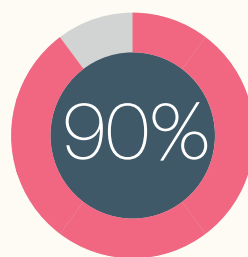


The Kenny Report II: Is “Politics” for young people?



February 2014



of MPs are university graduates, **even though only 38% of the adult population are university graduates.**

More than 400 MPs equivalent to 62% of the total number of MPs, are white men aged over 40.



More than one-third of MPs elected in 2010 attended fee paying schools (private schools) **even though only 7% of the adult UK population has been privately educated.**



Over 25% of MPs went to Oxford or Cambridge University.

Contributors

Why I wrote “The Kenny Report 2”



As a young person myself, it upsets me that I am growing up in a democracy that fails young people and that does not represent our wider society. In the UK we have a parliament that does not speak to the interests of young people and that fails to make worthwhile attempts to include all young people in politics.

Young people and youth policy is not on the Government’s agenda. I feel very strongly that too many politicians remain uninterested in the issues or aspirations of young people, often due to the fact that young people seem uninterested in politics and the fact that fewer than half of us (18-24 years old) vote.

Politicians, political professors and the media are constantly having on-going discussions about why so many young people are disengaged with the political system and do not vote. One of the main factors I believe why young people do not vote, is that far too many young people don’t believe that politics can change anything for them and they also feel that politics is not for them. Young people are angry with politicians and with a political process that does not represent them, so they choose to disengage from it.

What fundamentally inspired me to write The Kenny Report 2 was my interest in the issue of young people aged 16 and 17 being deprived of their right to vote. I have always wondered why young people do not vote and why politicians continuously let young people down and fail to take young people and their agendas seriously. Much of the discussion in this report applies to all young people aged 18 to 24 and not just 16 and 17 year olds.

Politicians are not the only ones to blame for the lack of interest young people have in politics. We too, as young people, have to take personal responsibility for our choice not to engage with our democracy, despite many of us at school not learning anything about politics or what it means to be a citizen in a modern democracy.

I spent my entire semester break from university, producing this report and looking for the answers to the questions raised in this report. I conducted 43 interviews with key stake-holders across the United Kingdom and searched to find credible reasons as to why the voting age should be lowered to 16, why young people as a whole should vote, and why we all should be registered and be taught politics in and outside of school.

Conducting this study has convinced me that this subject is even more important than I originally thought, and I sincerely hope that the information I have been able to put together with the help of the many people who contributed, will support others in taking on and implementing the recommendations highlighted in this report.

Foreword



Lord Tyler

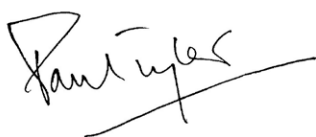
The Kenny Report 2 is a formidably well-argued wake up call to politicians. Many in the cosy Westminster bubble just assume that young people ignore politics, and that by return, politics can ignore them. But this report shows us that politics is at the heart of the very many issues in which the next generation of voters are engaged. Kenny Imafidon could not be more right in linking education about citizenship to enfranchisement as a citizen. It is surely ludicrous to teach young people about their civic duties but deny them the right to exercise their say in our democracy.

It is often said that politicians must go where the people are, rather than expecting the people to come to them. The same should be true of the new system of individual electoral registration. This key to our democracy should be handed to every young person in school, with registration officers getting pupils on the register at 14 and 15, ready to exercise the right to vote at 16.

This simple step to bring democracy and young people together could make a radical difference to the shape of public policy. It is no coincidence that those most likely to vote – older people – are least likely to have their interests breached by politicians. Witness the way in which pensioners have emerged largely unscathed from this decade's big retrenchment in public spending. The best way to redress this imbalance is to permit young people to vote while they are still engaged in politics at school. In turn, parties would be bound by their own electoral advantage to inspire young people to the polls and to look after their interests when in office.

The evidence from Austria is clear that engaging young people in politics, by giving them a vote, works. Just as education is essential to ensure each new generation can advance our economy, early enfranchisement is a crucial step to advance our democracy. The Kenny Report 2 should leave no one in any doubt that this is an idea whose time has come.

Lord Tyler is a Liberal Democrat Peer and primary sponsor of a cross-party Bill to reduce the voting age for all UK elections and referendums to 16.





Katie Ghose

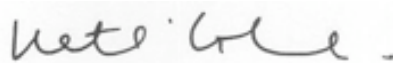
I'm delighted to introduce this report which takes a fresh look at the case for introducing a right to vote for 16 and 17 year olds in UK public elections. Its publication is extremely timely, as Scottish young people prepare to vote in the referendum on Scotland's future on September 18th. Their experiences will provide valuable insights and give impetus to UK political parties and campaigners to embrace the same change in other elections across the UK.

Kenny gives us new insights into the topic, gathered from 43 interviews conducted in 2013. They give a flavour of strong and growing support among politicians and civic groups, reflecting mounting dismay about people's disconnect from formal party politics which is infecting all ages but seen most acutely in the under 25s.

Most impressively, the report tackles the topic from the doubter's stand-point, taking on and demolishing each argument in turn. From charges of immaturity to the prospect of low turn-out if younger voting is introduced, Kenny provides compelling evidence, often with reference to other countries where votes at 16 is common place.

The Electoral Reform Society is a long-standing supporter of votes at 16. The future of our democracy depends on younger generations getting involved in all aspects, local and national, and voting is a crucial part of this. We believe that voting early can help form a habit for life and if accompanied by practical education can also open the door to participation in all kinds of ways, including standing for elected office where our democracy desperately needs people from all backgrounds and talents.

Kenny has produced an excellent primer for all who want to get the word out to support an extended franchise and create a policy-making process that can no longer ignore younger voters. But I am struck most by the author's last words: 'Maybe it is time we made voting easier not just for young people but for everyone'. The real success story of votes at 16 will be its ability to kick-start a renewed civic duty and commitment to democracy among all ages, and the Kenny Report 2 is a superb contribution to this democratic renewal.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Katie Ghose'.

Katie Ghose

Chief Executive, Electoral Reform Society
January 2014

Contents

Why I wrote The Kenny Report 2	1
Executive Summary	6
Background	8
Introduction	10
The case for votes at 16	10
The “Votes at 16 Campaign”	11
The Scottish Referendum 2014	12
Why lower the voting age to 16 and not 14 or 12?	13
The Arguments opposing Votes at 16	14
(1) 18-24 years old don’t vote anyway, so why should we give 16 and 17 years old the same opportunity?	15
(2) Young people as a whole are not interested in politics, especially those who are aged 16 and 17 years old	17
(3) The lowering of the voting age to 16 imposes an unwanted responsibility to vote on young people	18
(4) Young people aged 16 and 17 years old are radical and are likely to vote for radical parties	19
(5) Young people are not informed or mature enough to vote at 16 and 17 years old	20
(6) 16 and 17 years old don’t agree themselves that they should be allowed to vote	22
Have other groups before been denied the right to vote on similar grounds?	23
Possible compromises for first-time voters who are aged 16 and 17	24
What we can learn from Austria about Votes at 16?	26
Why is it important that more young people vote as a whole?	29
Voter registration	31
Background information to the changes of our electoral roll system	31

The Kenny Report II: Is “Politics” for young people?

How does the change to IER affect young people?	34
What are the disadvantages of not being on the electoral register?	36
How can we increase the numbers of young people who are registered?	38
Grassroots steps	38
Legislative steps	39
Citizenship and Political Education	41
How the introduction of political education in the national curriculum can complement the lowering of the voting age to 16 years old?	42
Why more politicians need to visit places where young people are in order to engage young people in politics	43
The role of teachers in getting students registered and becoming active voting citizens	44
Do we need to have political education in schools first before we lower the voting age to 16?	45
Conclusion	46
Recommendations	48
Acknowledgements	49
About the author	50
Appendix	51
Electoral reform society	51
Votes at 16 campaign (UK)	51
National Voter Registration Day	52
Bibliography	53
References	57

Executive Summary

Whilst it remains every citizen's responsibility to vote in order to maintain the fluidity of a healthy democracy, we find that levels of participation in our voting and democratic processes in this country do not reflect this understanding.

Over the last two decades, voter turnout has been steadily declining and the last general election in the U.K saw only 65.1% of those registered to vote actually voting¹. Young people are amongst many of the people who do not vote in our country and there are many reasons for this. The first, being a lack of awareness of the implications of not voting, as well as the feeling that there is no reason to vote, because nothing ever changes anyway. More than half of young people who are registered to vote, do not vote. Therefore, politicians are less and less likely to hear the views of young people, particularly in an era where we have an ageing population that dominates the electoral-roll and voting polls.

The young people I have tried to inspire to vote, many of whom are my friends who are disengaged from politics, have always repeatedly said to me: "politics is not for me and why should I vote?" They believe that politics is all about a bunch of old, predominately white men from private school backgrounds, jeering at one another in Parliament like kids in primary school and at the same time making out-of-touch laws that favour the privileged few and not the public at large.

Some may say that this is not a fair representation of what parliamentary politics is about, and of course there is much more to politics than can be observed from the outside. However, many in our society who are disengaged with party politics only know as much as they see on TV at Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons and sadly that is the image. Many Britons look at Parliament with the view that it is out-of-touch and that a majority of the people who represent us are not like you or me, and all very much cut from the same cloth.

We all would want a Parliament with more women; more people from working class backgrounds; more people from minority ethnic backgrounds; more people who are disabled and younger people, in order to bring different experiences and expertise to the running of the country by our government. It is interesting to note that there are currently no elected representatives in Parliament between the ages of 18 and 24, even though we are allowed to be a political representative from 18 years old. Young people are very significantly under-represented in politics at local, regional and national levels. This sends a message to millions of young people that Parliamentary politics is not for us and that our experiences are not valued.

Too many young people feel hopeless and that their vote means nothing because at the end of the day they believe that all politicians are the same. They feel that politicians never listen or fulfil the promises they make to us. When young people are listened to by politicians, it tends to be tokenistic which is of course frustrating for young people. It is not difficult to understand why many people, especially young people, choose to disengage.

The Kenny Report II: Is “Politics” for young people?

I was shocked when I saw the research from “The Hansard Audit of Political Engagement 10 (2013) Report”² showing that just 12% of young people in our society are certain to vote if an election were to happen tomorrow³. This demonstrates how dire youth engagement and participation in our democracy actually is.

In spite of these disturbing figures, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that young people are very interested in politics, just not in party politics. Young people are interested in politics in its wider context and many young people feel very strongly about the issues that affect them directly in society.

Young people are expanding their political engagement through many mediums, from consumer politics and community based protests, to calls for reforms or challenging cuts to youth services. A lot of young people today raise awareness of issues that affect them online through social media. We can see young people being involved in politics informally and making changes internationally over social media, in the Middle East for example, it has been argued that young people ignited the Arab Spring popular movement.

Through this report, I want to empower and show young people why we need to be registered and to vote. I want to show young people that democracy does not begin or stop at the ballot box and that we cannot create change whilst standing on the sidelines. If we want change, then we have to take part in politics and be the change we want to see.

This report explains why I believe that we need to lower the voting age to 16, despite the fact that so many young people currently do not vote and are not registered. It will discuss the positive effect that lowering of the voting age to 16 could have on our society, our young people and on our electorate as a whole.

Lowering the voting age to 16 will not eradicate voter apathy amongst young people, but it will take us a step closer to engaging and inspiring young people to be registered and to vote, and ultimately to stand as candidates for political elections

The active involvement of young people in politics will change our democracy for the better by making it more representative, inclusive, and engaging.

Background

The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the western world's earliest democratic states. The law states that to vote in a UK general election a person must be registered to vote⁴ and also:

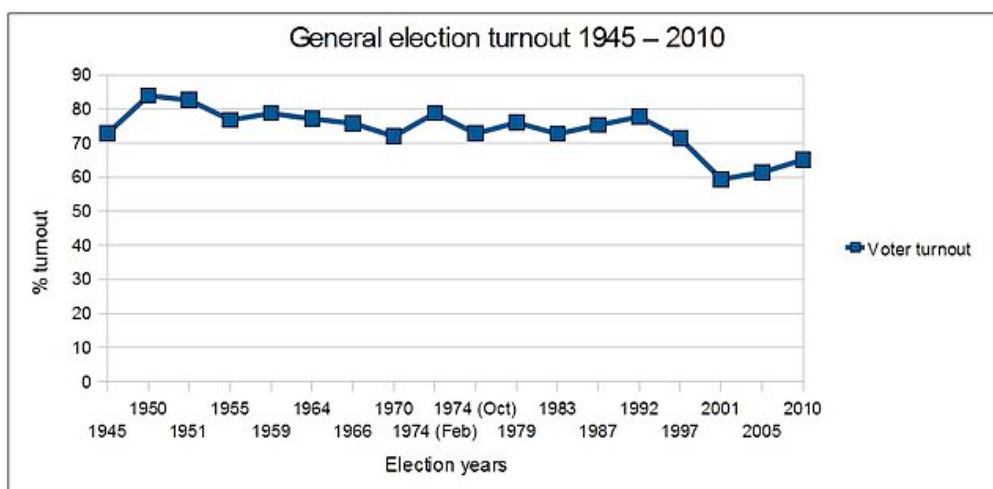
- *Be 18 years of age or over on polling day;*
- *Be a British citizen;*
- *Be a qualifying Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of the Republic of Ireland; and*
- *Not be subject to any legal incapacity to vote.*

Additionally, the following people cannot vote in a UK general election:

- Members of the House of Lords (although they can vote at elections to local authorities, devolved legislatures and the European Parliament);
- EU citizens resident in the UK (although they can vote at elections to local authorities, devolved legislatures and the European Parliament);
- Anyone other than British, Irish and qualifying Commonwealth citizens;
- Convicted persons detained in pursuance of their sentences (though remand prisoners, unconvicted prisoners and civil prisoners can vote if they are on the electoral register); and
- Anyone found guilty within the previous five years of corrupt or illegal practices in connection with an election⁵.

It is an interesting fact that nearly 1 million voters from Commonwealth countries will be able to vote in the 2015 general election.

Over the past two decades, voter turnout has been fluctuating in the UK but has been considerably low in the past two decades compared to elections in post-war Britain. The last general election saw only 65.1% of those registered to vote actually voting⁶.



(graph taken from - <http://www.ukpolitical.info/>)

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in November 2012 resulted in the lowest turnout of any election since 1945 with only 15.1% of the general public voting⁷. This was a waste of almost £100 million pounds of taxpayers’ money⁸; with research showing from the Electoral Society Reform report “how not to run an election”⁹ that 90% of Britons have no idea who their elected police and crime commissioner are.

The PCC elections were significant for various reasons. It was held in the winter months, which discouraged people from turning out to vote and the electoral commission did not send out candidate information to voters to raise their awareness of the upcoming elections¹⁰.

The think-tank the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) estimated in their report “Divided Democracy”, that “the likelihood of voting for an individual under the age of 35 earning less than £10,000 a year is just 34 per cent, whereas the predicted turnout rate of someone who is over 55 with an income of at least £40,000 a year is 79 per cent¹¹”. This data shows that there is a huge disparity between younger and poorer voters and older and wealthier ones when it comes to participation rates at elections. IPPR researchers also found that the UK has one of the largest inequalities in voter turnout between young (under-30’s) and old people (over-60’s) in Europe.

Introduction

This report will focus on the following three separate topics, which are all inter-linked and inseparable:

Firstly, to counter the common prejudices and objections to extending the right to vote at 16 and show that we need to extend the voting age to accommodate 16 and 17 year old citizens, who as a matter of principle are entitled to such a right to vote.

Secondly, to look into the national issue of voter-registration, predominantly around young people (18-24 years old) and show ways we can increase the number of people registered in our country, particularly young people.

Lastly, this report seeks to emphasise the fundamental importance of placing political education on the national curriculum under the umbrella of citizenship education, in order to create a younger generation of informed and engaged participants and voters in our democracy.

By using the information collected from interviews I have conducted with politicians and various organisations, as well as, the valued opinions I have gathered informally from different groups of young people, together with, an analysis of existing research, this report will demonstrate how important it is that our current democracy is revived and reformed.

This report will provide sound reasons why the government need to implement the recommendations made in this report and why we, as young people, need to take part in the campaigns shown in the appendix to ensure that votes at 16 become a reality.

The case for votes at 16

Firstly, I must raise the point that I do not believe that extending the right to vote to an estimated 1.5 million (1,562,921) young people aged 16 and 17¹² will by itself tackle the issue of young people's engagement in our democracy. More efforts in relation to this must be made by other means and strategies, which I will discuss later in this report.

Currently, you can vote at 16 year's old if you:

- Live on the Isle of Man, Jersey or Guernsey
- Live in Austria
- Live in Argentina
- Live in Cuba, Nicaragua, Brazil or Ecuador
- Live in Germany and are voting in Länder or state elections
- Live in Hungary and meet certain criteria. For example, if you are married before reaching the age of 18 you have full adult legal rights and can therefore vote.

- Live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia or Slovenia and are employed.
- Live in Takoma City Council (the first municipality to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 in the United States)
- Live in Norway and are part of the 20 selected municipalities that the government has given 16-year-olds the right to vote in the September 2011 local elections, as part of a greater effort to get young people interested in politics¹³.
- Live in Indonesia and are married¹⁴

Maybe it is time for the UK to join the aforementioned countries and set the trend for other western democracies.



The “Votes at 16 Campaign”

The debate for and against the lowering of the voting age to 16 has been going on for over a decade in Parliament and there have been equally compelling arguments on both sides of the camp, or have there?

The “Votes at 16 Campaign” was launched on 29 January 2003 by the Votes at 16 Coalition as a result of pressure to reduce the voting age from 18 to 16¹⁵. The coalition is made up of young people, 70 organisations and a network of politicians across the UK¹⁶.

Since the launch of the campaign there have been many attempts made in Parliament to extend the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds. Parliamentarians such as Conservative Peer Lord Lucas¹⁷, Liberal Democrat MP Stephen Williams¹⁸, Assembly Member Julie Morgan (former Labour MP)¹⁹, and most recently Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Tyler²⁰ have all attempted to have the voting age lowered.

Last year, on 9 May 2013, Lord Tyler introduced a Bill in the House of Lords called “Voting Age (Comprehensive Reduction) Bill”. This Bill will extend the franchise for parliamentary and other elections, and for referendums, to all citizens over the age of 16 years old. The Bill has recently had its second reading on the 25th October 2013 in the House of Lords²¹. The date that the Bill will be at committee stage has not yet been confirmed.

When I interviewed Lord Tyler in his office at Parliament, I asked him why he proposed this Bill and why he was in support of votes at 16:

“I very strongly support lowering the voting age. The Bill I am trying to push through Parliament will introduce the right to vote to those who are 16 and 17 in all elections and all referendums in our country. It is a good time now to be pushing for movement on this because sometime next year 16 and 17 year olds will be allowed in Scotland to vote on a major issue which will affect their lives. Imagine if it was voting time in Scotland, and there were another kind of election in England on the same day. How could we explain the difference in maturity between two 16 years old in either country?”

The Scottish Referendum 2014

The referendum in Scotland will take place on the 18th September 2014. The people of Scotland including Scottish 16 and 17 year olds will be asked the yes or no question of: “Should Scotland be an independent country²²?”

The Scottish Referendum has definitely reignited the votes at 16 agenda as a national issue and has made many young people ask, how can you let 16 and 17 year olds in Scotland vote on the referendum and then not let them vote in subsequent Scottish elections? And how can our government not let 16 or 17 year olds have a say in other parts of the country?

When I had an interview with the Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament, Kyle Thorton, I asked him what his thoughts were on the upcoming Scottish referendum and the fact that 16 and 17 year olds were allowed to vote. He told me that:

“Young people are interested in the referendum next year because they have a civic interest in the referendum. It should be a testament for other governments to take on board that Votes at 16 was the right thing to do in Scotland with such a big issue”.

He went on to say that:

“This (Scottish referendum) should erase some of the fears that young people, particularly 16 and 17 year olds do not vote, but actually they vote like the rest of the population in general. Votes at 16 is practical as a reality and once it is done fairly and democratic, it should be done every time after. Hopefully it will be a catalyst for the rest of the UK”.

The Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly, and UK Parliament have already given signs pledging their support to the lowering of the voting age. However, the Conservative Government has no intentions of lowering the voting age; therefore, none of the motions that have been backed can become law²³.

Two of the major political parties, the Liberal Democrats and most recently the Labour Party have pledged their support to the Votes at 16. The Conservative party has not pledged its support to the campaign as yet, however, some Conservatives do believe that the voting age should be lowered.

When I interviewed the Labour Party General-Secretary Iain McNichol, and asked him why the Labour Party has recently (2013) pledged their support to lower the voting age. He responded by saying:

“It sends a powerful signal to young people that we want them to be involved in politics and our democracy. Politicians are making decisions that will affect many of the young people in that age group who are not able to express their voice through ballot box”.



Why lower the voting age to 16 and not 14 or 12?

The first question many of you will be asking is why lower the voting age to 16 and not, for example, to 14 or even to 12 year olds.

One of the reasons for this is that 16 is the legal age at which young people gain a range of rights and responsibilities. This is touched on in the previous Kenny Report How do politics and economics affect gangs and serious youth violence across the UK:

“Why is it possible for young people to go to prison at 10, give full consent to medical treatment at 16, leave school and enter work or training at 16, pay income tax and National Insurance at 16, obtain tax

credits and welfare benefits in their own right at 16, consent to sexual relationships at 16, get married or enter a civil partnership at 16, change their name by deed poll at 16, join the armed forces at 16, become a CEO of a business at 16, become a member of a trade union or a co-operative society, and can apply for their first adult passport at 16 but they cannot vote at 16? - Because there is no right to vote at the age of 16, many young people are disenfranchised before they even get a chance to vote. The political system is weighted in favour of those who are eligible to vote at the expense of young people who cannot”.

At 16 you are more or less seen as an adult by the state but you cannot vote. If young people are given all these legal entitlements and responsibilities at 16 then it is only right that they should be given the entitlement to vote. Who could disagree with that?

Under the United Nations Conventions on Rights of the Child, which the UK are a signatory of, Article 12 states that:

“1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law²⁴”.

Taking Article 12 into perspective you can legitimately argue that, it is a human right that young people who are 16 and 17 are given the opportunity to vote.

The UK Government is committed to the fullest possible implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, children and young people’s right to be listened to and consulted is also established in both specific domestic legislation (Children Act 1989, Education Act 2002, Children Act 2004) and in a range of policies and guidance.

The Arguments opposing Votes at 16

My findings for arguments against the lowering of voting age were very interesting to me and some reasons people gave for not supporting the lowering of the vote were amusing and far from rational. I heard some arguments like *“If you can’t give someone your car to drive at 16, then why give them the vote?”*, *“What do young people at 16 know about politics or the economy to be able to vote?”*, *“Young people who are 16 should just wait till they’re 18, what’s the rush?”* It was particularly funny because some of these remarks came from young people themselves.

A few arguments against why the voting age should be lowered to 16 were however interesting and more thought provoking.

(1) 18-24 years old don't vote anyway, so why should we give 16 and 17 years old the same opportunity?

One of my first interviews was with Glenda Jackson MP (prior to Labour's pledge of supporting the Votes at 16 campaign). She told me that she was not in favour of lowering the voting age and she gave a strong argument why she wasn't. She told me that, *“young people aged 18 – 24 do not vote anyway already and young people are the age group with the lowest turnout compared to the others, so why should we extend the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds?”*. She went on to say that *“young people should vote because many people died to give young people the right to vote and live in a democracy but still young people do not vote anyways. Voting is a civic responsibility and it is our duty to vote and be involved in the decision –making process that dictates our government”*.

You could argue that this was a non-discriminatory and valid point because only 44% of young people aged 18-24 voted in the 2010 General election compared to 76% of those aged 65 or over²⁵. Based on the fact that so few young people vote now, you can assume that many 16 to 17 year olds will be unlikely to vote because many people slightly older than them currently choose not to vote.

According to the findings from the *Hansard audit* of political engagement 10 report, only 12% of young people are likely to vote if an election happened today²⁶.

No one can promise that the lowering of the voting age is a remedy for the lack of political engagement amongst young people in our democracy and that it will in itself increase voter turnout. In fact some believe that if the voting age were lowered there is a strong likelihood that we could find ourselves in a situation where, as is currently the case, millions of young people remain unregistered and unengaged, resulting in continuing low voter turnout rates in elections.

The threat of lower voter turnout being behind the fear of lowering the vote is not a real one, and more importantly is not a credible reason to deny the lowering of the voting age. I agree with the conclusion of the Power Commission's *“Power to the People”* report (2006) which states *“this argument suggests that a significant reform should be rejected on the grounds that its results may embarrass politicians and reinforce the widespread view that the party and electoral system are disliked”*²⁷.

We should not pessimistically think that when 16 and 17 year olds are allowed to vote in elections it will automatically cause voter turnout to drop further. Evidence from trials taken in Germany, particularly in Hanover, provide a clear indication that the lowering of the voter age can boost, rather than lessen turnout. This is because, in their study a greater proportion of 16 and 17 year-olds voted than those aged 18 to 35 – in fact, twice as many as those in their late 20s. Evidence also from a study in 2005 carried out in Vienna, Austria showed that 59 percent of 16 to 18-year-olds voted in the elections and that the turnout of that group (16 and 17 year olds) was the same as any other group of voters. This study showed that young people aged 16 and 17 were not any less interested in politics than any other group²⁸.

Lord Tyler's bill is not the silver bullet to our current issue of political engagement but it is a first step of our struggle to engage with young people from early on in their lives by giving them a democratic right to vote. I strongly believe that the change in the law will definitely help to fulfil what the campaign is asking, namely the opportunity to *"engage 16 and 17 year olds at the ballot who hold many responsibilities in our society, empower 16 and 17 year olds, through a democratic right, to influence decisions that will define their future and inspire young people to get involved in our democracy"*²⁹.

There are further steps we need to take to engage young people in politics and the "Power to the People" report, as well as other reports support the position that there is a need to include young people (16 and 17 year olds) in the political process as early as possible, in order to create a basis for greater political engagement in later life.

The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) "Make Your Mark" campaign had a mandate of nearly half a million votes (478,386 votes) which as the British Youth Council stated *"is a record turnout, very specifically, it is a dramatic improvement on the turnout of 253,000 last year - almost a doubling of the level of interest"*. This is proof that young people are interested in politics, but we must remember that the ballot box does not come to the young people; young people must come to the ballot box. At the UKYP last annual sitting in the House of Commons, "Votes at 16" was chosen as the most important issue for them to campaign on in 2014 nation-wide.

A study by the Electoral Commission after the last General Election (2010) showed that many factors inhibited young people from voting. This included not knowing how or where to register if moving house or feeling intimidated at polling stations³⁰.



(2) Young people as a whole are not interested in politics, especially those who are aged 16 and 17 years old

I will not spend much time on this argument, because it is very clear that young people are interested in politics. Who wouldn't be interested in the issues that affect them? The problem is not that young people are not interested or engaged in politics; the problem is that most politicians, from the beginning to end of a Bill, do not engage or consult with young people, when making decisions that disproportionately affect them.

There are numerous ways young people engage in our democracy. For instance, they use social media campaigns to promote issues which affect them, or petition to keep their youth clubs or schools open, or join groups where young people can dictate youth policy and in some cases have a budget to spend on projects that will benefit their communities. Young people also set up social enterprises to tackle the issues that affect them, of which Whitehall has not come around to doing anything about or seem interested in solving.

We must remember that we cannot expect to see those young people who are genuinely interested in politics and in what is going on around them, to devote time to party politics in the same way as before. A lot of young are not growing up in the days when politics was most rife and sparked many of the generations before us to enter politics. Young people are still trying to find out who they are, find work, or chase their dreams and focus on the many issues and challenges they have to face.

We need to make politics much more easy-going and accessible. This is because too many young people feel like once you are actively interested in politics, you are expected to devote your life to it or people ask for too much from you which you cannot offer. We need to stop making politics seem like a chore. Young people are always talking politics one way or another, whether they are talking about how the prices of transport have been rapidly increasing, or how much their rent has gone up.

Politics dictates our lives and young people know this and if they don't then they should. We need to raise awareness that politics is for everyone and that we all have a part to play in improving our country's politics. Young people need to be informed and educated so that they can play a greater part in the changes we need in our society. This could be as simple as signing a petition, registering to vote or playing a major role in a campaign. We have to find a way to move from talk amongst our peers or social groups, into proactive influence towards change for the better for us all.

Young people are neither inspired to vote nor take part in our democracy and are always the age group losing out. It is ironic that as a society we expect many young people to vote, but forget so many young people grow up not ever having been told that it is their civic duty to vote, or why their vote makes a difference and the impact of politics on their lives.

If the voting age was lowered to 16, then young people would be much more likely to be interested in politics and want to know more about politics before they could

vote. General elections are every five years and therefore, there is a massive gap before someone under 18 will be able to vote at an election of the greatest national importance. I am 20 years old and I will not be able to vote in my first general election till I am 22 in 2015. If I were able to vote at 16, I would have been entitled to exercise my right to vote in the 2010 general elections, four years ago.

(3) The lowering of the voting age to 16 imposes an unwanted responsibility to vote on young people

Another argument against the lowering of the voting age is that it places potentially unwanted responsibility on young people who are 16 and 17, who may not understand politics, know what Parliament's role is, or have no interest in it.

Those who rely on this argument claim that society would not, in an ideal world, want 16 and 17 year olds who do not have a clue about politics, voting. Critics believe young people aged 16 and 17 have enough responsibility already and should not at such a time in their life, be worrying about who they need to vote for. Instead, they should be focusing on more important stuff, like preparing for their GCSE's and other examinations.

This is a fair point. However, I still do not feel that we can rely on this argument and say that on this basis, all 16 and 17 year old should be denied the right to vote. In comparison, there is no evidence to suggest that all or even a majority of adults have got a clue about politics, but regardless they still have the imposed obligation to vote, despite having far more duties and responsibilities than the average 16 and 17 year olds.

Not everyone who has a civic duty to vote, votes anyway. It is an individual choice whether they exercise it or not. So, regardless of the responsibility it may impose on 16 and 17 year olds, we cannot escape the fact that it is a positive responsibility. It is one which allows them to have a stake in our society, as well as dictate and take part in choosing the people who make decisions which affect their daily lives. This is not a burden that will make their life harder, or add some sort of unnecessary pressure to their difficult lives.



(4) Young people aged 16 and 17 years old are radical and are likely to vote for radical parties

Some critics who are opposed to votes at 16 argue that young people are generally radical by nature and therefore, if 16 and 17 year olds are given the chance to vote, they are more likely than not, to vote for radical candidates at election time. There is a further assumption by critics that most 16 and 17 year olds who do not have a clue about politics will vote based on their drastic impulses, and therefore choose a political candidate they feel is more charismatic, who may be radical, as opposed to a candidate who is more moderate and representing their best interests.

If we all think that young people aged 16 and 17 will vote for radical parties if given the chance to vote, then surely we should teach them about fascism so they can make informed choices and are less inclined to be persuaded to vote for parties that promote fascist politics. There is no evidence to suggest that young people, who can vote now, are more inclined to vote for extremist parties compared to the rest of the voting population. Therefore, I don't feel that if 16 and 17 years were given the right to vote, a majority of them would vote for radical parties.

Research published by the Institute for Social Research and Consulting (SORA) counters the argument that 16 and 17 year olds will make protest votes and vote for extremist parties. The study by SORA shows that in the Austrian elections, in 2008, 16 and 17 year olds who were first time voters did not vote significantly more for extremist parties than other groups of the electorate.

(5) Young people are not informed or mature enough to vote at 16 and 17 years old

When I was visiting several schools, both from the state and private sector, including several pupil referral units, to find out how young people felt about the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, I found it very interesting that some young people themselves didn't feel like they should be given the right to vote. This was due to the responsibility of being informed about politics that comes with it.

In spite of their academic excellence, many young people believed they were not competent enough to vote because they didn't feel they were sufficiently informed. Some might see this as a clear reason to not give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote. However, the same argument also supports the case that 16 and 17 year olds not only want to engage in politics and vote, but also when they do vote, they want to make informed and wiser choices about who actually represents them. Therefore, this should be a point of commendation rather than criticism of young people aged 16 and 17.

During the course of this research and speaking to young people, I have found that many 16 and 17 year olds feel like there is a certain intellectual level you have to reach before you can have or exercise the right to vote. This is mainly a result of the way adults go on about how young people do not know enough about politics to vote. Wisdom and maturity doesn't necessarily come with age and there is no research to suggest that someone who is 40 years old is better able to choose the political party to represent them, than someone who is 16.

Young people do not need to be informed about every single aspect of politics or the economy to understand that they are the age group being hit the hardest in this recession. Young people are most likely to be not in employment, education or training and are the age group to whom politicians keep making promises too but rarely fulfil them. Young people are informed about the political system through the results of policies and issues that affect their daily lives and which they want to change.

Young people will always suffer from the debts created by the generations before them, and since austerity measures, more adults are falling into debt and poverty. Young people are invariably seen as the problem and hardly ever the solution to the ills in our society. Young people have had their tuition-fees tripled, seen their transport prices hiked, EMA scrapped and funding to youth services in their areas considerably cut back, in some boroughs by as much as 70%. Even at schools, young people cannot even be part of the decision-making process to pick what they want to be taught in order to prepare them for life after secondary school.

Youth unemployment (aged 16-24) is almost at 1 million according to figures published by the national office for statistics.

The Government £1 Billion pound flagship scheme called “Youth Contract” was introduced to provide nearly half-a-million new opportunities for 18-24 year olds, including apprenticeships and voluntary work experience placements³¹. However recent data published by the Department for Work and Pensions show that despite employers who were supposedly subsidised to take on 160,000 young people by the 2015 general election, little more than 4 and half thousand (4,690) young people have actually found long-term work³². The Government has dramatically missed its target of getting young people into work by more than 92 per cent! With failure like this by the Government, no wonder there are still almost a million young people out of work in our country.

What many adults enjoyed when they were young, the young people of today will never enjoy. My younger brother who is 16 years old now and in college will never benefit from EMA allowance, which was something I had the privilege of having and helped me whilst I was in college and he is only four years younger than I. Many politicians of the older generation would have been to university for free, or been privileged enough to have their families pay for it. The youth of today however must pay on average £9000 every academic year for something many adults enjoyed for free or for which they paid three times less. Young people going to university will be on average £60,000 in debt by the time they leave before they have even started working life or bought a house.

Another argument against the lowering of voting age is maturity. Some argue that at 16 and 17 years of age, young people are not mature enough to vote about decisions that affect their life. I am not sure if this is meant as an insult to the intelligence of the vast amount of 16 and 17 year olds who are politically engaged and more than competent enough to vote. If we truly believe young people aged 16 and 17 are not politically advanced enough to vote, then let us educate them.

A major issue with party politics today, is that party policies and party manifestos are too difficult to read, not just for young people but for many of us in society and maturity is not necessarily the issue. Party policies need to be clear and accessible and able to be read and understood by the reasonable man or woman in the street, not just by the very few politically or economically educated experts. If the bill to reduce the voting age becomes law, I strongly recommend that policies are made more user-friendly so they can be more easily understood by the general public. How else can a man and woman of whatever age understand what a political party is for and what it is against?

Political parties can create manifestos that are aimed at younger voters so without all the nice, big and flowery words to put them off reading a manifesto, or to sugar-coat irrational policies.

Some of those against the lowering of the voting age say that because 16 and 17 year olds supposedly lack maturity, they are more likely to be influenced by their parents and vote for whom their parents vote for. However, this is not a reasonable argument either, because some adults today are guilty of not being informed enough at their age, but they still vote. Some adults still vote for whom their own parents vote for. Young people have more access to far more information than the generations

before them had growing up. This is mainly because of the massive growth of the internet and media platforms which can be used as sources to easily educate and inform young people. I have seen no evidence to support this assertion that the 16 year olds are not mature enough to vote and my own experiences as a young person as well as speaking to many young people contradict such claims.

Young people receive too much criticism from society and not enough credit, in general. When young people do well in exams, instead of saying they are really achieving outstanding grades at schools, we say exams are getting easier and need to be toughened. As a result thousands of children had to retake exams last year because examiners made mistakes around "grade boundaries". The issue is that we are under-teaching young people in schools. If some young people do not know who the prime minister is, or what policies are being carried out, then we need to teach them this in schools. Young people at 16 are being undermined and are in fact maturing faster and accomplishing things the older generation could never have done before at such an age. There are many areas of life in which young people are very advanced, particularly technology to take one example. If anything, our education system is not keeping up with the advancement and maturity of young people, and not educating them on other important things like politics, which affect their lives.

(6) 16 and 17 years old don't agree themselves that they should be allowed to vote

There is also the argument that "16 and 17 year olds are not fully convinced themselves that they should be given the right to vote from 16 so why should we even bother to give them such a right?"

This is not a just argument, because disagreement is not always a bad thing and can be seen as a healthy measure in ensuring that a rational and well thought out compromise is met between those for and against.

Interestingly, I have found that after I have informed a 16 or 17 year old or even adults who are opposed to the lowering of the voting age, about the rights and responsibilities you already have at 16, they tend to change their view. The truth is that many people who are opposed to lowering the voting age do not understand the full picture, and when they do, they often decide to support a change in the law.

History shows us there have been many occasions where we should have changed laws much sooner, but we didn't because we were waiting for a clear majority, which in most cases never arose. I feel strongly that many years from now,

if we do not allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in all public elections and referendums, we will regret that we were on the wrong side of history and that the arguments against such proposals were flawed and discriminatory. Waiting for a majority vote or complete agreement amongst 16 and 17 years old, should not delay the decision to allow them the right to vote.

Have other groups before been denied the right to vote on similar grounds?

Those in favour of lowering the voting age, talk about the similarity of the arguments put forward against are similar to those put forward to deny women and the working classes the right to vote³³. When women were campaigning for the right to vote in the 19th and 20th century, they were told by politicians in government as well as others that:

- Women were too irresponsible to vote;
- Women could be easily influenced;
- Women were not interested in voting;
- Not a majority of women were interested in having the right to vote therefore women should not be given the right to vote;
- Men who had the right to vote now, knew what was best for women;
- Women were not competent enough to vote and would make decisions based on emotions³⁴.

The arguments against women voting, debated 14 years prior to women finally achieving the same voting rights as men through the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, are as wrong now as they were then. Many of the arguments opposing the case that the voting age should be lowered are injudicious and are largely based on the same arguments used to deny the rights of women to vote as well as the fear of the unknown.

Votes at 16 should be supported because it is giving young people aged 16 and 17 a positive right and consent which is democratic. We must all remember we are not protecting 16 and 17 year olds from smoking or drinking, both of which cause them bodily harm.



Possible compromises for first-time voters who are aged 16 and 17

One of the controversial arguments offered as a compromise to lowering the voting age to 16, is to only allow 16 and 17 year olds who get a GCSE in politics or citizenship to vote. Hopefully we can all see what is wrong with this policy, as many of the electorate are allowed to vote without any of those qualifications. We cannot have one rule for adult voters and one rule for younger voters, where is the equality in that?

The IPPR think-tank in their report called *Divided Democracy*³⁵, agreed that there are many reasons why the voting age should be lowered but, mentioned that the uncertainty of the potential impact of electoral turnout if young people from 16 can vote, put the chances of the enfranchisement in dispute. Therefore they proposed that the government should introduce *“an obligation for new electors to turnout once would go a long way towards breaking the habit of non-voting that often gets passed from generation to generation”*³⁶.

I will not debate the whole issue of compulsory voting and the reasons for and against, because it is not one of the focuses of this report and is a major subject in itself. However, I would recommend those reading this report to read the IPPR report for a more in-depth look at the case for compulsory voting.

In my interview with Simon Hughes MP, I asked him what his thoughts were on the introduction of compulsory voting for first time voters who are 16 and 17 years old. Simon Hughes MP told me that:

“It’s (the policy proposal) superficially attractive but it’s not fair and practical and if young people don’t vote they will have to pay penalties and fines and this will give young people the wrong impression of the political system that it is oppressive and is forcing them to vote”.

When I met up with Guy Lodge, who is an Associate Director for Politics and Power at IPPR, as well as one of the authors of the *Divided Democracy* report, I asked him why did the think-tank take the position that lowering of the voting age would be compatible with compulsory voting for first-time 16 year old voters?. Guy Lodge said that:

“Compulsory voting for first-time voters who are 16 is a good idea but at the moment there is not much interest in the idea of compulsory voting but it is an idea worth exploring. The two benefits of our proposals are that it will get young people in the habit of voting because you will be more likely to vote 2nd time and 3rd time. Compulsory voting would force people to vote and force politicians to be accountable to everyone because everyone will be voters”.

Guy Lodge did go on later to say that compulsory voting for young first-time voters will not cure the deep problems of our democracy which has many young people feeling disaffected with politics. But he did say that he thinks *“there is a case for it, as a sort of emergency surgery to get young people to vote”*.

In other words, if young people who were 16 and 17 had to vote (with the option of choosing ‘none of the above’ on their ballot box) then the issue of participation rates dropping, would be resolved.

Most people I have interviewed and asked for their thoughts on the introduction of compulsory voting for first time voters who are 16 and 17 years old, were against this proposition by IPPR for the reason that it is not acceptable or equitable to tell one group of voters you do not have vote, and then force another group to vote or be fined, like the voters in Australia who refused to vote at elections.

Democracy is about choice, therefore, from the moment we force people to vote, we remove the option of choice which defeats the concept of a legitimate democracy. People should be made to understand it is our legal responsibility as citizens to register and vote. Michael Sani, from Bite the Ballot spoke passionately against this proposal in our interview saying:

“We need to try a lot harder to engage people before we force them. We haven’t tried many solutions, such as political education and rock the vote campaigns, to encourage people to vote before we take such drastic steps. Young people should not be forced. They should be inspired and understand why they should vote.”

What we can learn from Austria about Votes at 16?

Austria is the first and only country in Europe to lower the voting age to 16 in all nation-wide elections since 2008. There is a lot the UK can learn from Austria, Norway, Brazil and other countries where young people can already vote from 16. However, in this report I will focus primarily on the research conducted in Austria and show what we can learn from their democracy, which involves people from 16 years onwards.

In October, 2013, I was fortunate enough to visit Austria and stayed in Vienna for a few days. I was initially attending a Youth BarCamp in Austria, on e-Participation, as a delegate of the British Youth Council. I had the opportunity to socialise and discuss the lowering of the voting age to 16 with over 50 delegates from other European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Spain, Belgium, Finland and Austria.

Speaking with some of the young people in Austria who were 16 and 17, I found that most of them felt that even though they were entitled to the right to vote, they still felt that they were not really being listened to by politicians. Findings from research produced by SORA showed that more than 50% of young people who responded to their survey said that politicians in Austria paid no attention to the important issues in the country³⁷. Many young people who took part in the study said that politicians were not recognising young people as a separate group with “special needs, concerns, and perspectives on societal developments, their individual fears and aspirations³⁸”.

All the young people that I had the privilege of speaking to, consistently accepted that they should be given the right to vote at 16 and would rather have the right to vote than not. This disaffection amongst the young voters doesn't surprise me, as voter apathy amongst young people is an issue across the whole of Europe.

The UK, in comparison to Austria, has more democratic youth structures outside of the National Youth Council, such as the Young Mayor Network and UK Youth Parliament, as well as various social action initiatives and organisations like Bite The Ballot, which help to mobilise young voters and get them participating much more in our democracy. There is a deficit of these youth-led democratic structures and social initiatives in Austria.

Extensive research published in December 2012 in Austria by Dr. Eva Zeglovits at the University of Vienna,³⁹ shows that since young people have had the right to vote at 16 at 17 in Austria, their interest in politics has significantly risen:

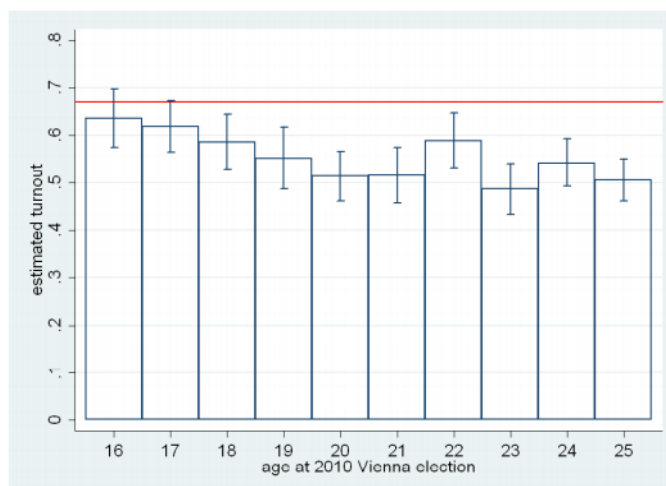
What happend in Austria?

Young people’s interest in politics rises

		16-18, federal elections 2008	16-17, Vienna election 2005	16-18, 2004
How interested are you in politics	Very interested	23	12	9
	Fairly interested	34	37	25
	Not very interested	34	38	50
	Not at all interested	9	12	14
	Don't know, answer refused	< 1	1	2
n		1.000	700	318

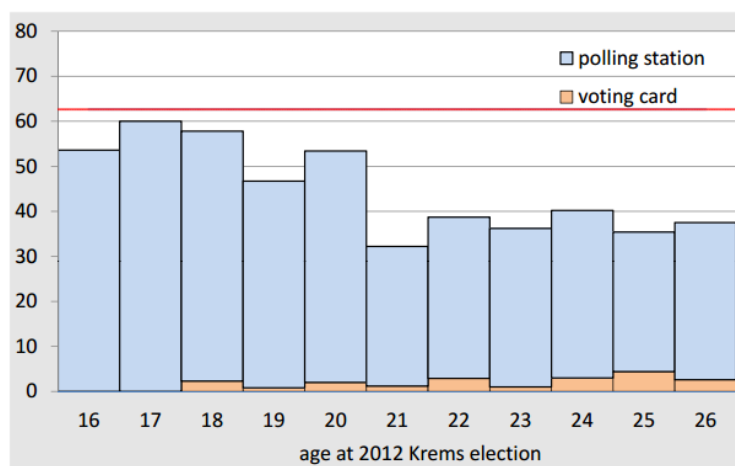
Dr Zeglovits’ research also shows that when focussing on the voter turnout of those aged 16 and 17 at two regional elections in Vienna (2010) and Krems (2012), the voter turnout of this age group was higher than other young people aged 18 to 25.

Turnout at Vienna regional election 2010



turnout estimated from a sample of electoral lists

Turnout at Krems regional election 2012



The research in Austria also gives positive evidence that if the voting age is lowered to 16 in the UK, then the issue of lower voter turnout may not necessarily be caused, if the correct measures are taken to encourage those enfranchised to vote to exercise their democratic right. It also strengthens the argument that young people in general, as well as 16 and 17 year olds, are interested in politics and will be more interested in politics and democracy if they have a vested civic interest in it and can vote.

Dr Zeglovits' research findings are very supportive for the case of lowering the voting age. However, despite the encouraging statistics, she also highlights that:

- Campaigns and activities are needed to mobilise young voters
- There is a need to address the less educated young people
- There is a need to address the less integrated young people in society e.g. the young people not in schools
- We must not forget to mobilise and educate 18-25 year olds to vote⁴⁰

Finally, Dr Eva Zeglovits stated that *"the lowering of the voting age had the effect, that political interest or attitudes of 16 and 17 year olds are no longer something private that goes on in your parent's home, but that schools have got the tasks of making them ready to vote"*.

We can also find from the research published by SORA that in Norway, after they allowed 16 and 17 year olds the chance to vote in 21 local elections in 2011, that 58% of the enfranchised 16 and 17 year olds voted. This was slightly lower than the overall turnout level of 63% in these municipalities, but much higher than the turnout of 46% among regular first-time voters (aged 18–21)⁴¹. Two factors explain the high turnout of 16 and 17 year olds in Austria and Norway. Firstly, 16 and 17 year olds are more easily mobilized than their slightly older peers and secondly they still go to school, live at home, and have not moved out of their local community.

Why is it important that more young people vote as a whole?



If more young people including 16 and 17 year olds who are now affected by the tripling of university tuition-fees had been able to vote in great numbers and had stood as an influential voter's block, I am very sure that many politicians would have thought twice about raising tuition-fees. As stated in The Kenny Report *"because there is no right to vote at the age of 16, many young people are disenfranchised before they even get a chance to vote. The political system is weighted in favour of those who are eligible to vote at the expense of young people who cannot"*⁴².

Research published by the Intergenerational Foundation (IF) think-tank, shows that the population is ageing, which also has deeper implications for young people who feel as if their voices are not being heard by government. Findings from IF research show that *"in 1971 the over-60s accounted for 20% of the population; by 2020 that figure is likely to be 33% – or one-third of all UK citizens. Likewise, by 2020 more than half of the electorate will be over 50"*⁴³. This demographic is quite different for young people descended from UK citizen groups born abroad, whose populations are significantly younger.

The 'grey vote', which is essentially the 65+ electorate, dictates a lot of policies and is over-represented in our system. The grey vote is creating issues for the future, because whilst the power to affect policy making is substantially held within the elderly electorate, those most affected are the younger people who have to live with the policy effects for longer. This becomes part of the dynamic, as young people are the minority voice within the electorate⁴⁴. Whilst it is important for young people and the elderly to vote, we face a pyramid-shaped age distribution within the voting population, which undermines the

vote of young people dramatically⁴⁵. Giving 16 and 17 year old citizens the right to vote can help close the gap in the age inequality that we see in the electorate. If 16 and 17 year olds are given the vote, they may even reconcile their interests with an ageing population, especially as young people will all grow old at some point! If young people vote for what they want to happen to their elders and themselves when they are older, then maybe elderly voters might vote for what younger people want as well as themselves. As a result, there will be greater rather than less understanding between generations, as whatever young or old voters choose to vote for is for the good off all people, not just specific age sections of society.

Some people may still ask how this information affects young voters. The answer is simple. 94% of people aged 65+ are already registered to vote and at the 2010 election, 76% of registered voters aged over 65 went to the ballot box, as did 73% of the 55–64 year-olds. The older population tends to vote in greater numbers compared to young people. In the 2009 local election, in areas where elections were being held, it was found that for every 1 young person who voted there were 7 elderly people who exercised their vote⁴⁶. This really strengthens the case that young people need to deal directly with our democracy by voting instead of standing on the sidelines.

It is not rocket science to conclude that many politicians are protecting the interests of the older generation when young people do not actively vote at the ballot box. Nick Hurd MP rightly stated at the UKYP House of Commons (2013) sitting recently *“we cannot let the politics of this country and this place be dominated by the politics and priorities of old people. And if we’re not careful, there’s a real danger that we will⁴⁷”*.

Politicians tend to canvass those who are on the electoral register in their constituencies, which tends to be the older as opposed to the younger generation who have the lowest turnout rates of the age groups. Politicians want to catch the votes of those who are registered and who actually vote (which tends not to be young people because of low registration and voting rates) and they are more inclined to shape policies in the favour of those who will potentially vote for them (which tends to be much older sections of the adult population).

Young people should picture voting like this. If I have a £100 giveaway for the 10 people who partake in my survey, the £100 can only be given to those who partake and not to those who have the opportunity to partake but choose not to.

Therefore, if young people do not partake in our democracy or vote in greater numbers when we are given the option to, and if we don’t exercise the tools of our democracy then how can we ever change things or expect to have a fair share of the money when it is spent on the public’s needs? One life lesson I have learnt on my journey is that you can’t change anything by sitting on the side-lines; you have to be part of the process.

I do not think I am wrong in saying that young people are clearly not on the Governments agenda, particularly as stakeholders or as guardians of a future democracy. The proof is in the pudding as to how young people feel they are treated and engaged with by politicians and political parties. I hope that Votes at 16 will encourage a high turnout and change the political landscape, and that the Government will realise that the youth have a voice not to be ignored. Young people are tired of not being able to genuinely influence decisions that will affect their lives and deserve a piece of the public pie and not just the leftovers. Studies show that when young people are faced with a genuine opportunity to involve themselves in a meaningful process that offers them a real chance of influence, they do so with enthusiasm and responsibility. One of the ways we can genuinely include those who are under 18 in our society, is to give them a voice at the ballot box. This will create further platforms for young people to express their concerns, voice their opinions, and expand our democracy.

Voter registration

Voter registration is a big issue in our country. One of the main reasons why a lot of young people who are eligible to vote are not voting in elections, or able to vote when they want to, is because they are not registered and do not even realise that they have to be before they can vote. This is because many young people are not ever told explicitly or made aware that they need to be registered on the electoral roll in order to vote. Low numbers of voter registration have bigger implications in our country than we perceive. Registration is the first hurdle that has to be jumped before people can even exercise their democratic right to vote. This section of the report will discuss how the changes in the electoral roll system will affect many young people in particular, and reduce the chances of them voting if we are not careful and do not take the necessary measures to ensure young people are registered.

Background information to the changes of our electoral roll system

To register in the UK you must be:

16 years old or over and

- a British citizen
- Or an Irish, EU or qualifying Commonwealth citizens. Qualifying Commonwealth citizens are those who have leave to enter or remain in the UK, or do not require such leave

Currently in England, Scotland and Wales we have a household electoral registration system. By law, a householder (or a named person) is required every year to complete and return an electoral registration form to their local authority, on their own behalf and on behalf of anyone else who lives in the household

and who is eligible to vote. If the householder (or a named person) does not provide this information to their local authority, no one living at the property will be included on the register, which means that they will all lose their right to vote.

Registration on the electoral register is compulsory in England, Scotland and Wales for householders (or a named person) and those who fail to provide the relevant information to their local authorities may also face having to pay a fine of £1,000. However, there are very few prosecutions against householders for not completing the electoral registration form⁴⁸.

Being registered does not mean that you have to vote at an election, but you will not be able to do so unless you are registered.

The Electoral Commission have made repeated calls for a change in the law of the electoral registration system since 2003⁴⁹ and have raised concerns about electoral fraud and the integrity of the current register.

The government has taken heed of the Electoral Commission recommendation and has called for a change in the way people are registered and as a result, have decided to pass a new Bill which gained Royal Assent in January 2013.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 will introduce individual electoral registration (IER) in the summer of 2014, which will mean it will be compulsory for each person in a household to register to vote individually, rather than rely on a householder (or a named person) to do this on everyone's behalf⁵⁰. The plans will take place in England and Wales but the process will be delayed in Scotland until after the Scottish referendum. IER has been used since 2002 in Northern Ireland⁵¹.

The forthcoming historic change of the voter registration system has caused a huge stir amongst MP's and the general public. Those opposing the change to IER have said that the level of voter-registration will fall as it did in Northern Ireland when IER was introduced there by the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. The number of people on the register fell by 10.5% in Northern Ireland when it changed from household registration to IER however the legislation was seen as successful in reducing electoral fraud⁵².

In the Electoral Reform Society's submission of evidence to the Cabinet Office (in relation to Individual Electoral Registration White Paper and draft legislation) they highlighted that they welcomed the introduction of IER, but raised concerns in relation to the government's implementation⁵³.

The key points in their submission of evidence were the following:

- *The UK Government must address completeness and accuracy together. The legislation will improve accuracy and counter fraud, but risks bringing registration rates down to 60—65% (Electoral Commission);*
- *Any measure that leads to a significant reduction in levels of voter registration runs contrary to the UK Government's stated intention to distribute power and opportunity to people, and carries a number of unintended consequences in other policy areas;*

- *Mechanisms such as the retention of a full household Annual Canvass in 2014 will help Electoral Registration Officers frontload registration and prevent any drop-off caused by IER.*

Those in favour of the change to IER have argued that despite the concerns that voter-registration is very likely to fall; there are benefits to the new system which cannot be ignored.

People will be asked for identification such as date of birth and National Insurance number, which will be used to verify that everyone on the register is who they say they are. IER will create an electoral register of which everyone can be fully confident and a system which reduces the risk of fraud and duplication, as well as eradicating redundant entries⁵⁴.

Another benefit of IER is that it will help ensure that those people who are least likely to be registered, such as those in shared housing and students who move regularly, will have the opportunity of registering themselves and will not have to worry about whether the householder who received the household electoral registration form put their name on it, or not.

The then Minister for Constitutional Reform, Mark Harper, made a statement about the government proposals in regards to individual voter registration on 15 September 2010 and stated that:

“No one will be removed from the electoral register who fails to register individually until after the 2015 general election, giving people at least 12 months to comply with the new requirements, and ensuring as complete a register as possible for the election. From 2014 onwards any new registrations will need to be carried out under the new system, including last-minute registrations⁵⁵”.

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), which is a non-governmental and non-partisan body that has 1745 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services, have recently published a research paper (November 2013) commenting on the “considerable challenges” the implementation of IER poses.

AEA have said its members were clear that the government should continue with the implementation of IER and that they were preparing for the change. However, AEA have said they were not as confident as they should be about plans to register people to vote as individuals, rather than by households, in time for the 2015 polls⁵⁶.

AEA commented in their “readiness assessment” report that “with a number of significant components required for the implementation of IER not yet fully completed and tested, there is very little room for slippage to the current timetable. If such slippage occurs, it has the potential to significantly impact administrators’ ability to deliver IER. If any of the risks set out below fail to be fully and properly addressed, the AEA may need to reconsider its view about preparedness to proceed with IER in 2014”.

AEA found from a survey of administrators in London that an “overwhelming” number of them were not confident that the new system would work⁵⁷.

AEA's biggest concern was that if IT systems used for IER were to fail eleven days prior to polling day, then this could result in electors being disenfranchised from registering and voting. Furthermore, people trying to get on the electoral register for the first time would be worst affected⁵⁸.



How does the change to IER affect young people?

Voter registration is already a big issue in our country and with the soon to be implemented change to IER, voter registration rates may fall, which is more likely than not. However, this comes at the price of having a more robust and trustworthy electoral registration system in place.

At least 6 million people in the UK are not registered to vote. This huge figure represents just fewer than 10% of the population. A highly disproportionate percentage of those eligible to vote consist mainly of people who are either, young, private rental tenants, ethnic minorities, or disabled people. Even when these same groups of people are registered, they are the same groups that are most unlikely to vote.

The Electoral Commission published a report in December 2011 on research that it had carried out into the completeness of the register⁵⁹. The report showed that:

- The April 2011 parliamentary registers were 82.3% complete, meaning that 17.7% of the eligible electorate were not registered at this time.
- The December 2010 registers were estimated to be 85-87% complete, meaning that an estimated 13-15% of those eligible were not registered after the 2010 annual canvass
- The last estimate for the completeness of the registers found that 8-9% were not registered in December 2000;

- Only 14% of people who moved house after the 2010 annual canvass had registered at their new address by April 2011;
- 56% of 19-24 year olds are registered, compared with 94% of those aged 65+;
- 77% of people from Black & Ethnic Minorities (BME) communities are registered (compared with 86% of white people);
- 56% of European Union citizens and 68% of Irish / Commonwealth citizens are registered on the local government registers, compared with 84% of UK citizens;
- 56% of people living in private rented homes are registered, compared with 88% for homeowners;
- 44% of those not registered to vote mistakenly believe that they are.

From the data produced by the Electoral Commission above, we can see that young people are undoubtedly a hugely under-registered group. To make matters worse, nearly half of the young people not registered mistakenly believe that they are registered to vote⁶⁰. Recent statistics published by the Government earlier this year showed that in some regions, only a third of 16 to 17 year olds who should have registered ahead of their first elections, have in fact registered to vote⁶¹. All these statistics ring alarm bells that we need to make some drastic improvements to ensure that young people who are eligible to register are registered.. This is because far too many young people are thus disenfranchised of their democratic right to vote before they even get to the ballot box.

Based on the electoral registration and voting figures published by Government we can see that nearly half of 18-24 year olds are not on the electoral register and less than half of 18-24 year olds actually vote⁶². This is a huge problem for young people as a whole because nearly half of us are not registered to vote, and of those of us who are registered, less than half of us vote anyway.

If more young people were registered and voting, then young people could as a bloc vote, choose the next government(s) and in some constituencies where there are a lot of young people, dictate who their local Councillors or MP (politicians) will be.

One the major factors as to why a huge percentage of young people are not being registered is that many young people do not even know that they need to be registered to vote or even registered in the first place. We have seen many cases where young people go to the polling station mistakenly believing they are registered, only to find out they are not on the electoral register and therefore not eligible to vote.

**Interesting fact: According to the Electoral Commission, the Government intends to bring in online registration as a way that could help increase registration, particularly among young people and students.*

What are the disadvantages of not being on the electoral register?

A lot of us may not even be aware that if we are not registered, then it can cause issues for us and our wider community later on.

Many of us should understand that if you are not registered then:

- 1. You may find it difficult getting credit for a loan or mortgage** – This is because registered credit reference agencies are entitled to a copy of the electoral register and may use this data as one of the ways to verify where someone lives, when they apply for credit. This explains why some young people may not be able to get a mobile phone contract, loans or to pay weekly or monthly payments on credit for a particular product they want.
- 2. Your local authority will not be given the adequate resources it needs by the government, to continue providing services and improve your council in areas where there is dire need** – This is because central government resources are allocated to local authorities based on the number of people on the electoral register, and not on the actual number of residents living there. Youth services are more likely to be cut if a lot of young people are not registered in a local authority and therefore they are under-represented on their local authority electoral register.
- 3. The juries which are chosen at your local magistrate or crown courts which are taken from our electoral register, may not reflect the make-up of your community** - If young people most importantly, as well as private rental tenants, ethnic minorities or disabled people are disproportionately under-registered on the electoral register, then our juries are unlikely to have these groups of people reflected on a jury in our courts. This is a big concern when looking at the interests of social justice and determining whether those who face trial, have the right to a fair trial. As most juries, especially those outside of London, are likely to consist of all-white jurors with hardly any young people among them. There is currently shocking evidence that members of BME groups are over-represented at virtually every stage of the criminal justice process relative to their representation in the general population⁶³ Statistics show that members of a BME group are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, charged and in prison than their White counterparts. In 2010, the Ministry of Justice commissioned research into *“Are juries fair?”*⁶⁴ and quoted that *“despite the lack of evidence of actual discrimination by all-white juries in cases where the defendant or victim was a BME, concerns about the appearance of fairness may still arise with all-white juries in two particular instances. First, BME defendants may still perceive unfairness when there are no BME jurors in their cases. Second, concerns about the appearance of jury fairness are also likely to arise when all-White juries try White defendants accused of racially aggravated offences against BME victims”*⁶⁵.

We should all be registering on the electoral roll, not just because we should by law but also because it has many obvious benefits for us as individuals and for our communities as a whole, as illustrated above. Most importantly, registering gives us the choice to vote if we wish to, should an election be suddenly called at any time.

The change of our electoral roll system to IER will mean registration becomes an individual responsibility of all those entitled to vote, rather than the responsibility of single householders. The government must do more to raise awareness of those groups who are most likely to be unregistered. In relation to young people, we should ensure that they are encouraged or supported to register from early on in their school life, because it is easier to communicate with young people whilst they are still in school. Once they understand the importance of, and how to fill in a registration application, this can become a habit when they move into new addresses.

If we really want to increase the numbers of young people registered, then ideally we should be registering young people after citizenship classes in years 10 and 11 at school. If younger people being active citizens mean so much to our country, I am sure that there should be time to fit political and civic education into school life, because being an active citizen is important and we want everyone to contribute. School cannot continue to be solely focussed on exams, but also on ensuring young people understand the basic principles of politics and prepared to carry out their civic duties and contribute to our democracy.

Northern Ireland politician, Mark Durkan MP during the course of our interview mentioned that:

“It’s all political parties’ responsibility to encourage voters to register and vote whether it is for them or their opponents. More efforts should be made to encourage or remind people to register”

Some of those I have interviewed said that we should incentivise voter registration further, by rewarding benefits such as council tax freeze if people get registered. This is likely to increase the number of people on our electoral register. If more people are registered, then we would all hope that more people would choose to vote and participate in our democracy as well.

How can we increase the numbers of young people who are registered?

Grassroots steps

In the United States of America (US), the Rock the Vote campaign is an outstanding example of a campaign we can replicate in this country to increase voter registration amongst young people. Rock the Vote⁶⁶ was founded over twenty years ago and since then it has ensured over five million young people have registered to vote in the US. The campaign is dedicated to *“building the political power of young people by engaging them in the electoral process, urging politicians to pay attention to issues that matter to young voters, and protecting their fundamental right to vote⁶⁷”*.

Rock the Vote engages with young people by using tools such as music, popular culture and technology to mobilise young people to vote and take part in the process and make a change for the betterment of the younger generation. Rock the Vote has used a variety of campaign tactics that can be implemented here in this country, ranging from traditional tactics such as phone calls and canvassing to modern tactics such as advertisements, social media, emailing and mobile apps. In the UK, it is rare to hear of young people who have been contacted by institutions and campaigners through social media or through mobile, to raise awareness of the political process of this country. This form of contact implemented by Rock the Vote in America can help to increase the levels of voter registration in our country, if it is executed correctly in the UK.



Bite the Ballot, are an organisation who lead a voter registration campaign in our country, which mirrors the US Rock the Vote organisation. Bite the Ballot’s ‘Rock Enrol’ programme has proved to be a success amongst young people.

The Rock Enrol⁶⁸ programme, co-created by the Cabinet Office and Bite the Ballot consists of 45 minute sessions with young people to bring to life why they should vote. Facilitators do this by using methods like using interactive games which gets the young people to talk about issues that relate to them. The Rock Enrol programme introduces voting to young people and gets them to open up and discuss political issues that affect or are of interest to them. At the end of the Rock Enrol sessions, young people are invited to register on the electoral register as a voter and can do it right there and then.. The programme shows young people that they can make their own decisions; and that by registering to vote, and voting afterwards, they have a chance to have a say and do something about what they care about in society. Conveniently Rock Enrol offers their programme to be incorporated in citizenship curriculum in schools⁶⁹. Michael Sani, who is one of the co-founders of Bite the Ballot, told me in our interview that young people who were not old enough to register after sessions with Bite the Ballot, have been texting or emailing him as soon as they have turned 16 to tell him that they have just got registered.

Legislative steps

The Government can also take legislative steps to tackle the issue of voter registration, as they did in the US under President Bill Clinton. On May 20th, 1993, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993⁷⁰ (NVRA), also known as “The Motor Voter Act” was passed in the USA. This Act required state governments to make the voter registration process easier in order to increase the number of people on the electoral register, by providing people with the opportunity to register whenever they applied for, or sought to renew, a driver’s license. The Act also required states to offer voter-registration opportunities at all offices that provide public assistance of any kind e.g. libraries, schools and disability centres.

This law made voter-registration easier, but it has faced some criticism in the US because it did not attempt to tackle the issue of electoral fraud. However, we must take the positives from this legislation and the lessons to be learned from it since it has been passed over a decade ago. If we were to implement such a law like “The Motor Voter Act” in the UK now, then we would need to ensure that the correct measures were in place to prevent issues of electoral fraud. We could make registration easier by providing people in the UK with the opportunity to register whenever they have an encounter with the state services, so for example, when they go to the post office to get a passport form, or when they go into their local GP for a check-up. We would need to make sure that when people do register, the forms are user-friendly and much simpler to fill in. We would also need those who wish to be registered, to provide proof of identity in order that we escape the issue of electoral fraud.

If such a law is passed in the UK, it will not be a silver bullet to the issue of low voter-registration or voting rates amongst young people or the general population. This is because people do not vote merely because they are registered. People vote because they feel they inspired to do so, or because they feel it is their civic duty to vote. A voter-registration law with simpler forms to complete will help to assist our goal of increasing the rates of voter-registration, particularly amongst younger voters and possibly increase voting rates. However, we need to make sure electoral fraud does not increase, because we need a robust and trustworthy system.

Citizenship and Political Education



Citizenship education which is part of the National Curriculum aims to teach students about how the United Kingdom is governed and how the political system works.⁷¹ There is a real concern that the current citizenship curriculum does not adequately meet the needs of young people. Many young people are calling for reforms to our education system and now want what they call a “*curriculum for life*”, which will teach them life skills as well as provide them with formal education⁷².

The vast majority of young people believe that the skills citizenship classes provide contribute heavily to their political, social and cultural awareness and as a result this education contributes to increasing their chances of becoming active and well informed citizens in society⁷³. The success of our democracy and the political process which sustains it, depends on these young citizens being aware of and exercising their right to vote.

One way to mould young people into responsible individuals who will fulfil their civic duties and can make positive impacts on their communities is through citizenship classes at school. As the British Youth Council reports,

“Schools play a critical role in supporting young people to develop the skills and knowledge that will help them later in life. Their role is more than one of reinforcing knowledge learned elsewhere, because for some young people their school may be the only place they have to learn about these kinds of issues”⁷⁴.

The current framework for citizenship classes in British schools explains that teachers should raise adequate awareness of what democracy is, what government is, and how the laws of our country are made and upheld. Young people should be taught at school the skills and knowledge they need to

define their own political stance, and be taught to have critically thought-out opinions on contemporary social issues that affect them. Citizenship training should teach, allow, and encourage young people to think freely, to debate and argue rationally and logically through reasoned argument.⁷⁵

The education system in place today needs to pay greater homage to the democratic system of our country by exploring with students, and teaching students, the core use of tools used to maintain a fair and equal democracy.

How the introduction of political education in the national curriculum can complement the lowering of the voting age to 16 years old?

It is argued that young people should not be extended the right to vote because they do not have the knowledge required to make an intelligent and informed decision. But if the voting age was lowered to 16, then the education system should be promoting political education from much earlier on in the lives of students. Young people need to be empowered and have their common misconceptions about politics challenged. Young people should be taught about politics in chunks as soon as they start secondary school, up until they leave.

Teaching young people their rights and duties as citizens is important and these should not just be taught in schools; citizenship should be taught in other institutions such as the workplace and youth clubs. Young people need to be taught about politics in formal and informal settings. Politics does not have to be a complicated subject matter or seem like a taboo topic to discuss. Many young people are concerned that the current political landscape is so removed from meeting their needs that any involvement by young people can feel meaningless. This notion needs to be dispelled and the way to achieve such an aim is through classes at school and more communication between politicians and youngsters.

One of the most basic responsibilities of a citizen is to vote. When politics is taught well in school, it teaches young people to be aware of such responsibilities like voting. The basics of the political system can be taught to every child at school, but not only that, children can learn what the specific party politics are in school. Lowering the voting age goes hand in hand with making political education part of the curriculum. As Sadiq Khan MP said during my interview with him:

“Lowering the voting age and making political education part of the national curriculum goes hand-in-hand; there is no point in widening the franchise without making political education part of the national curriculum”.

By making politics a part of citizenship education, it will create a generation of informed voters, which will help to ensure that whatever Government is in power, it will be more accountable and a lot more attentive to young people's demands.

Politics itself within and outside of the parameters of citizenship education should be, and is considered vital to the understanding of daily life. The political environment of young people shapes and affirms the type of people they will grow up to be. If young people feel apathetic towards their own involvement in society, it is because the social policy makers today are not involving young people enough, or doing enough, to see to it that an interest in politics is created from an early age by using political education as a platform.

Young people often do not recognise their own interest in politics, yet when a question is raised in a topical discussion about their feelings toward wider society or education or social justice, they become fully engaged in the dialogue.

In a group discussion which I held between young people from the Lewisham Youth advisory group, the general consensus was that whilst there are some educational lessons about politics in school, the classes that are already there need to be substantially improved and young people need to be drawn into politics by interesting events or by organisations for example, Change Makers.⁷⁶

Change Makers is an organisation set up in 1994 that helps to develop young people and give them the tools and skills they need to make a positive change to the world by becoming active citizens. These types of organisations can bring in people like MPs to schools because it makes politics more interesting. Young people need to see this sort of commitment from current policy makers, this level of genuine consideration needs to be shown by politicians all throughout the UK.

Another exceptional example of an organisation that is helping to inform and prepare young people to be active citizens whom I have already mentioned, is Bite the Ballot⁷⁷. Bite the ballot has been reaching out to young people who have no understanding of how politics affects their daily life and who have objections to why they should vote. As a result of their sessions, Bite the Ballot have enabled over four thousand young people to register to vote, essentially because they have done what politicians should be doing-they have shown young people why they should vote, and why their voice counts.

When politics is taught to young people, it must be delivered in a fun, relevant, interactive way and not a chore to be taught, if it is to be placed on the school curriculum.

Why more politicians need to visit places where young people are in order to engage young people in politics

Young people do not need to see political figures like they are something alien but as human beings like them. Politicians should not be far removed and put on a pedestal, but are the elected representatives of the people, who young people can also hold to account. However, it is a hard job for young people to do this properly if they haven't been taught about politics and the roles of MPs in the first place.

John Bercow MP, the Speaker of the House of Commons, addresses the issue of communication between MP's and young people in an interview between himself and BBC School Reporters, Rachael and Gregory from Holbrook Academy. In his interview he says:

"We've got to communicate more often with young people using modern communication methods, social media etcetera, and every MP should regularly visit schools, colleges, universities and take an interest in the work of the youth parliament in the hope that by showing our respect for you, you will have some interest in and respect for politics"⁷⁸

The role of teachers in getting students registered and becoming active voting citizens



Teachers also need to be better engaged with students as well as politicians. If young people are to become forward thinking young adults who can step up into society in the most productive sense, then teachers themselves need to lead by example, not just citizenship teachers but all teachers. Teachers need to encourage students to register to vote before they leave school.

The teachers of today must recognise the importance of educating young people with such invaluable life skills such as how to campaign, lobby and debate. It's also important that citizenship education should be taught in a way that is interesting and balanced.

George Galloway MP told me that he firmly believes state schools do not do enough for political education. When I interviewed him to discuss votes at 16, he spoke to me about his travels to schools to raise political awareness. One of the key points he mentioned was that *"in private schools, there is a lot*

of political education, whereby the likes of political intellectual giants such as Noam Chomsky come to their schools and teach the students about politics, because the school departments want to see this happen. Unfortunately, these schools are an exception and right now this sort of stimulating and interactive teaching in many state schools is not being provided”.

We can see already that in the private schools throughout the UK, political education is considered important and is a significant part of their citizenship and extra-curricular curriculum. So why should it not be the case for every school across the UK?

Do we need to have political education in schools first before we lower the voting age to 16?

Giving 16 and 17 year olds the vote and putting political education on the national curriculum complement each other. Young people will feel that because they have the right to vote they need to be aware, and because they have been given political education in school, they will be ready to vote.

On the other hand, I must stress the case that making political education part of the national curriculum can be done without lowering the voting age and should be done regardless, as there is a strong indication that making political education a part of the national curriculum is a highly favourable consensus amongst young citizens. Civic education should be taught in years 7, 8 and 9, and then the basic principle of our democracy should be refreshed and built on further in the minds of year 10 and 11 students, so that when they leave school they are educated adequately enough to make an informed vote.

Whilst it is important to teach young people about politics, it is also equally important to educate them about other issues that may also affect them for the rest of their life. One objective of the national curriculum is that schools should be able to prepare students for opportunities, responsibilities and experiences later in life⁷⁹. According to these standards, schools should raise awareness about politics, financial literacy, sexual health & healthy relationship matters including any other relative and practical issues that a person may face in later life, for example such as coping with a death and so on.

In my interview with Baroness Margaret McDonagh, she stated the point that sums up my position in relation to the lowering of the voting age and political education in schools:

“You can have one (the lowering of the voting age) without the other (political education), but it is better if you have both because they are equally important and I wouldn’t want to presume that young people can’t vote without the political education like the majority of the British public.”

Conclusion

To conclude this report I must state firstly that in order to convince the Government to lower the voting age from 18 to 16, and to implement the other recommendations made in this report, it is vital to make all relevant campaigns cross-generational.

Young people must work alongside adults and the elderly to support campaigns in relation to votes at 16, voter registration and getting political education in our citizenship education. We need to change the attitude of older people towards young people and vice versa. We are much stronger when we come together, rather than when isolating ourselves.

My only concern will be if the Government just passes an Act that lowers the voting age to 16 and then does not have voter registration education and awareness raising campaigns, then young people will not take the opportunity to register and vote. Therefore, as a result, political inequality will remain high and the voices of young people will remain unheard, and all that we have worked for will have been a pointless exercise. If the voting age is to be lowered, then the education system needs to promote political education in all schools in order to ensure these young first-time voters are informed and willing to engage in our democracy. Young people need to be empowered and have their common misconceptions challenged about politics and voting, in order for them to vote and truly participate in our democracy. Politics affects all aspects of our daily lives whether we choose to vote or not and all young people should be aware of that before they make the choice.

Politicians are very hasty to say that young people should vote or should know more about politics, but they are not nearly as hasty to provide the adequate funding and resources to ensure that young people understand politics and the political process. Young people need to understand why they should be registered, why they should vote, how to lobby government, and what it means to be a citizen in a democracy. Most importantly we need to understand that we are the electorate and that we have the power to vote in the Government we want and that we should hold our elected politicians to account.

There is no doubt that if young people can vote from 16 and do so in great numbers, then politicians will be forced to be more accountable and forthcoming in relation to the interests of young people. If more young people voted in greater numbers, then politicians would do more to create fairer policies that do not negatively affect young people. I say this with conviction, as many politicians make this point themselves.

We cannot change what politics looks like unless we relentlessly challenge the status quo of politicians at all levels of government. Unless more of us, who are eligible to stand for political positions stop letting this notion of being too young, prevent us from entering leadership positions, young people will never be in positions of power. Let us not forget that experience does not necessarily come with age and there are some young people who are more than capable to be our representatives in Government. Just because we are young does not mean we are not leaders. We are the leaders of tomorrow, but unless some action

is taken on issues affecting young people today, some of our more vulnerable ones may not be around for tomorrow.

Young people can be more involved in the political process and should be. We need to be consulted from the outset and throughout the whole process of a Bill, not just at the end.

We all have our roles to play as politicians and as voters. In the same way that not all politicians are bad and can't be trusted, not all young people are not interested in politics and don't vote. We need to stop constantly feeding into stereotypes. Those of us who feel voting doesn't change anything, will maybe understand by reading this report, that having your right to vote and using it when and where it counts, does change things.

Overall, the arguments against lowering the voting age to 16 do not hold. There is little evidence to say that these citizens are less able or less motivated to participate effectively in politics. Young people can be engaged about politics from school through citizenship classes and we can start growing a new generation of leaders who are ethically motivated, and an engaged population that understands our democracy and holds our politicians to account. Lessons from other EU countries and other parts of the world show us the impact young people aged 16 and 17 can have when they exercise their right to vote and this gives us hope.

All political parties need to play their part in giving not just young people but the electorate a reason to vote and showing them how important their vote is to them and their party. Politicians should also take the time to explain why they have created the policies they do, and make their manifestos youth-friendly so young people can understand them too.

Change will not come overnight and the make-up of our parliament certainly won't change quickly. All the more reason to pave the way for the generations to come and who will benefit from reform, such as the lowering of the voting age.

As Lord Tyler put it so well, *“if people don't vote, particularly young people, then other people will and they may not have your interests at heart. This reminds me of that quote which says, all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing”*.

Politicians need to change the way they engage with young people. I have always said that *“If young people are to understand politics then politics must understand young people”*.

Young people should know everything they need to know about politics and voting. Maybe it is time we made voting easier? Not just for young people but for everyone, as this may improve voter turnout. We are in the age of technology. If we can do our banking online, get sensitive documents, like our driver's license or passports online, then surely we should be able to vote online. Most would agree with me that we should at least in this day and age, be able to vote at our local supermarket, or maybe even at the weekend?

Recommendations:

1. The Government should lower the voting age from 18 to 16 to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in all public elections and referendums.
2. Promote political education from an early age in our education system.
3. The Government should pass a law that provides people with the opportunity to register any time they have an encounter with state services.
4. Create a nation-wide cross-party campaign targeted at young people to raise awareness to ensure young people are registered and vote.
5. The Government should produce a more user-friendly registration form to enable more young people who are 16 and 17 years old to be registered.
6. Schools should do more to ensure that young people understand the many benefits of registering on the electoral register as well as voting.
7. The Electoral Commission should publish materials and broadcasts adverts that appeal to young people specifically, in order to persuade more young people to register and vote.
8. Political parties should create manifestos that have been informed by young people for young people, which are accessible and easy to read.
9. The Government should appoint a minister for youth. Many other democratic countries have a minister for youth whose sole responsibility is to ensure that youth is always on the Governments agenda.

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And lastly and most importantly, to the almighty God, who has been continually blessing me in all I do and who has taken me to heights beyond my imagination.



About the author

My name is Kenny Imafidon and I am 20 years old, from Peckham, South East London. I am an advisor and researcher on youth policy, currently a Partner at Coreplan, the Chair of the social enterprise Push Your Passion and I have recently become a Trustee of the British Youth Council since September 2013.

Last year, I was awarded a 3 year Amos Bursary scholarship to study a LLB degree at BPP University College and I am currently in the second year of my degree and enjoying the whole university experience.

I am the author of *"The Kenny Report: how do politics and economics affect gangs and serious youth violence across the UK?"* The first Kenny Report was published on 13th November 2012 and launched at the House of Commons. Since then, it has gained considerable attention from professionals working in the youth and youth violence sector, from politicians, from the media and from young people.

I was inspired to write *"The Kenny Report 2"* because I am passionate about youth issues and more than anything, I want to play my part in ensuring that young people have a voice and a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

Politics is not just something that only a few of us should be involved in. It is there to serve everyone, not just the privileged few. I strongly believe that young people should vote and that those who are aged 16 and 17 should be able to have their say at the ballot box and be genuinely included in our democracy. I hope you now feel as strongly about this issue as I do, and that together we can work towards a more enlightened future.

Twitter: [@KennyImafidon](https://twitter.com/KennyImafidon)

Appendix

Electoral reform society

The Electoral Reform Society is an independent organisation campaigning for a better democracy in the UK.

From getting big money out of politics, to votes at 16, pushing for House of Lords reform, and fairer votes for local government elections, we are campaigning hard to bring our democracy into the 21st century.

Find out how to get involved, sign up for updates and join us at

www.electoral-reform.org.uk

Facebook: [electoralreformsociety](https://www.facebook.com/electoralreformsociety)

Twitter: [@electoralreform](https://twitter.com/electoralreform)

Email: ers@electoral-reform.org.uk

Votes at 16 campaign (UK)

Take action and help make Votes at 16 a reality. There are lots of different ways you can get involved right away. From signing up to be a supporter, to emailing your MP or organising a debate in your school or college. Remember – this campaign is for you. The more of us who make ourselves heard, the louder the noise will be, and the stronger our call for change.

Find out more about how to get involved at

www.votesat16.org/

Facebook: [Votes at 16 \(UK\)](https://www.facebook.com/Votesat16UK)

Twitter: [@votesat16](https://twitter.com/votesat16)

National Voter Registration Day



WHAT?

A day in February, organised by Bite The Ballot and made possible by all the amazing organisations taking part, where schools, community groups and youth organisations will register to vote and make sure everyone else is!



HOW?

By signing up and committing to register as many people as you can, we will reach our goal! If you sign up we'll also send you helpful tools and resources to make registering your class, youth group or community as easy as possible.



WHEN?

5th February 2014 and every year after. The 5th of February is the anniversary of the Great Reform Act in 1832 which first introduced voter registration – sure, it was to white middle class men, but it was a start! We've come a long way since then and that should be celebrated.

Find out more about how to get involved at

www.bitetheballot.co.uk/nvrd/

Facebook: **Bite the Ballot**

Twitter: **@BiteTheBallot**

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