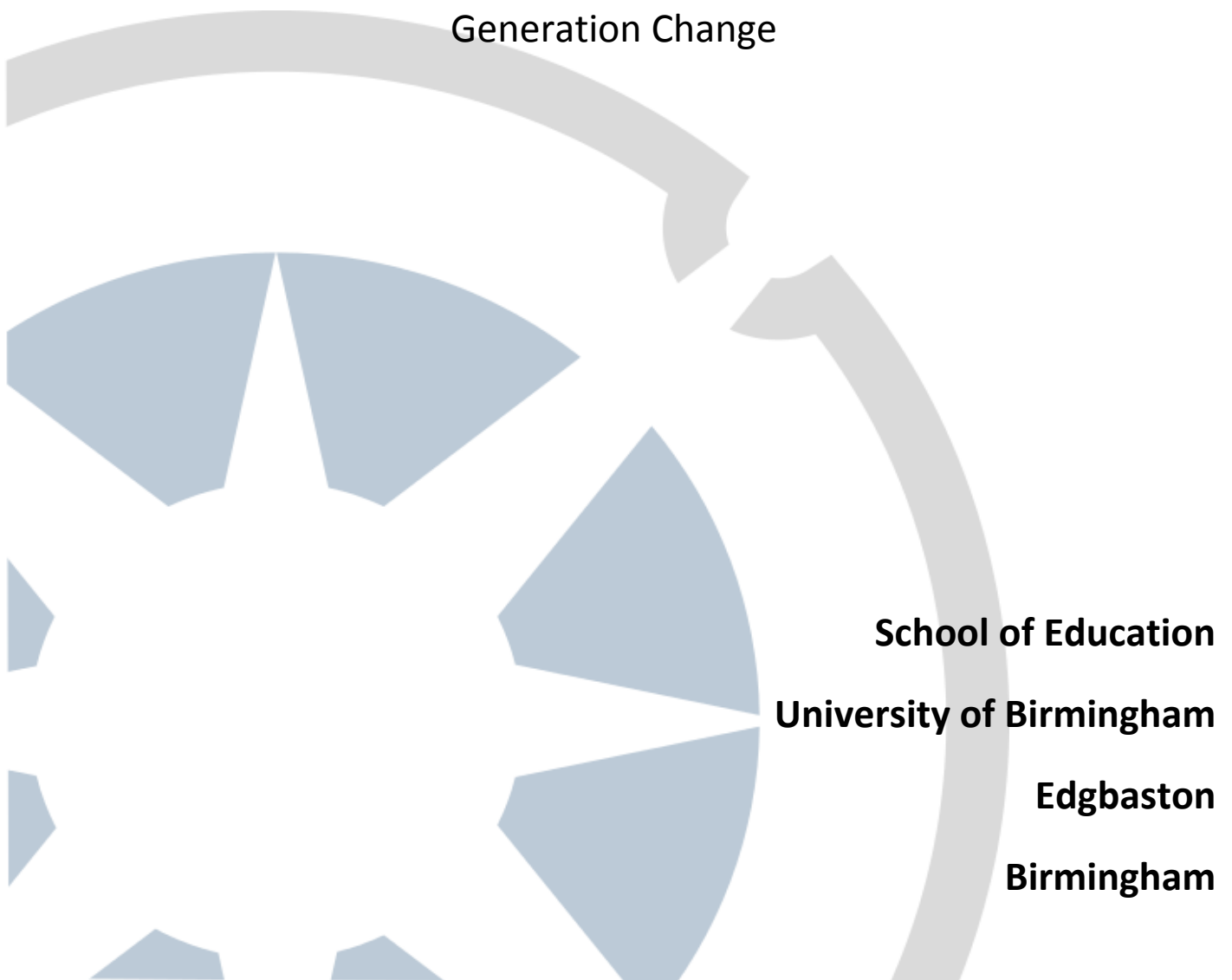




THE
JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VALUES

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Character Education: The role of Youth Social Action Organisations (YSAOs)



Character Education: The role of Youth Social Action Organisations (YSAOs)

Executive Summary:

- Teaching character and an experience of citizenship is important for educating young people to be able to participate in society to the fullest. Youth social action organisations are set up to build the character and skills of young people by giving them opportunities to solve social problems in their communities. They have a key part to play in character education in schools.
- High quality character education in schools requires five strengths: *Prioritisation* of this aspect of education, positive *Relationships*, strategies to encourage the *Internalisation* of values, *Modelling* of the qualities we want to educate, and support for the *Empowerment* of young people.
- Schools struggle with each of these five strengths due to a lack of capacity, focus on other priorities, the academic focus and skillset of teachers, and the necessary limitations set by creating a controlled learning environment.
- Youth social action organisations (YSAOs) on the other hand have advantages over schools in each of these areas, and through collaborating with schools can help to transform character education into an exciting opportunity, rather than an added pressure on the curriculum.

As a priority we recommend that:

1. All schools nominate a member of school leadership to take responsibility for character education and relationships with the YSAO sector.
2. This leadership member should chair a small advisory group on character education including 4-6 YSAO groups. This group can help to build a curriculum of activity that builds character and fits within the school's priorities and draws on the knowledge and expertise of the YSAOs.

What are Youth Social Action Organisations and why are they relevant to Character Education?

Youth Social Action Organisations (YSAOs) are youth charities focused on delivering a *double impact* of working with young people. This double impact is made from

1. Developing young people by building the skills and character that they need to help build and sustain the good society
2. Acting with young people to strengthen and (where necessary) drive change in society.

YSAOs are relevant to Character Education for three reasons. Firstly Character Education is key to their work; – it is the first part of the double impact: “*Developing young people by building the ... character that they need to help build and sustain the good society*”. Secondly, YSAOs have unique advantages which enable them to deliver on the Character Education agenda alongside schools. Thirdly, YSAOs are also going through a period of growth in the UK (as shown in the number of new fast-growing organisations identified in the case studies in this paper).

What challenges do schools face in delivering Character Education?

Research shows that most teachers see their role being in some way responsible for the character and personal growth of their pupils.¹ But understanding of the role of character and citizenship teaching in schools is limited, and the area has not received the level of recognition that it has in other countries. The United States Department of Education for example have expanded support for character education for more than a decade, whereas PSHE is still not a subject that has compulsory curriculum time in UK secondary schools.

There are three common areas that recur in analysis of why character education is challenging for certain schools:

1. *Lack of agreed framework*

There has been repeated discussion on the difficulty of defining what outcomes or approaches are required to deliver character education. Schools struggle to focus and deliver on the task without a clear description of the end-goal, required pedagogy or existing curricula.

2. *Lack of recognition*

As the Jubilee Centre and Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) have noted, character and citizenship education is frequently not recognised by schools as important and worthy of discrete curriculum hours. A lack of recognition of citizenship and character by businesses and government means that a picture can be presented of this education being less ‘useful’ to students coming out of school.

This is a missed opportunity. Youth social action organisations – most notably the National Citizen Service – have made their case for funding through impact monitoring to show that they have had a beneficial impact on young people’s skills and character. The growth of the sector shows there is clear interest to invest in these areas of education when a narrative about its impact can be presented.

3. *Lack of priority*

Building on points 1 and 2, a lack of consensus around a set of principles, and a lack of recognition of outcomes means that across secondary education, and within schools individually, there is often stifled interest for committing resources to character education. The Association for Citizenship Teaching detail how schools that commit resources to teaching citizenship and character achieve better results than those that only integrate it into other school time, like in form groups. Likewise, evidence presented in reports by character education researchers at the Birmingham School of Education shows that once a ‘critical mass’ of character education in schools has been achieved, the beneficial outcomes become more tangible. This can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of less committed schools not seeing tangible results. There are many priorities that a school might have that focusing on citizenship and character can help achieve, but quite often this falls just outside of the central priorities of a school.

¹ “*Character Formation in Schools and the Education of Teachers*”, Professor James Arthur and Dr. Lynn Revell, Canterbury Christ Church University College in partnership with The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation – pg 13 - 14

How can YSAOs help?

Youth social action organisations have clear organisational advantages for assisting schools in addressing these problems. Professor Marvin W. Berkowitz, University of Birmingham has shown that successful character education requires a focus on five PRIME principles:²

- **Prioritisation:**
“Schools [must] prioritise Character Education beyond their mission statement following it through administratively, with rhetoric, with resources and time allocation.”
- **Relationships:**
“Teachers need to intentionally nurture positive relationships between the teacher and each student as well as between all students. Peer interactive strategies is one way of accomplishing this. Group project based learning, peer-tutoring and mentoring are also relationship building strategies.”
- **Internalisation:**
“The ultimate goal is for students to internalise values and virtues as motivating factors in their behaviour. Yet educators seem seduced by the lure of giving extrinsic rewards as a means, often the primary means of getting students to embrace an internalise core values.”
- **Modelling:**
“Educating for character has to be about experiencing and witnessing character and not merely learning about character. To paraphrase Gandhi, educators have to be the character they want to see in their students (...) Of course, it again falls on the shoulders of school leaders to increase the positive modelling of staff in a school. This includes promoting it, monitoring it, nurturing it through training and feedback and counselling, and selecting for it.”
- **Empowerment:**
“The pedagogy of empowerment centres around making schools closer to democracies; educators need to create classroom structures that empower student voice and support autonomy. If we want students to evolve into responsible, participating citizens, they must experience the potential power of their voices and actions in public life”

In each of these areas, schools face challenges, whilst YSAOs are well placed to help:

² “Educating for a Just and Caring Democratic Society: Foundations of Effective School Reform”, Marvin W. Berkowitz, The Jubilee Centre, inaugural conference papers (Friday 14th December 2012)

1. Prioritisation:

As was discussed in the challenges section, it has been recognised that for character and citizenship education to be successful, schools need to commit teaching resources and prioritise its importance. Without prioritising character teaching as a method of achieving a school's mission for its pupils, this essential area of education will be difficult to achieve and sustain.

Youth social action organisations often assist this prioritising process in three key ways:

- **Focus:** For YSAOs, character education is a top priority. For these organisations, being able to monitor and demonstrate that they develop character is their reason for existing, and as such they have the best impact-measurements to track this change. This enables a clear focus on character education that a school – with its dual focus on educational attainment – cannot achieve alone.
- **Energy:** YSAO staff bring an energy and passion to character education due to the internal culture of YSAO's and their relentless focus on its importance. This in turn impacts the passion and interest of staff, governors and students in character education. Impact reports consistently show high levels of recommendation by school staff for youth social action providers.
- **Demonstration:** YSAOs can show how a school's mission statement to develop character can be delivered on the ground. This demonstration enables school leaderships to demonstrate the benefits to staff and governors making further activity easier.

Case study: Future Foundations



Future Foundations (FF) is an education training organisation working with over 5000 young people aged 9 to 19 every year. Our mission is to develop the academic and social leadership potential of young people with coaching, mentoring and training programmes. We believe young people are the solution to many of the challenges faced by society today and we need to challenge young people to create their own future. FF programmes focus on developing character by prioritising the following themes that we believe are important for success in life:

- Taking personal responsibility – for your future and your impact on others
- Knowing yourself – develop your self-awareness
- Being yourself – be who you are and the best you can be
- Finding your talents – follow your passions
- Serving others – by supporting each other, everybody benefits

To do this, we deliver a wide range of activities, group reflections and team challenges which are often brought to life by challenging young people to work in teams to do social action projects. By working in a team, exploring each others' talents, skills, interests and contribution, they learn more about themselves and each other. By then being challenged to design and deliver a social action project this further tests their character, and resilience.

Our programmes are led by trained coaches and mentors who help the young people to reflect on their experience, how they worked as individuals and as a team, and how they can contribute further to reach their potential whilst also enabling others to do so. Most of our programmes are delivered off-site in inspiring venues, delivered by staff from a wide range of backgrounds who are all focused on helping young people develop their social leadership potential. The FF Network includes over 200 experts including teachers, trainers, coaches, peer-mentors, youth workers and tutors who together deliver our programmes.

FF are leaders in developing models for solving challenging issues for young people. To do this, we focus on:-

- Creativity – developing creative solutions and nurturing young people’s creativity
- Collaboration – working with experts, and playing to partner organisation strengths
- Change – measuring our impact and ensuring we make a difference

We have significant experience in developing young people’s aspirations, attainment, and future employability in schools. We have worked with 600 students from 100 schools across 9 cities to deliver the government’s flagship youth programme, National Citizen Service. In 2012 FF developed a new model of Work Related Learning to prepare young people for the future world of work, funded by NESTA, delivered across schools in London. And we have worked directly with the Cabinet Office to deliver the Government’s National Citizen Service Leaders Programme for 100 graduates of NCS, selected from 25,000 participants.

2. Relationships:

Establishing positive nurturing relationships is something that all schools are obliged to do through their responsibility to the children they teach – but ‘relationships’ in this context has a different focus to pastoral care. Character education thrives where schools build relationships between peers, and by peers towards adults – not just in terms of encouraging receptivity to learning, but in terms of making bonds that form the basis of empathy. This can require focus outside of the primary task of teaching pupils, in a way that can be difficult to combine with the relationships needed for managing a class.

Youth social action organisations bring a number of advantages to this area;

- Separation: social action organisers in schools are not required to manage classroom performance, and are often closer to peer-level with students. In addition to this, peer-to-peer learning activities, team-building and mentorship is integral to many YSAOs who work with young people.
- Focus: YSAOs recruit, train and monitor young people on the basis of their mentoring skills and ability to form relationships. In many social action roles, this is the main role of social action that young people and adults supporting them take part in.
- Capacity: YSAOs can bring a huge amount of organisational focus solely into developing positive relationships for empathetic.

Case Study: BB Group

The logo for The BB Group, featuring the text 'The BB Group' in white on a dark blue speech bubble background.

The BB Group uses relationships to inspire social action and improve wellbeing. Their programmes are based around the power of positive relationships – they build communities of support to solve specific social problems, connecting people in need with those who can help. And at the heart of all programmes is peer mentoring: they train, support and empower young people to help each other to overcome their problems, which is beneficial to both mentor and mentee. Our

three core programmes are BeatBullying (beatbullying.org), an international bullying prevention charity working and campaigning to make bullying unacceptable, MindFull (mindfull.org), a national charity helping young people to improve and sustain positive mental health, emotional resilience and wellbeing and FutureYou (thefutureyou.org.uk), a national programme enabling young people to overcome the barriers they face in accessing and succeeding in education, employment and training.

Our programmes train young people in schools, colleges and communities, to become mentors, giving them the knowledge and tools they need to tackle and prevent various social issues. They then support and mentor other children and young people, in schools/colleges and online to ensure they

Generation Change

are safe, and get the peer-to-peer support they need. Adult mentors, specialist advisors and qualified counsellors are on hand to provide expert advice and counselling support, online in real-time (via live chat and instant messaging functionality).

Through our experience of providing online mentoring, 72% of young people explicitly report an improvement in wellbeing, 95% of mentors report an increase in confidence, 56% of mentors report an increase in empathy, and 48% of mentors report an increase in self-esteem. Our peer mentoring model is also beneficial to the wider school community. For example, following implementation of our BeatBullying programme, 91% of teachers indicated a more positive involvement in school life for their pupils, nearly three-quarters (73%) of schools embedding the programme report a reduction in the levels of Incidents of Concern (IoCs), 27% of schools indicate a reduction in the levels of pupil absence.

3 Internalisation:

Character education can be a fruitless, or even negative, endeavour if young people are expected to adopt a set of prescribed behaviours rewarded by institutions. Because character is a description of highly personal qualities, rather than simply a field of knowledge or list of competencies, its development through education centres on the intrinsic factors that form a young individual's identity. It can be difficult to make young people feel that their school education is authentic in terms of their own identity and motivations. Indeed part of the challenge for schools to truly embrace character education lies in the odd proposition of making intangible areas of "personal growth" compulsory. The act of providing external rewards for behaviour that accords with character objectives risks failing to build up a long-term picture of young people as autonomous citizens, and may demean adolescents' experiences of growing up into responsible adults.

There are areas in which YSAOs are better placed to encourage the internalisation of character education for young people than their school.

- Objective: Social action organisations start with a need for social change. Supporting students to consider their ability to affect social problems is a powerful pathway to engaging their own altruistic interests and motivations.
- Voluntary: YSAOs ask young people to choose to take part, whereas classrooms punish children for not engaging. We might say that intrinsic learning is synonymous with volunteering, but actually paradoxical to classroom education.

Case-study: The Challenge Network



The Challenge Network is the largest provider of the National Citizen Service, which inspires thousands of 16-17 year olds to connect across boundaries and work in their communities.

In areas where The Challenge Network operates, around 10-15% of all 16 year olds take part in a two-month long National Citizen Service - with the majority of these young people hearing about the programme through a presentation at school. Beyond the skills and character gained - there is no financial and material reward for completing the programme. However, the programme achieves very high rates of retention and marked increases in young people's empathy and trust of others in their community. 95% of schools felt their pupils benefited greatly from the experience – and parents cited **confidence boosting, character building and developing strong and on-going friendships** as the main benefits for their children who took part in The Challenge.

The key to this success is friendship. Rather than being told that they should empathise or care for people who are different from them, the programme helps them form friendships across these lines of

difference. These friendships then change the way they think about other people and internalises this change. This is achieved through three key approaches:

1. Consistent Relationship: The young people are placed in small teams of twelve which are made up of young people from different ethnic backgrounds and income brackets. They work with the same group throughout the programme and spend 90% of their time with this group.

2. Intense Activity: The young people have a clear challenge to achieve during each day of the programme. To complete these challenges requires the team work together intensely over a protracted period of time. Days are spent climbing mountains, preparing and running events, building a business plan. This forges a sense of shared identity.

3. Reflection: Every day allows space for reflection on the day's activity to provide space for young people to underline and own the change in their values.

Giving students the chance to give back to their communities, to campaign, fundraise, work on team projects, voluntarily – even if there are obvious external motivators to make young people want to do these things – should always involve the intrinsic development of personal qualities shaping the way young people see the world. Moreover, it is a vital part of the impact that youth social action organisations measure in order to justify their existence.

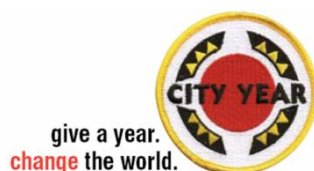
4 Modelling:

Educating for character has experiential elements that require it to be role-modelled and witnessed, rather than only explained or discussed. Setting an example is integral to all teaching, and students often recall their best teachers as role models in later life. However, there are some ways that it is difficult for teachers to undertake modelling character as a structured exercise. Firstly, it is not their focus in the classroom, and modelling is often used as a means to achieving learning objectives. Secondly, teachers must necessarily maintain a professional distance from young people in their role, which can be a barrier for young people to relate to and experience their teacher's character.

In contrast, YSAOs have a lot of advantages in affecting young people's receptivity to role modelling of character:

- Near-peer: Youth social action gives young people a chance to spend time with people who are close to being their peers, but who are slightly more confident and experienced. Modelling by near-peers is an effective method of getting young people to relate to positive behaviours and qualities
- Altruistic: YSAOs bring young people into contact with people focused on creating social good, which can be a powerful model to set. Whilst many teachers will obviously be inspiring in terms of their commitment to young people, social good is written into why YSAOs exist.
- Appeal: YSAOs are built to appeal to young people in a way that school cannot be. .

Case Study: City Year



City Year is London's leading youth and education charity that recruits passionate 18-25 year olds to spend a year on their Corps Member programme. Corps Members serve in schools in deprived communities, acting as tutors, mentors, and role models. City Year aims to tackle two of the biggest social welfare issues in the UK: educational under-attainment and youth unemployment.

Generation Change

Positive character modelling is an essential part of what City Year corps members do in school. Corps member's model positive behaviour through interactions with their team mates, teachers and the children themselves. Corps members are conscious to the fact, that the children they support every day, not only witness their interactions, but impersonate them too. This attitude to always modelling positive character behaviour, is not limited to school premises, its replicated again when corps members are out in the community. So, the same set of children witness their corps members act appropriately in school and out of school.

Corps members are best equipped to carry out modelling character behaviour, because of their near peer relationship to students. Corps members are not seen as authoritative figures within the school environment, but rather on a similar level to an older brother or sister, someone they can relate to. This allows them to build a high level of rapport and trust with students. Through this and the consistencies of being present in school every day, permits corps members to help nurture positive behaviour in their children, through coaching and mentoring, both in the classroom and the playground.

Before corps members start their service in schools, corps members are put through a two week intensive training programme that introduces them to City Year culture. Instilled within this culture is modelling positive behaviour. Within the programme, they are undertake training in Modelling Positive Behaviour for Young People and Children, and Philosophy for Children. Both sessions equip corps members with the ability to understand the barriers of working with children and young people, but most importantly, solutions for overcoming them, to create an everlasting positive change in children.

5 Empowerment

The central purpose of educating for character has repeatedly been described as being to empower individuals to participate in society. As an example, ACT sets out citizenship teaching that includes days where their students visit an MP or civil servant, and situational learning activities intended to empower students at a level of equality with their peers.

There are limits to how far schools can do this however. Many schools adopt policies to give students a stake in their school life, and establish more 'democratic' classrooms through interactive teaching. But learning environments are ultimately founded on discipline, and so there are necessary limits to how authentically students can experience autonomy at school. Much like with internalisation, 'educating autonomy' suggests an element of paradox. If we want young people to receive the experience of having power, often the best way to do this is to take them outside of the school environment and into public life.

Youth social action organisations are highly suited to supporting young people to experience personal empowerment.

- 1) Youth led: YSAOs are predicated on seeing young people as an authority in themselves by supporting them to create the social change they care about. They can offer a controlled environment for young people to express themselves and set the agenda.
- 2) Context: Where schools seek to create classroom structures and school policies that are empowering to the student voice, social action organisations can provide to young people a crucial grounding of these gestures in the real world by giving young people the experience of taking responsibility in public life.

Case Study: Envision



Envision delivers nine month programmes in schools, where young people to give up their time to develop a social action project, which they are then supported to deliver in their own communities. Envision believe that if you want young people to be socially responsible and empowered to tackle real problems in their communities, then you have to start by giving them genuine responsibility. So it does.”

At Envision, social action is youth-led. Young people decide on the issues that they want to learn more about and tackle, they decide how to make a difference, they plan their project, they decide how and when to run their team meetings and they implement their project. This is unlike in classrooms where teachers must constantly monitor and lead activities, giving young people little autonomy. Using young people's personal concerns and interests as a starting point also means that Envision doesn't need to cajole or discipline young people to stay on task like teachers may need to. By tackling an issue they are passionate about in the manner they choose, young people overwhelmingly tend to be more committed and enthusiastic.

However throughout the process, Envision recognises that every team needs support to pick young people up when they flag, build resilience and sustain momentum. So every Envision team is supported at least once a week by an Envision Coordinator and two volunteer facilitators. Coordinators ensure that activities are safe, legal and more likely to make an impact. Envision's approach puts great onus on young people taking the initiative, even if this requires encouragement and support. This is because Envision is ultimately seeking to empower young people to become responsible, participating citizens. Through giving them genuine opportunities to make a real impact on issues they are passionate about, young people realise their own power to make positive change in their communities.

"I volunteered in a charity shop, but Envision is different. It's about creating your own project and being in control of it. You have to be committed to it. You can't just not come to meetings. When it's your own project, you're responsible and you can't let people down." Sofina, age 16.

In Conclusion

In order to give future generations the skills and understanding to participate fully in society, character and citizenship need to be central element of what young people learn growing up in our country. YSAOs are part of an exciting, growing sector in the UK with the organisational focus, resources and outcomes to make a real difference in how schools are able to provide character education. Working with school leaders to deliver on the five PRIME principles can help make a transition to a citizenship rich school that nurtures pupils' empathy, altruism, confidence, and leadership.

To take this forward, we recommend that

1. All schools nominate a member of school leadership to take responsibility for character education and relationships with the YSAO sector.
2. This leadership member should chair a small advisory group on character education including 4-6 YSAO groups. This group can help to build a curriculum of activity that builds character and fits within the school's priorities and draws on the knowledge and expertise of the YSAOs.

This paper was produced by Generation Change. Generation Change is a collective of senior executives of the UK's leading Youth Social Action Organisations working together to make social action a norm in young people's lives.