

PUBLIC PERCEPTION BRIEFING



Locally and nationally, Scouting continues to deliver our 2014-18 Strategic Plan, Scouting for All. As a Movement, we are proud that we are growing, becoming more Youth Shaped and inclusive while making a positive impact in our communities.

The Scout Association (TSA) is now planning Scouting's future beyond 2018, thinking about our priorities, the work we wish to continue and any new areas where we can make a difference, all to answer the question: how can we improve the life chances of young people and better support our volunteers? We want as many members as possible to have the opportunity to contribute to this important process.

This briefing outlines what we found when the general public was asked what they thought of Scouting, our brand and how inclusive we are. We also tested, based on the postcodes of current adult volunteers, what the Movement looks like and where in the country Scouting is most likely to work. It's part of a series of weekly briefings sharing the research and insights we have collected in shaping out next strategic plan, which you can find at scouts.org.uk/beyond2018.

METHODOLOGY

Populus (a national research agency) conducted 10 focus groups from 24-31 January 2017. Four groups took place in London, two in Leeds and four in Birmingham. Each group comprised of between eight and 10 adults aged 18-59, and lasted 90 minutes. Five of the groups were global brand / strategy groups consisting of adults who were representative of the local demographics. The remaining five groups were diversity groups consisting of black, Asian, and minority ethnic adults of mixed faith and lower socio-economic status. The groups were asked what they thought the challenges and opportunities were for Scouting.

STRATEGY

Life in the UK

Life for young people today was almost unanimously viewed as more challenging, complex, and stressful than it had been for respondents when they were that age. Many specific challenges facing young people today were mentioned: increasing employer expectations, heightened pressure to perform well at school, peer pressure and a lack of guidance in an overwhelming job market. There was widespread agreement that these challenges were compounded by the negative impact of social media on young people's ability or willingness to socialise and their self-confidence. Against this backdrop, extracurricular activities were felt to be as important as ever to the personal development of young people, if not more so.

"I'm sounding like an old bugger, but I do, I look at my kids' childhood and theirs is far more complex and difficult and stressful, and the expectations are greater than were ever placed on me."

Male, Leeds in Scouting

Benefits

The in-principle benefits of joining the Scouts were evident to all – whether or not they would send their own child. The opportunity for young children to take part in 'fun' adventures, enjoy the outdoors, make friends and develop social skills had great appeal. Any employability skills that were developed along the way

were a bonus, albeit not necessarily the main draw for young children.

Barriers

There were, however, significant barriers to joining the Scouts; most prominent was the 'uncool' image that was seen to deter teenagers from continuing at, or joining the Scouts. The uniform was felt by almost everyone to be a major obstacle alongside the fact that, however positive adults may be about Scouting activities, they would be seen as unappealing and 'boring' by teenagers – though many thought it was more realistic to envisage younger, primary school aged children being willing to join. A perceived lack of diversity and an impression of the Scouts as being for better off people was also seen by some to discourage participation, as did concerns regarding child safety in light of historical sex abuse allegations.

“That uniform, it’s got no relevance in today really. I can’t think of any kids, or I can speak for my son anyway, wanting to wear a scarf around his neck. He is very focussed on what he looks like.” Male, Birmingham

Opportunities

There were a number of suggestions of things the Scouts could do to increase participation and support. Most important was to change the offering to teenage members, by incorporating more 'extreme' activities into the programme, and by formalising activities into recognised awards. Beyond this, an updated uniform, or even the removal of the uniform, was seen as potentially necessary to entice teenagers and volunteers to join.

“It’s also the idea of getting kids to have a go, boosting up their confidence and their self-esteem, saying you can do this, or you know, have a go.” Female, Birmingham

Brand

We asked participants how they perceived Scouting today compared to their childhood, and if there were any implications for us as a result.

“I think it’s even more important now that people are more and more in cities, and exactly because kids are on their computers all the time, it’s absolutely fantastic...” Male, London.

Reputation

The Scouts' reputation used to be strong, built on history and tradition. Thanks to its long-term presence in British society, participants felt it had become an important and embedded part of life in the UK. The organisation's reputation meant that most were willing to give the Scouts the benefit of the doubt on its weaknesses, and hoped for future success.

“There’s no information about it – it’s sort of a spoof. It’s something I associate with ‘80s and ‘90s – I don’t hear anybody talk about it anymore and it’s a shame.” Female, London.

Lack of visibility

However, a lack of visibility in recent decades meant that most impressions of Scouting today were almost entirely shaped by impressions or memories of the Scouts in the '80s and '90s. Questions were raised over the practical relevance of Scouting activities in a new era of smartphones, the internet, social media and YouTube. There was a cohort, however, for whom these technological advances made the Scouts as relevant as ever, if not more so.

Not inclusive or diverse

“I think, if they've got a diverse, like if you've got a team of leaders and they're mixed, each group would be able to attract the minorities, as well as the majorities.” Female, London

The Scouts was not deemed as an inclusive or diverse club. The impression that Scouts was for white, Christian, middle class males was strong – though for many rooted in a lack of visibility and activity in their area, rather than any specific knowledge or example, and although few thought the Scouts actively excluded other demographics, there was a sense that the Scouts was not doing anything to combat this.

“Most of the people there, interestingly enough, are white. The group leaders, the scout leaders were white as well.”

Female, Birmingham

Current branding

The Scouts' current branding reinforced its 'uncool' image, thanks to the uniforms and activities which were deemed suitable for young children but not teenagers. More extreme activities that would entice teenagers, plus an updated uniform, or the removal of it, was called for. Views were, however, challenged by some of the

advertising. Participants were surprised at the level of diversity in the imagery but didn't challenge its credibility.

Change perceptions

To further change perceptions of the Scouts, groups wanted inclusivity to be addressed. For some, this was a matter of spreading the word, by approaching communities and visiting schools to market the opportunities available through the Scouts. Others, however, saw an entire rebrand as necessary, with more diverse figureheads, a refreshed, relevant list of activities, and a new 'grown up' image.

Emphasis on skills

An emphasis on skills (one presented with a *Skills for Life* proposition) in the Scouts' branding was welcomed. Developing young people's skills was seen to be at the core of what the Scouts do, and so it seemed natural that this would be reflected in the branding. Nevertheless, there was a consensus that different skills would attract different ages. For advertising aimed at the parents of young children, it was character skills and social skills that mattered most, while for teenagers and volunteers the focus had to be on employability skills.

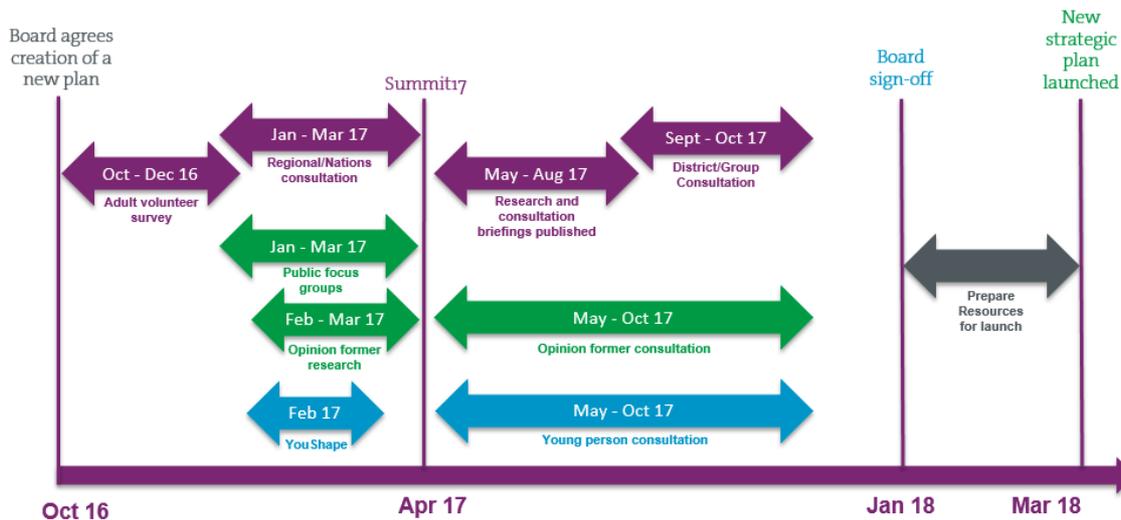
This piece is part of a series of contributions intended to stimulate discussion and debate as we create a new strategic plan for Scouting between 2018-2023. You can find all resources at scouts.org.uk/beyond2018

In early August 2017, we will release a toolkit to support consultation on a District and Group level, with views being fed back nationally. Make sure you've made time at a County or District level to take part in September or October 2017.

BEYOND 2018

To inform the decisions made for Scouting's future beyond 2018, we have asked for views from volunteers, young people, opinion formers and the general public. Over the next two months we will be publishing the reports from this research and consultation to help stimulate conversations in the Movement about the future.

Beyond 2018 | Consultation timeline



Schedule for publication of briefings and resources

The following briefings will be published in April – June on scouts.org.uk/beyond2018 and circulated to members through Scouting+. These will summarise key insights from the research and consultation to date and are intended to stimulate discussion and debate.

- Briefing 1 – Summit17
- Briefing 2 – #YouShape Beyond 2018
- Briefing 3 – Public perceptions
- Briefing 4 – Volunteer survey
- Briefing 5 – Regional/Nations consultation
- Briefing 6 – Opinion former research
- Briefing 7 – Impact of Scouting on young people

In August, we will publish resources to be used at District and Group level for consultation with volunteers on the next strategic plan, with a method to feedback views nationally.

In September and October, volunteers are encouraged to feedback their views on the draft strategic plan through County/District level meetings or events.

The Board will discuss a final draft of the next strategic plan based on volunteer feedback in January and will aim to launch the new plan in spring 2018.

Future conversation resources – Summit17 in a box

To help support the consultation on the next plan, the toolkit will include resources to help you run your own Summit17 event if you wish to or to have a conversation as part of a meeting or event you may already have scheduled. These resources will include presentations, suggested session plans and activities as well as how to submit your feedback.

Make sure you've made time at a County or District level for volunteers to take part in discussions from September to October on the future of Scouting and what we as a Movement should prioritise in the next five years.