

To Whom It May Concern

Youth Citizenship Commission: Chaired by Professor Jon Tonge

As Minister for Democracy within a wide portfolio in the Ministry of Justice from 2005 – 2010, I was responsible for the conduct of Electoral Administration and within that, youth engagement. Having been a teacher in inner London schools for 15 years before entering Parliament, I was painfully aware of the lack of information, encouragement and opportunity for young people to engage in the democratic process at any level.

I, therefore, encouraged and persuaded the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Jack Straw, and the Prime Minister to set up a Youth Citizenship Commission which would analyse, research and report on the issues and processes most likely to engage young people. It was important that the commission had status and respect and was led by someone with a research agenda in the field. Thus we invited Professor Tonge to be Chair. Academic discipline was integral in ensuring the Commission was not simply a talking shop or a forum for subjective ideas but could stand up to rigorous scrutiny. Professor Tonge provided that academic leadership and experience.

For me, it was essential that the Commission not only had the respect of decision makers, but also fundamentally the respect of the young people about whom it was addressed. Hence, the inclusion of young Commissioners was vital. Their input – having come from diverse areas of life – was crucial to the Commission being responded to openly and honestly by the young people with whom it engaged.

The Commission also worked to a tight timetable and small budget. Each of these was achieved despite the difficulties such constraints imposed. Again the leadership, understanding and experience of Professor Tonge were essential in reaching those goals.

As a result, a professional, academic and rigorous piece of work set out in language that was comprehensible and engaging, was achieved. So comprehensive was it, that the Government accepted almost all of the

recommendations without dispute. What is more, because of its makeup and outlook, the Commission was unique within Government research and is a model for future engagement where the academic, political and disenfranchised might work together for positive and useful outcomes.

Now in my capacity as a consultant, I use the Youth Citizenship Report as a basis for launching debate whether with young people or older adults. This was a major piece of work, undertaken with rigour and openness, academic and yet attainable which had never been tried before and now serves as a model for the future.

I am delighted to be able to endorse both it and its authors.

Bridget Prentice

Minister for Democracy

Department for Constitutional Affairs

Ministry of Justice

2005-10