

Partnership for Young London

Young People's Political Engagement 2019 Report

Partnership for Young London

About Us

Partnership for Young London is the regional youth unit for London. We connect the youth sector through a diverse network of over 400 organisations, develop and share knowledge with training and events, and influence policy through our local and regional research.

Connect - We're connecting everyone who cares about young people in London – bringing together organisations, local and regional government, and young people themselves.

Develop - We're developing and sharing knowledge and skills – equipping others to help young people in London access the support they need.

Influence - We're influencing policy and practice – generating the new ideas that will help young Londoners thrive



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Introduction to Debates about ‘Votes-at-16’

The debate over lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 has become an increasingly prominent feature of British politics in the 21st century. The United Kingdom was the first country to lower the voting age to 18 in 1969, with most democracies across the world following over the next decade. This followed a period in the 1960s when many other social and economic rights, including home- ownership, abortion, and the age of adulthood, were lowered to 18. There was little evidence of public or political opposition to ‘Votes-at-18’.

Demands for ‘Votes-at-16’ have been driven by concerns about the turnout of 18-24-year-olds in elections, particularly after reaching 2001 general election when only 39% voted, and their wider disengagement from traditional forms of political activism.

It also reflects viewpoints that young people aged 16 and 17 are sufficiently mature, independent, know enough about politics, and have significant social, personal and economic rights - such as paying tax, undertaking military service, and getting married – to justify lowering the voting age.



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Opponents of 'Votes-at-16' draw on a number of arguments. Some note it appears contradictory to lower the voting age when many other ages of responsibility have risen to 18 or even older. Others draw attention to the often limited and poor-quality political education in schools across the UK. Concerns are also expressed about the lack of life experience, numbers of young people paying income and other forms of tax, and lack of universal support for 'Votes at 16' amongst young people.

Citizenship Education was introduced to the National Curriculum in England in 2002. Research has indicated that it can have a positive effect on youth political participation and voting but that it is not taught consistently or well in many parts of the UK. The link between voting age and the transition to adulthood is also contested, with many of the traditional indicators, such as marriage, parenthood, home-ownership, and full employment, coming later in life when compared to previous generations.





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The Introduction of Votes at 16 across the UK

The voting age was lowered for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum when 75% of 16 and 17 year-olds voted. This was higher than 18-24 year-olds (59%) but lower than the overall turnout figure of 85%. The Scottish Parliament subsequently lowered the voting age for elections to the Scottish Parliament and to local councils. The Wales Assembly has legislated that the voting age should be reduced to 16 for local and national elections in Wales. In 2012, the Northern Ireland Assembly expressed its support for a lowering of the age of franchise, though at present it does not have the powers to do so. A growing number of local authorities and city-regions in England also support 'Votes-at-16'. The voting age across the UK Westminster elections remains unchanged.

Most political parties in the UK now support 'Votes-at-16', with only the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party formally opposed to reform. A report by the Electoral Reform Society published in 2018, *The Conservative Case for Votes at 16 and 17*, highlighted though that there is growing support for Votes-at-16 in the Conservative party. The 'Votes-at-16' Coalition is a network of political parties, youth representation groups, trade unions, and other organisation which support lowering the voting age across the UK. There is no formal network opposing 'Votes-at-16'.



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International Evidence on Votes at 16

A small but growing number of countries have lowered the voting age to 16 for some or all elections, including Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Germany, Malta, Nicaragua and the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey. Evidence from other countries that have lowered the voting age, particularly Austria, indicates it can have a positive effect on youth political interest and engagement but has not seen – as yet – an increase in voter turnout above the average of the wider electorate.

Survey Finds Substantial Support for ‘Votes-at-16’ among young people. Many claims are made regarding public support for ‘Votes-at-16’ by both advocates and opponents. Opponents often use the claim that there is little public support for lowering the voting age as a strong argument against lowering the voting age. Supporters, on the other hand, claim that support has been rising and it has become an increasingly important issue for young people.

There has however been little recent evidence on public attitudes to the voting age and related issues.

To address this gap, as part of our two-year Leverhulme Trust research project examining the arguments and evidence related to the voting age debate in the UK, we ran two surveys examining attitudes towards Votes-at-16. One looked at attitudes among 16 and 17 year-olds, the other analysed the existing 18+ electorate. Both included over 1000 people. The surveys were run by Survation in November 2018.

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16-17 year olds heavily in favour of Votes at 17

Our survey found extensive support for 'Votes-at-16' among 16 and 17 year-olds. 71% are in favour, with only 12% opposed. There is some evidence that 16 year-olds are more supportive of 'Votes-at-16' than 17 year olds. Support is particularly strong in Scotland and among young people from higher income family backgrounds. However, support for lowering the voting age was considerably smaller among those from lower income backgrounds. Interestingly voting rights were not connected to any changing sense of adulthood, with 63% of the sample saying they still considered adulthood began at 18, compared to 23% saying 16.

Split amongst Older Citizens

Among the existing electorate, support for votes at 16 is far more split. 42% are in favour of the change compared to 40% opposed. That more adults now favour lowering the age of franchise than reject the idea is nonetheless very significant. In 2003, an Electoral Commission survey on lowering the voting age found that 83% of adults believed 18 was the correct voting age. It appears that public opinion may have substantially shifted. There is a clear age difference though. Younger people over the age of 18 largely support a lower-

ing of the voting age. This support then goes down steadily among older respondents, with a majority being in opposition to votes at 16 from around the age of 45. There is also particularly strong opposition to the move among lower income people and Conservative supporters which makes the issue more politically divisive than for 16 and 17-year-olds.

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In conclusion

Overall, survey evidence suggests that votes at 16 has won the support of 16 and 17-year-olds and there is growing support for the proposal amongst the general public aged over 18. However, there remains opposition to the change among working-class and older voters which may challenge some of the claims made by advocates for the transformative impact it will have.

The voting age was lowered to 16 for local and national elections in Scotland and Wales. Moreover, concerns about the political futures of young citizens are widespread, and has encouraged growing cross-party political support for 'votes at 16' in Westminster:

"Britain's democratic story is unfinished – let's write the next chapter" **Sir Peter Bottomley Conservative MP**

"There is one group for whom this decision really matters because it's their future that's on the line – young people. Their voice was not properly heard during the 2016 EU referendum and this should not be allowed to happen again in such a crucial democratic decision for the future of our country. One important way to achieve this would be to reduce the voting age to 16"

Sadiq Khan, Guardian January 2019

Details

The event was hosted at the Old Bailey on the 6th April 2019, kindly supported by the City of London's Sheriff, The Hon Liz Green. The session was facilitated by Partnership for Young London, Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Inspire Chilli, The Leverhulme Trust-funded project on Lowering the Voting Age in the UK (led by the Universities of Huddersfield and Liverpool), and the British Youth Council to respond to the critical question: *'Are we ready to lower the voting age to 16 for all UK elections?'*

The event provided a much-needed opportunity to discuss whether young people want to lower the voting age for all elections in the UK, and, if so, what are the conditions required for this to happen effectively?' The event moved beyond the well-rehearsed binary of current debates 'for and against' lowering the voting in Westminster and the media to debate in progressive, youth-led ways what conditions we need to have in place to create the right environment for 'Votes at 16'.

Framing the evidence for this debate, three key drivers needed to be explored; political momentum, policy momentum, and public opinion momentum. Research is available on the current state of political support, how and why votes at 16 has been introduced in Scotland and Wales, the need to realise citizenship rights and responsibilities for young people across the UK, the role of Votes at 16 within City or regional government and current opinion polling on the issue.

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The event was supported by Partnership for Young London, Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Inspire Chilli, The Leverhulme Trust-funded project on Lowering the Voting Age in the UK (led by the Universities of Huddersfield and Liverpool), and British Youth Council. Young people from the nations and regions of the UK came together to discuss their experiences of voting (where 'Votes at 16' has been introduced) or not voting and sharing their views on how to create political support to ensure that young people are supported in developing the knowledge, skills, and experiences for life-long voting – whatever the voting age is.

A range of young people and partners including academics, policy leads, local politicians were engaged in this event, both in terms of presenting evidence, helping to shape the arguments. The space accommodated 70 participants and groups in England from London, Yorkshire and Humber, Greater Manchester as well as Scotland, and Northern Ireland took part. Participants were offered much-needed space to debate the key issues linked to 'Votes at 16' and youth democratic citizenship. We worked with media partners to also engage with young people not attending the event.



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Judge: Her Honour Judge Sarah Munro QC.

Youth Presenters: 16 -20 delegates from various regions and nations across the UK worked in teams to collate evidence on various aspects of the argument to present in court. Each region identified young people who led on the arguments, provided supporting evidence and ran all communications.

Jury: This consisted of 6 young people from across the country. Sam Foulder – Hughes, Craig Macauley, Naomi Sloan, Beverley Tetteh. Melissa Demstader, Alaa Fawaz. 6 key leads from a range of areas of expertise, including; journalists, legal profession, funders, elected members and policy leads. Alderman Alison Gowman, Georgia Harper, Keith Bottomley, Derek Hayes, Lord Lewison Lord Justice of Appeal, Matteo Bergamini,.

Witnesses: A range of witnesses took part in this event, these witnesses provided evidence across a range of areas i.e. research and public opinion data, citizenship education, political engagement among others. They were Caroline Macfarlane, Councillor Jake Cooper, Dr Andy Mycock and Professor Alistair Ross.

Court Reporters: A number of young people will write reports on the event and then set up a twitter feed post the event, there will also be a court illustrator at the event to profile the debate narrative. The event will get coverage from both sector press and also via online social media.

Time	Activity
10.00	Arrival, Refreshments and Registration
10.30	Briefing for all groups on format and roles
10.45	Debate commences in Court Room number 1
12.45	Debate adjourned
1.00 - 2.00	Jury Deliberations
1.00 – 2.00	Lunch and Tours
2.00	Feedback session
2.45	Certificates and Refreshments
3.30	Finish

The UK is ready for Votes at 16	The UK is not ready for Votes at 16
<p>The UK is ready for Votes at 16 because of the array of rights that are already granted to 16-year olds in the UK.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get married or register a civil partnership with parental consent • Drive a moped, invalid carriage, or pilot a glider. • You can consent to sexual activity with others aged 16 and over (with various child protection caveats such as activity with over-18s in positions of authority). • Drink wine/beer with a meal if accompanied by someone over 18 • Get a National Insurance number and pay NIC if you earn more than £116 a week. • Work full-time if you have left school and join a trade union • Be paid national minimum wage for 16/17 year olds (which is considerably lower than over-18s). • Join the Armed Forces with parental consent. • Change name by deed poll. • Leave home with or without parental consent. • In certain circumstances you must pay for prescriptions, dental treatment and eye tests. • You can consent to medical treatment pre-16 (Gillick Competence), can choose a GP at 16, and register as a blood donor (although you won't be called to give blood until you're 17). • Buy premium bonds, or a lottery ticket. • Apply for a passport without parental consent. 	<p>The UK is not ready for Votes at 16 because the majority of rights a young person accrues are at 18, not 16.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sexual age of consent is one of the few examples of the age-restrictions in UK law being relaxed in recent years. • The law allows for 16-year-old to leave home but not in a way that allows them to be considered independent. Very few 16-17-year olds actually do leave home. • Only someone aged 18 or over can legally sign a tenancy agreement and local authorities must legally provide shelter for those under 18s presenting as homeless after the Law Lords judgement (G. vs Southwark 2009). • Recently the participation age was raised meaning that young people have to stay in education or training tied to formal educational qualifications until aged 18 from 2015. • Income tax can be paid at any age, while research for the Electoral Commission found that in 2001 thanks to relatively high tax thresholds and poor youth wages, only around 9% of 16-17 year olds actually earned enough to qualify. Under-18s do not pay Council tax • The UK's signature on the Protocol of the UN Convention of the Human Rights of the Child means that 16-17 year olds are kept out of active service. • Some Child Protection laws have changed in recent years to protect vulnerable children and young people, while protective rights run to the age of 18.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage: Those under 18 need parental permission to marry in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (although not in Scotland). Under 18s can enlist in the UK armed forces – but again need parental permission to do so. Arguing that rights that require ‘parental permission’ justify extending the franchise seems rather bizarre. • Welfare rights – most 16-17 year-olds cannot claim housing benefit, universal credit etc. • You cannot get credit agreements – phone contracts etc until 18.
<p>The UK is ready for Votes at 16 because with Scotland, and possibly Wales in the future, lowering the voting age it is inconsistent that 16- and 17-year olds in England could not vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people in Scotland, and maybe soon Wales, can vote at 16 and 17 in local and national (but not Westminster elections). Yet those in England and Northern Ireland cannot, which creates a disparity. • In 2006, the Isle of Man reduced the voting age to 16, followed by Jersey and Guernsey in 2007. In 2012, a decision was made to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The Northern Ireland Assembly also have indicated their desire to reduce the voting age to 16 but not have statutory powers to do so. • There are also multiple examples across Europe where 16 and 17 year olds can vote, such as Austria and Malta. Is it fair that young people living in those countries are given more of a say in the direction of their country than in the UK? 	<p>The UK is not ready for Votes at 16 because there are a number of ways that young people under 18 can engage with politics already, and they need to be fully expanded first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are Youth councils, Scottish Youth Parliament, Welsh Youth Parliament, Northern Ireland Youth Forum, UK Youth Parliament, and a whole range of ways to engage. • The post of <i>Children’s Commissioner</i> is responsible for promoting awareness of the views and interests of children and works with advisory groups. • The APPG on Youth Affairs is coordinated by the British Youth Council and exists to: raise the profile of issues which affect and concern young people; encourage dialogue between parliamentarians, young people and youth services; and encourage a coordinated and coherent approach to policy making on youth affairs. • Youth Select Committee – annual inquiries into issues for young people

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2018, a total of 1,106,788 young people from the UK took part in the annual 'Make Your Mark' ballot. The ballot decides what Members of the UK Youth Parliament should debate and vote on to be their campaign for the coming year.
<p>The UK is ready for Votes at 16 because Scotland introduced it, and it led to massive increases in turnout and political engagement.</p> <p>Direct impact on turnout:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A person who votes has a 13% greater probability of voting in a future election.ⁱ Involving young people in voting can have a "trickle up" effect that mobilizes their parents and other adults in their households to vote, increasing the overall voter turnout rate.ⁱⁱⁱⁱⁱ However, this was a small-scale study and is yet to be seen in Scotland or Austria. Turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds in Takoma Park, Maryland, the first US municipality to lower the voting age for local elections, was double that of eligible voters 18 and older.^{iv} A poll run by NUS in summer 2016 found that 76% of 16- and 17-year olds said that they would have voted in the EU referendum had they had the chance. <p>Increase in participation and interest:</p> <p>Franklin (2004)^v pointed out that a first-time voting age of 18 was exceptionally disadvantageous.</p>	<p>The UK is not ready for Votes at 16 because the UK needs real political reform first, like devolution or proportional representation, not simply lowering the voting age.</p> <p>Lowering voting ages do not increase turnout:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies by Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) and Franklin (2004) have shown that reducing the voting age from 21 to 18 has been associated with a decrease in overall turnout. Blais and Dobrzynska estimate that turnout falls two percentage points for every 1-year reduction in the age of electoral majority. Franklin shows that the cumulative effect of successive generations of people voting at 18 rather than 21 is a reduction in aggregate turnout rates of an estimated 3%–4% across established democracies (2004, chs 3 and 5).^x Although it's frequently said that lowering the voting age in Austria has improved turnout in the youngest sections of society the evidence is mixed at best. Even in a research paper that supports the law change, Wagner et al. (2009) found that the average intention of turning out for 2009 European Parliament elections was lower for under 18s (59.1%) than for any other part of the electorate (62.4 for 18-24s and 73.8% for those over 30).^{xi}

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18 is an inconvenient time to start one's voting career. Many 18-year-olds are in a time of transition, making them less likely to participate in elections.^{viii} However, critics have also noted that 16 is also an inconvenient time and that local and national elections are held nearly every year.

- Voting earlier, while still being in school and more likely to live at home, is likely to increase voter participation, not reduce it.
- Research on Austrian youth shows that lowering the voting age to 16 increased youth political interest (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013) however it found that 16-17 year olds do not vote at higher levels than average turnout or older voters.
- Research shows that newly enfranchised young people in Scotland indeed show substantially higher levels of engagement with representative democracy (through voting) as well as other forms of political participation (such as signing petitions and taking part in demonstrations). However, there is no evidence that 16-17 year-olds are voting in greater numbers than other age cohorts except for 18-24 year-olds.
- Researchers say that people who participate in elections when they first reach voting age are likely to develop the habit of voting, and those who don't are more likely to remain non-voters.^{ix} However, this is yet to be demonstrated in a long term study.

As Jo Saglie states there is no evidence of increased political interest and engagement among 16- and 17-year olds in Norway when a lower voting age was trialled in local elections.^{xii}

Young people want and need real political reform like online voting

- Our May post-poll survey in Scotland revealed that 16 and 17-year-old voters were less satisfied than the overall population with both the procedure for voting and with the electoral registration system. Younger electors are also the biggest advocates of increased automation and digitalisation of the electoral process: 74% of 16-17s and 64% of 18-34s agreed that you should be automatically added to the register when you receive your National Insurance number. Two thirds of 16-17-year olds and 52% of 18-34 year olds said they would have been more likely to vote if they could have voted online instead.^{xiii}
- The Commission recommended that the House of Commons should take further steps to improve active involvement by young people, which might include:^{xiv}
 - o Encouraging young people to participate in the e-petitions system
 - o Youth issue-focused debates which involve young people and MPs.
- Reforms need to be conducted into voting registration, allowing registering up until election day, ensuring more young people can participate.

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	<p>More than half of the 2,700 13-18-year-olds surveyed felt no connection with their local community, the study found. The research also pointed towards increasing detachment as they became older with one in 10 13-year-olds saying they felt no link with their community compared with one in five of 18-year-olds.^{xv}</p>
<p>The UK is ready is for Votes at 16 because the UK has already begun to recognise the vast contribution that young people, who are very politically engaged, have to offer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people accessed more information from a wider variety of sources than any other age group when deciding on who to votes for.^{xvi} • The Channel 4 survey, of 319 people aged 16-24, found just 20 per cent said they would not vote in an election if it were held tomorrow. Three quarters of the participants said they were “interested” or “neutral” about politics, with 26 per cent saying they were “not interested”.^{xvii} • The research, which surveyed 1,000 British citizens across the UK at the end of March 2015, revealed that despite almost 60% of people feel well informed about casting their vote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 1 in 3 lack basic political knowledge such as how many votes a candidate needs to be elected as an MP o Over 50% don't know how many constituencies there are in the UK o Nearly 2 in 3 (63%) don't know who the current Foreign Secretary is 	<p>The UK is not ready for Votes at 16 because political education is non-existent/inadequate, and should be the priority before lowering the voting age.</p> <p>Political education needs to be adequately in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship is a compulsory subject only at Key Stages 3 and 4 of full time compulsory education for 11 to 16 year-olds, where it is taught as a discrete subject. • Education for 16 to 19 year olds is qualification-led rather than curriculum-led and the National Curriculum does not apply to post-compulsory education. The qualification most commonly taken by 16 to 19 year olds is the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A Level). Currently, one exam board, AQA, offers an A Level in Citizenship Studies, but there are no plans to continue this beyond 2018 under Government changes to A Levels. Citizenship education is a statutory subject only in England and Northern Ireland and provision across the UK is patchy and inconsistent. In Scotland, only a third of young Scots take a modern studies course covering history, politics and current affairs.

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o Almost a quarter don't know who the current Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer is.

- 5% admit to not knowing which political parties form the current coalition government.
- Austria lowered the voting age to 16 in 2007. According to Markus Wagner, social sciences professor at the University of Vienna, et al., studies of subsequent elections show "the quality of these [younger] citizens' choices is similar to that of older voters, so they do cast votes in ways that enable their interests to be represented equally well."^{xviii}

The impact of 16-17 year olds voting on politics

- In 2015, the most recent year for which we have constituency-level population estimates, there were 1.5 million 16- and 17-year-olds in the UK. They would have made up 2.87% of the population aged 16 and over.
- Overall there were 88 constituencies where the number of 16- and 17-year-olds³ was greater than the winning margin.^{xix}
- The Mirror modelling of the 2017 election shows that if 16 and 17-year-olds were able to vote, Labour would probably have gained seven seats from the Conservatives - enough to cancel out the DUP vote.^{xx}

- An online petition which has reached nearly 30,000 signatures demonstrates public appetite for compulsory political education.^{xxi}
- Voters aged 18-34 were significantly more likely to say they found it difficult to complete their ballot paper (16%) than both 16-17 year old voters (7%) and those aged over 35 (2% among 35- 54s and 3% among over 55s).^{xxii}

The impact of effective political education

- A large-scale longitudinal study of more than 4,000 students in the US found that civic learning in which students actually experienced involvement in civic and political issues — and particularly on issues that matter to them — had the greatest long-term impact on future political participation.^{xxiii}
- British Youth Council: "We believe that young people's education does not currently prepare them to adequately vote. We believe that to prepare for lowering the voting age, a comprehensive programme should be designed and implemented to improve formal political engagement amongst young people."
- There also is some evidence that democratic practices in schools can instil participatory norms in 15–16-year-olds (Benton et al., 2008).^{xxiv}

- ⁱ Kevin Denny and Orla Doyle, "Does Voting History Matter? Analysing Persistence in Turnout," [jstor.org](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2764444), Jan. 2009
- ⁱⁱ Amy Linimon and Mark Joslyn, "Trickle Up Political Socialization: The Impact of Kids Voting USA on Voter Turnout in Kansas," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, Mar. 2002.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Jens Olav Dahlgaard, "The Surprising Consequence of Lowering the Voting Age," [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2018/03/01/teen-voting-age-16-17-2018/), Mar. 1, 2018.
- ^{iv} National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, "Solid Turnout for 16 and 17 Year Old Voters in Takoma Park, MD," [naspa.org](https://www.naspa.org/2018/11/01/solid-turnout-for-16-and-17-year-old-voters-in-takoma-park-md/) (accessed Nov. 1, 2018)
- ^v Franklin, M.N. (2004) *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- ^{vi} Mark N. Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*, Apr. 2004.
- ^{vii} Eric Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood," *American Political Science Review*, Mar. 2002
- ^{viii} Daniel Hart and James Youniss, *Renewing Democracy in Young America*, 2017.
- ^{ix} Mark N. Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*, Apr. 2004.
- ^x Blais A. Dobrzynska A. (1998) 'Turnout in Electoral Democracies', *European Journal of Political Research*, 33, 239-61. + Franklin M. (2004) *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- ^{xi} https://homepage.univie.ac.at/markus.wagner/Paper_Votingat16.pdf
- ^{xii} <http://www.democraticaudit.com/2013/09/28/votes-at-16-what-the-uk-can-learn-from-austria-norway-and-the-crown-dependencies/>
- ^{xiii} https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/234893/Voting-in-2017-Final.pdf
- ^{xiv} <http://www.digitaldemocracy.parliament.uk/documents/Open-Up-Digital-Democracy-Report.pdf>
- ^{xv} <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/6012322/Teenagers-most-influenced-by-celebrities.html>
- ^{xvi} <http://www.covi.org.uk/the-eu-vote-was-a-missed-opportunity-for-votes-at-16-across-the-uk-josiah-mortimer/>
- ^{xvii} <https://www.channel4.com/news/youth-vote-teenagers-channel-4-survey-voting-politics>
- ^{xviii} Markus Wagner, et al., "Voting at 16: Turnout and the Quality of Vote Choice," *Electoral Studies*, June 2012.
- ^{xix} <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/articles/whatimpactcouldloweringtheukvotingageteto16haveontheshapeoftheelectorate/2017-07-14>
- ^{xx} <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/what-would-happened-16-17-11463495>
- ^{xxi} <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/134362>
- ^{xxii} https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/234893/Voting-in-2017-Final.pdf
- ^{xxiii} <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831208316951>
- ^{xxiv} Benton T. Cleaver E. Featherstone G. Kerr D. Lopes J. Whitby K. (2008) 'Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS): Sixth Annual Report: Young People's Civic Participation in and Beyond School: Attitudes, Intentions and Influences', National Foundation for Educational Research, Research Report No DCSF-RR052.

There are two teams of two.

- The proposition will be argued by **Team Scotland** and **North England Team**
- The opposition will be argued by **Northern Ireland Team** and **London Team**

Judge's Opening Statement

Each box is worth five minutes of time, except the Judge's statement which will be ten minutes each.
The total run time is 120 minutes.

10
minutes

Proposition's opening statement (North England)



Opposition Opening Statement (London Team)

10
minutes

Scotland Team: Rights at 16

Northern Ireland Team: Rights at 18



Caroline Mcfarlane, Scotland Team questioning

Caroline McFarlane, Northern Ireland cross examine

20
minutes

North England Team: Votes at 16 regionally

London Team: Youth Voice



Jake Cooper, London Team questioning

Jake Cooper, North England Team cross examine

20
minutes

Scotland Team: Improving turnout

Northern Ireland Team: Political Reform



Andy Mycock, Northern Ireland questioning

Andy Mycock, Scotland Team cross examine.

20
minutes

North England Team: Young People are ready

London Team: Political Education



Alistair Ross, North England questioning

Alistair Ross, London cross examine.

20
minutes

Proposition Closing Statement (Scotland Team)



Oppositions Closing Statement (Northern Ireland)

10
minutes

Judge's Closing Statement

10
minutes

Introduction

The event organiser Sharon Long introduced the event, thanked those attending and outlined the rules of the debate which would be following standard court room procedure. Sharon thanked the judge and High Sheriff for being willing to give up their Saturday. She also thanked all the young people attending and noted how diverse the audience was, with young people coming from across the country. Particular mention was made of the young people who had travelled from Northern Ireland to the event. She then passed the proceedings over to Judge Monroe.

Judge Monroe thanked Sharon Long for organizing the event and introduced the Old Bailey. She focused on the historic importance of the court and pointed out that as well as being used for high profile murder cases it has also had a role in hosting cases involving high profile political scandal. Court 1, where the event was being held, had been the site of the Jeremy Thorpe trial for example.

It is also at the cutting edge of criminal law with cases currently being heard regarding Female Genital Mutilation. Judge Monroe highlighted the critical importance of Magna Carta as the bedrock of English Law and the principles that underpin the debate that was about to take place. She extended a special welcome to young people, participants, organisations and the witnesses who had agreed to appear and be cross-examined according to standard legal practice. Special thanks were reserved for Sharon Long for the organization effort.

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Swearing in and Establishing terms of debate

The 12 jurors were sworn into the jury box in the following order; Alderman Alison Gowman, Georgia Harper, Keith Bottomley, Derek Hayes, Lord Lewison Lord Justice of Appeal, Matteo Bergamini, Sam Foulder – Hughes, Craig Macauley, Naomi Sloan, Beverley Tetteh. Melissa Demstader, Alaa Fawaz. Judge Monroe addressed the Jurors directly and established that the question they were to consider in the proceedings was; Are we ready to lower the voting age to 16 for all UK elections?

Jurors were instructed to leave all preconceptions on this issue to one side and base their decision purely on the evidence they heard in the court room. Given the unique nature of the events Jurors were requested not to discuss the evidence with non-jurors during the lunch break.

Opening Statements

The opening statements were read out by the proposers and opponents of lowering the voting age (*these were written submissions which can be entered here*).

Opening Debate

In the initial debate the proposers pointed out that the British Youth Council's Make Your Mark ballot had managed to engage with 1 in 5 young people nationally and that the vast majority of these young people supported lowering the voting age and considered an important political priority. Young people have a wide variety of rights and responsibilities. They pay tax, they make decisions regarding their medical treatment but yet the UK cannot decide on the best practice regarding the right to vote and the situation across the country is variable as a result. Scottish young people voted on independence but were not deemed worthy to vote on the EU referendum.

Austria and Malta have both allowed the vote at 16 so why do we not have this in the UK? It is not even a particularly new concept in the UK as the Isle of Mann, Jersey and Guernsey instituted votes at 16 a decade ago.

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Young People are constantly told that ‘we are the future’ – it’s about time the political system honestly accepted that by lowering the voting age. The primary position of those opposed to lowering the voting age was that the UK is simply not prepared to bring in Votes at 16.

In general, 16-year olds are not viewed as old enough or mature enough in other areas of life. While it is true that young people can get married or join the military at 16, they may only do this with parental permission and do not see frontline service. In any case there are active campaigns to push both of those ages back to 18 and, in general, 18 is the age at which rights and responsibilities are gained. 16-year olds do not live independently at 16 and only 9 per cent contribute income tax. They do not pay council tax and cannot claim benefits.

The government has recently raised the school leaving age to 18 which shows that they do not think that 16 and 17-year olds are full citizens. They are also not sufficiently engaged in the electoral system to participate in politics. If government still sees it necessary for 16 and 17-year olds to rely on parental permission to purchase a mobile phone, then how can we claim that they are prepared to vote?



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Witness 1 (for the proposers) Caroline Macfarlane.

The witness was sworn in and identified herself as the 32 year old founder of the think tank Common Vision which look at contentious issues and how the debate around them can be de-toxified to be more productive and increase understanding especially between young people. She has a publication on intergenerational attitudes and voting behavior and her work looks at the views of 16 year olds and how they feel about important political issues and events as well as how political engagement can become more representative of young people's interests and views. Her report touches on the case for votes-at-16 by emphasizing the importance of young people forming a voting habit while still supported by institutional infrastructure in schools. She also mentioned that she is an advocate for changing the mechanisms of elections so that young people find them more accessible and relatable to other life experiences through approaches such as digital voting.

Question from proposer

“How has your experience of working with young people led you to support lowering the voting age?”

It is clear from engagement with under 30s that there is a huge demand for political engagement and for younger people to be involved in politics. It is

important to look at rights and responsibilities of young people in relation to politics. It is really important to differentiate between different types of rights. Voting is a civic right that specifically refers to civic political contributions. Young people have economic and social rights related to choices they make and some of these involve protecting them from making bad choices.

But there is a big difference between protecting young citizens from harm and giving them clear civic responsibilities. If they are paying taxes then setting aside how much is made from those taxes they must have the right to a say in how this is spent. In a way I'd ask whether it matters how many people pay tax – if they exercise the responsibility of paying tax then they also should have the responsibility to choose. Voting is often seen as a freedom to choose but this is wrong, it is actually a responsibility to choose. If it's seen as a choice then it is true that young people do have some other choices restricted. But if it's seen as a responsibility then the case for votes-at-16 becomes much clearer.

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Response to Witness 1 by Proposing side

Voting age is an issue of devolution divergence in the UK. The franchise has been extended to 16 for all Scottish elections and was done so with the unanimous support of all major political parties in Scotland. This shows that all parties can support votes-at-16 and that it is a non-partisan measure. There is a simple argument that it is about consistency within the UK both between countries of the UK and across other areas of rights. On what principle can someone fight and die for their country without having a say? This is a fundamental bedrock of consistency around freedom of speech and expression and must lead to support for lowering the voting age to 16.

There could be a case for keeping the voting age at 18 and raising other minimums to meet it but since when has any democratic country moved backwards and not forwards in this regard. In the Scottish referendum 77 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds voted and 97 per cent of these said they would continue to vote. The Scottish experience was an undoubted success and it makes no sense to deny the vote to 16 and 17 year olds elsewhere in the UK. As Lincoln said 'A house divided against itself cannot stand' therefore we must look forward not backwards and grant suffrage to 16 year olds.

Response to Witness 2 by Opposing Side

There is a great opportunity to involve young people at the ballot box but we need to encourage a far more general political involvement. Every single person needs to be engaged in politics first before they can vote otherwise, we risk marginalizing and excluding voices from the process. Does ticking a box every few years really mean young people are engaged?

Instead of lowering the voting age we should be setting up structures that engage young people in politics every day. We should harness digital technology to make sure young people's voices are being heard by Parliament and Councils. Growing up in South London I had no contact with politicians or any MPs. Recently I went to visit Westminster to see the All Party Parliamentary Group on Young People.

It was great but I had never heard of this before went and neither had my friends. It is engagement with these organisations that matter including the expansion and empowerment of youth councils and youth forums. What is more important – ticking boxes or meaningful honest engagement with young people in politics?

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Witness 2 (for the Opposers) Councillor Jake Cooper.

The witness was sworn in and identified himself as an 18 year old councilor in Dudley.

Before I was involved in the UK youth parliament and forums in my area, I was standing up for the views of young people in Dudley. When we simply drop the vote on people it doesn't lead to an increase in engagement. They used the figures from Make your Mark but I think this supports my case —only 1 in 5 young people actually contributed and the way we move forward in address the engagement issue is not the same one as voting.

I don't have a handbook with solutions on this but the National Citizenship Service (NCS) and single issue campaigns encourage young people to get involved in issues rather than imposing voting on them in a way that may not be meaningful.

Government needs to fund NCS and support youth forums and youth parliaments. NCS is a 3 week course where young people can develop their own skills and then launch a local campaign.

So instead of imposing a set of values through voting they are actually encouraged to engage with local campaigns that matter to them. Before NCS

politics seemed removed and foreign to me. As a young person looking with brevity at politics it was through the NCS that I was able to see politics not as a big subject with lots of arguing but as something that morphs and shapes perception of the situation and person, which is what encouraged me to get involved in politics.

Cross- Examiner intervention

“But surely NCS has been a policy failure that engages an even lower number of young people than the Make Your Mark Ballot which you dismissed?”

I am definitely an advocate for NCS. It is correct that it represents a low percentage of young people but it is about increasing numbers engaging with the programme and that's up to government to encourage young people to up the offer but also other parties such as schools and councils to encourage take up as a team effort.



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Young people need to be championed and informed for this to happen. Less than one per cent participate in youth councils as well – and that’s the point there’s not enough take up for this and young people are more disengaged than they should be.

Make your Mark is a box ticking exercise whereas things like youth parliament are an opportunity to get actively engaged and give these opportunities directly to young people as they can get involved in issues that matter to them. Obviously young people put their views on social media but the fault in the opposing argument is that it doesn’t recognize how much of an echo chamber that produces.

We need to think about how young people with different views can be brought together. Government needs to look at Make your Mark as a way to listen to young people’s views but youth parliament is actually where those views are properly heard and debated.

Cross Examiner Intervention

“But votes-at-16 was the campaign of last year’s youth parliament so surely that contradicts your argument? Isn’t vote-at-16 a more efficient way of engaging young people in politics anyway?”

Young people need to be provided with opportunities to get involved. Young people in my area are not aware of these opportunities. One thing we need to look is that opportunities don’t just come from government but also charities, local government and from within communities.

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Cross Examiner Intervention

“Surely only voting allows full engagement. Are you not arguing our point that more opportunities are needed for involvement and that voting is the main opportunity for that?”

Ticking a box just doesn't provide that engagement. NCS is a brilliant start for opportunities that give young people a chance to develop their values and inform their engagement. It's up to young people if they choose to take advantage of that further and get politically involved. If you give them voting opportunities then you need to give them the change to develop their own views or they are just having a set of options imposed on them.



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Witness 3 (for the Opposers) Dr Andy Mycock

Reader in Politics at University of Huddersfield. Identified as having published extensively in the area of youth political engagement and was one of the authors of the Youth Citizenship Commission Report. The report found that votes-at-16 was a complicated issues and that there was no knock out blow for the argument on either side. It is also true that there was less clear cut support 10 years ago when the report was published than there is now.

There is definitely growing support for lowering the voting age but there are also issues related to wider political education and young people's transitions to adulthood. This is often considered an issue about the future but it also has important consequences in the present and should be informed by the past. By looking purely at the future we might not learn important lessons of the past. When the voting age was lowered to 18 for the 1970 general election young people initially voted at a similar rate as other generation before turnout among 18-24 year olds went into sharp decline.

We need to ask why this happened. In 1969 here was no consideration of the issues of wider citizenship educations and it had become accepted during

the 1960s that the age of adulthood coalesced at 19. Neither of these things are true of today's debate. However, there is no developed conversation about where voting fits with other citizenship ages. Scotland had a remarkable effect but young people still voted at a noticeably lower rate than other age groups so there may be issues there.

The Scottish Parliament did not bring in citizenship with votes-at-16. We have done some research in Kirklees and nearly a third of young people wanted the voting age to be lowered for local elections only.

There is also an issue of political culture. In Scotland parties have become no more likely to make policy appeals to young people and the representative age remains as old as it was before the voting age was lowered. The case is therefore largely unproven. The order we do things in matters.

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There wasn't a marked change in young people's engagement in Scotland overall and with the youthquake argument there is a danger that politicians simply lower the voting age and then moving to other things without addressing the other important issues in young people's political engagement.

It is clearly more difficult to bring in political education for over 16s. However, exceptionalising young people as uniquely disengaged is a dangerous fallacy that embeds disengagement. Whatever happens what is certain is that young people are citizens who must be listened to in the political process.

In England there is a campaign for a compulsory GCSE in politics which might put people off because it shouldn't be seen as a qualification. There is a danger that in focusing the voting age you reduce the idea that engagement is just about voting. More money and power needs to be invested in youth councils to engage young people properly. There is a problem that political parties segment political education ideologically and in of it being siloed into wider 'young people's issues'.



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In reality citizenship should not be thought of simply in terms of becoming a citizen at 18 as people transition to it at different ages. We need to change our political culture so that all young people are seen as citizens whether they are 5 or 21. It's not just politicians coming into schools and talking about what they do. They should be treating young people as citizens by taking their concerns, acting on them and then feeding back as they would other constituents.

Response to Witness 3 from proposers

The powers we have as young people are limited. We can actively express our beliefs but our powers to actually influence the society we live in are inconsequential. Allow us to be involved and make a difference, not in two years time but now. Many of the same arguments that are used against young people being given the vote were once used to deny women the same right. They were patronizing then and they are patronizing now. 16 year olds are showing the same determination and interest in acquiring the vote and we are ready and determined to make this change. Give us the ability to shape our own participation and control our own future.

Response to Witness 3 from opposers

When I was 16 I knew about Guy Fawkes, Henry VIIIth and Nazis. So what makes me prepared to vote? Citizenship is not a priority for teachers so why should it be for their students? Before we bring in voting we need proper political education. Compulsory political education will help combat inequality in politics. Parliament is elitist and full of nonsense jargon that makes it seem like a secret society. As a young black working class woman I didn't become aware of politics until I joined the LSE as a University student. Political education must be introduced formally before the vote. Without it we are not ready as we do have an informed opinion and it will only benefit those who already benefit from the system.

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Witness 4 (for the proposers) Professor Alistair Ross (Emeritus Professor, London Metropolitan University).

Identified as a leading expert on young people's politics and citizenship education in Europe. Currently conducting a large ongoing personal project looking at young people's political identities and political priorities across Europe. This is done by asking young people open questions to explore their own conceptions of identity rather than imposing 'right answers' on them.

Young people often assume older people are looking for them to provide a right answer – it is important to get past this in order to understand what they really think. I found that young people were increasingly politically involved and engaged and wanted to be involved in the issues they found important to them.

Older people often don't realise how young people actually are in terms of their political time span and this affects perceptions of what young people consider to be important. I found they were primarily interested in issues that concerned them with a particular focus on rights around nationalism, LGBT issues and women's position in society. In Austria a week after a local election the teenagers I spoke to discussed how they had voted and other

forms of political engagement they had been involved in such as protests. Those that weren't interested in politics didn't vote and therefore didn't effect the outcome. So it's a red herring to be concerned about young people not voting – if they don't vote they don't change anything. However, if they want to vote they should be able to do so. The important thing is that those who are interested are able to vote – making a change based on how someone who is disinterested in that change might react is an odd way to go about things. It should be purely about the young people who want to vote being able to do so. The young people I spoke to complained about political education not being up to date with current topics and issues.

I think we should make it more about deliberative discussion on issues that are relevant to them with teachers acting as independent facilitators. Generally I found high political awareness among the young people I interviewed and they came from a very diverse range of backgrounds across Europe.



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Overall I am unconvinced by the argument that education needs come before voting – I don't see why if something is a right it needs to be qualified. Political education may very well be desirable but it is a separate question from whether young people deserve the vote.

Cross Examiner intervention

“While your study is extensive it does not include the UK so how can it inform the current debate here?”

My study had a sample of 30 countries and 30 percent of those interviewed came from a family that included someone who had a migrant background. The focus is how young people describe their concerns and it is important to move beyond Brexit, which is why I didn't use a UK sample but I do intend to. What I want to reiterate is that it is just a fact that there will always be some young people who lack interest and others who will not be informed. But that applied equally as much when the voting age was lowered to 18 and no one considered it a valid reason not to give young people the vote.

There was no extensive education programme for women ahead of women's suffrage and such a programme would rightly have been considered deeply patronising.

Why is it considered uniquely necessary for 16 year olds to have this education before they vote? It hasn't prevented others from voting and 16 year olds are no less informed and with social media may well be more so. Teachers, politicians and parents are too frightened to introduce political discussion. It's not information that matters ultimately it's discussion. It's all about deliberation.

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Closing statement from Proposers;

Evidence from the debate today shows that young people are ready to vote. We've heard the exciting evidence from Scotland and why it has been successfully implemented there. The arguments used against 16 year olds voting are the historic ones and we have seen them used time and again against women and against workers in the past. They were wrong then and are wrong now.

The truth is that politicians are afraid young will band together and kick out at them to produce genuine change. All the witnesses accepted that young people were engaged so the question is not the impact that vote-at-16 would have on young people, it is about whether Parliament and Politicians are ready for us. The truth is that we are ready and everyone else needs to get on board with that.

Closing statement from Opposers;

We have heard convincing arguments today for why young people are simply not ready to vote. There are so many things that they cannot do and so many rights that they do not have. The crux of our argument rest on why we should priorities young people voting when serious political reform must surely come first? What about electoral reform and digital engagement? Without

this this you merely socialize young people in political disillusionment. A comprehensive political education programme would have the greatest impact on long term engagement, not simply giving young people the vote. We also call for the expansion of youth councils and parliaments to develop skills and views of young people.

It is a lack of understanding of politics that is the key reason for disengagement. We are not against it as a concept-we are just saying that the UK is not ready. Instead of increasing stress on young people we should instead invest in these other priorities and maybe leave the voting age for a future more healthy democratic society.

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Judge Monroe Addressing the Jury

The key issues that you must consider is whether you are persuaded that we are ready to lower the voting age to 16 for all UK elections. It seems to me that the most important words in that questions are READY and ALL.

Verdict of the Jury

A consensus verdict of the jury was not reached. However, the jury did reach a majority verdict that supported the lowering the of the voting age. There the jury sided with the proposers. The motion was successful – the court agreed that the UK voting age should be lowered to 16.

Judge Monroe revealed that she was surprised by the verdict and that based on the merits of the argument presented on the day she would have rejected the motion. She wished to state on record what a privilege it had been to oversee these proceedings on the day. The debate was impressively balanced and nuanced. All sides had developed well-constructed arguments that they advanced with passion and clarity. It was a joy to see so much enthusiasm from all involved and to see the debate carried out in such good humour. She noted that it was a shame that some of those present could not have been in Parliament contributing to the current Brexit debate. Season Parliamentarians could learn from the standard and tone of this debate.



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