Lowering the Voting Age in the UK conference

Manchester, 25th January 2020

The Leverhulme Trust-funded project (2018-20), Lowering the Voting Age in the UK, is undertaking the first-detailed analysis of ‘Votes at 16’ in terms of enhancing youth democratic education, participation and the attendant framing of rights and responsibilities of youth and adult citizenship. It has tested public opinion with both under- and over-18s across the UK, and held a large number of interviews and focus groups with young people, politicians, policy-makers, and youth democracy advocates. The project has undertaken the first historical analysis of voting age reform in the UK, particularly the lowering of the voting age to 18 in 1969, and also reviewed a wide-range of international evidence.

The Lowering the Voting Age in the UK conference is one of a series of youth-focused engagement workshops and conferences which aim to help inform evidence-based policy-making. The event is organised in collaboration with the People’s History Museum in Manchester, and a wide-range of youth democracy organisations from across the UK. Young people and youth workers will attend representing the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland youth parliaments, various English city-region youth polities, local youth councils linked to the British Youth Council, and other youth organisations. It will also bring together some of the leading youth-orientated democratic education and representation organisations, and people from across the political spectrum via the House of Commons All Political Party Group on Votes at 16 and the All Political Party Group on Democratic Participation. The Electoral Commission, Local Government Association, the Association for Citizenship Teachers, the Political Studies Association Young People’s Politics specialist group, and the Electoral Reform Society. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham will open the event.

This will be a high-impact event and we are working with a range of media partners to ensure it has extensive political and public reach, particularly with young people. The event will produce a series of outputs. We will capture the views and ideas of young people and produce a post-event report which will feed into our project, be submitted to policy-makers, political parties, youth organisations, academics, and – most importantly – to young people across the UK.

The event has three main aims and objectives:

1) To provide an opportunity for the Leverhulme Trust-funded Lowering the Voting Age team to present the new research on voting age reform from across the UK. This includes discussion of the lessons from lowering the voting age to 18 in 1969; political education in and outside of schools, and how voting age reform impacts on youth transitions to adulthood. This section aims to inform all participants of the current state-of-play across the UK in terms of voting age reform.

2) To host a series of youth-led workshops which will bring together young people from across the UK to discuss their experiences of voting or not voting, what they think are the best ways to prepare young people to vote, and how can democracy be reformed to become more youth-led and youth-focused. The workshops will provide opportunities for young people to ‘road test’ our research and to develop practical ideas to help policy-makers to develop comprehensive, youth-led approaches to reforming the voting age and youth democratic engagement.

3) To facilitate a networking session for youth and democratic reform organisations, policy-makers (the two APPGs in particular), and academics to develop next steps initiatives with regards to preparing for the introduction of votes at 16 (and other civic pathway issues). We are keen that the event has value in terms of developing capacity through networking, knowledge-exchange, and partnership working.

**Conference Programme**

10.30-11am – Welcome and refreshments

11-11.15am – Introduction and Welcome from Andy Burnham

11.15-12.00pm – Lowering the Voting age Project Research Presentation and Q&A

12.00-13:00 – Workshop: Preparing young people for Votes at 16: Political Education

1300-13.45 – Lunch

13.45-14.45 – Workshop:

14.45-15.15 – Creative exercise on Campaigning for Votes at 16

15.15-15.30 – Conference Summary and Next Steps