providing a range of opportunities, listening and acting on young people’s perspectives – have been able to authentically champion young people. Signatories stressed the importance of integrating quick, enjoyable projects alongside more long-term ones.

Look at what you’re already doing. See where you can build and grow opportunities for young people, and don’t be intimidated by some of the language around youth social action – you could be doing it already.

## **2. Explore the potential for local collaboration and place-based youth social action**

Throughout this research, we have seen how powerful it can be for signatories to adopt a place-based approach to youth social action – pooling resources, collaborating on initiatives for young people, and championing each other’s work and ambitions.

*‘We believe that working together with organisations that are based in [region] and even hyper local areas, will have better impacts for children, young people living in that part of [region], because they’ve got the knowledge and the intelligence on the ground and the relationships with communities, with young people.’*

A collaborative spirit can be crucial for organisations committing to youth social action. For many signatories, progress with the commitments and their journey with youth social action has been characterised by opportunism and connections with local partners.

Connecting with local organisations provides a network of support around young people, and a local culture of empowering youth voice. Ringfencing time and resource to build a hub of organisations championing youth voice can be transformative<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Further examples of place-based youth social action can be found in the Ipswich case studies.

### 3. Promote a culture that believes services are better when you work in partnership with the people you are talking about

For organisations embedded within the youth sector, the five commitments are often part of their DNA and organisational culture. However, Young Assessors and IVAR saw that this is possible outside of the youth sector. Giving young people a seat at the table is both possible and powerful in non-youth focused organisations.

We heard from non-youth sector signatories about how they are promoting a culture that actively seeks to platform young people's voices. This moves beyond involving young people in one-off delivery, and into decision-making, strategy and organisational culture.

Signatories also emphasised the importance of following up after opening up decision-making structures, and providing updates on progress and changes that have resulted from their involvement:

*'If you ask children what they think and then don't act on it, you do more damage than if you never asked in the first place.'*

*'It's not just about the learners feeding back about what's good and not about the college but also thinking how they can engage in an activity themselves to improve their opportunity.'*

Being genuinely youth-led means that young people are actively steering – it is not performative or tokenistic.

## 4. Don't underestimate young people's support needs, and respect limitations

Creating enough structure for youth social action opportunities, but with flex, is a core message from this research:

*'If you want to take primary school children outside of their comfort zone and into youth leadership and activist roles, you have to build trust and tailor support for them. They need structure in place to understand the decisions they're contributing to and develop the skills and confidence they need to participate. Sometimes we can throw people in the deep end without any structure in place and it can put young people off.'*

Working with young people requires skills, persistence and trust. In order to meaningfully embed youth social action, organisations need to maintain a level of flexibility and ensure young people and their needs remain at the heart of their projects.



# Messages from Young Assessors

*What can organisations do to get started with youth social action?*



**Martim Baptista**

'The first step to promoting Youth Social Action is to truly listen, with an open mind, to the perspectives of young people. It costs nothing but will have a huge difference in giving both confidence and opportunity to young people.'



**Beth Dennis**

'My top tip for starting youth social action would be starting to form an engagement group that represents the community you are serving. Ensure a diverse range of viewpoints are within the group and all voices are actively listened to and represented. So often specific groups of young people are left out. If you want the project to meet the community's needs, then the group must represent everyone within the community.'

'If the organisation affects or is for young people, then young people should be empowered to be meaningfully part of the decision making process. We want to see young people at every level of the decision making process. We want to bridge the gap between senior leadership teams/decision makers and young people.'



**Aynur Balkas**

'Organisations are working with schools to empower young people, enabling them to take social action and drive positive change.'



### **Eddie Rose**

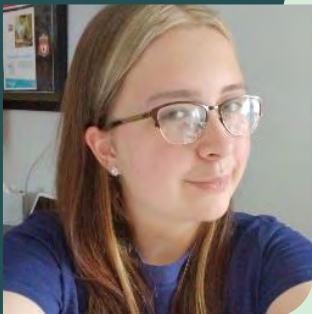
‘The first thing organisations can do is to start a conversation with young people involved in their work! Listen to young people about what can be done and what they want to do, and act on their recommendations. It’s important to feed back to the young people involved in the conversation, so they know their voice was listened to.’

‘Organisations are doing so many different things to empower young people, which is so exciting to see! There is such a range of activities that young people take part in, from youth takeovers to co-producing projects. This is where young people are involved in every step of a project, from the beginning and the project design all the way through to delivery and evaluation. Most importantly, organisations are empowering young people by listening to their voices and acting on their recommendations. This ensures that youth voice is meaningful instead of tokenistic, and this is what really makes a difference.’



### **Milana Bout**

‘Be motivated and invested in making your organisation be all about youth social action! Your organisational focus might be far from youth social action but by signing up to the power of youth charter, you can get that perspective and tool that will show you how to start and continue improving your implementation of youth social action practices into your work, purpose and goals. This is not a challenge but rather an opportunity to give your organisation a new inspirational energy and charge.’



### **Kaila Patterson**

‘Organisations are creating safe spaces for young people to express their individuality and confidently share their views on the issues they are passionate about.’

# Appendix one: List of participating organisations

Active Blackpool	Ormiston Trust
Aik Saath – Together As One	Projects4Change
ASSET Education	Solent NHS
Be Who You Want To Be (initiative)	Spirit of 2012
Blackpool Football Club Community Trust	Sporting Communities
British Red Cross	Street Games
Brook	Suffolk New College
Bytes	The Felix Project
Canal River Trust	The Larder West Lothian
County in the Community	The Miracle Foundation Scio
Creative Youth Network	The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
Digital Advantage	The Streetlife Trust
Dorset County Hospital	The Wood Foundation
Dumfries and Galloway Council's Youth Work Service	Unicef
Earkick	United Youth Alliance
EFL Trust	Volunteer Now
Global Action Plan	Votes for Schools
Imani Academy & Co	West End Women and Girls
Ipswich Central	Young Manchester
John Muir Trust	Youth Action Northern Ireland
MAD Swansea	YouthLink Scotland
Magic Club	
No. 5 Young People	