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*April 2019*

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**The All Party Parliamentary Group  
on Votes at 16:  
Campaign Report**



The All Party Parliamentary Group  
on Votes at 16  
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# About the APPG

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## All Party Parliamentary Group on Votes at 16

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Votes at 16 allows parliamentarians to meet to discuss extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. The APPG was founded in April 2018 with cross-party support following years of lobbying for a lower voting age in Parliament.

The APPG's Chair is Danielle Rowley MP, with Norman Lamb MP and Vicky Foxcroft MP as Vice-Chairs and Sir Peter Bottomley MP as Treasurer. The group is supported by two members of staff from the offices of Danielle Rowley MP and Sir Peter Bottomley MP in close association with the Group's secretariat, the British Youth Council.

The purpose of the APPG is to bring together key voices from across Parliament to listen to evidence on the case for extension of the franchise, and to present this evidence to the Government.

Events organised over the past year by the APPG have included an evening reception for supporters at the Conservative Party Conference, evidence gathering sessions in the Houses of Parliament and networking opportunities bringing together parliamentarians and supporters. Numerous amendments to bills, Private Member's Bills and Early Day Motions have been progressed with support from the APPG and its members.

There has been some significant media attention, and the campaign for Votes at 16 is being debated more than ever.

# Introduction

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**Danielle Rowley MP**  
*Labour Party*  
**APPG Chair**

It's been a fantastic first year for the Votes at 16 APPG, and an honour as a long standing advocate for votes at 16 to chair the discussions. We've held three wide ranging evidence sessions, gathering insight on issues including public attitudes to votes at 16, the experience and lessons of votes at 16 in Scotland and Wales, and on the parliamentary routes for getting votes at 16 passed into law.

At these sessions we've heard from a range of experts; from academics and politicians to campaigning organisations. We've attended conferences such as the Local Government Association Conference and the Conservative Party Conference - taking the debate to the places where it is most needed to change opinions. And we've kept up the visibility of the campaign in Parliament, holding drop-ins to discuss the topic with MPs and researchers.

During this time, young people in society have been making their voices heard. On hugely significant issues like Brexit and Climate Change, young people have been exerting pressure and influence on political parties and their policies, even if they aren't yet able to do so at the ballot box. They have demonstrated just how much we are losing out by not appropriately recognising the insights held by young people through our electoral system.

I hope you enjoy reading what we've been discussing over the past year, and will support the movement to extend the franchise to 16 and 17 years olds. These are turbulent times in politics, and listening to the diverse voices of young people will be just as important as ever in charting a way forward.

Do get in touch if you have any suggestions for future sessions of the APPG or thoughts you would like to share.

# Making the Case for Progress

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**Sir Peter Bottomley MP**  
*Conservative Party*  
APPG Treasurer

If we are in favour of the average new voter taking part in a national election aged 18, to achieve this, voting eligibility needs to be 16. General elections now occur normally every five years. The direct vote for an MP is an indirect vote for a national government that could be in place for up to five years. By the end of that Government, a 16-year-old will have reached the age of 21. Votes at 16 makes sense.

If we want to continue to consider our nation a United Kingdom, irrespective of any level of devolution, extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds should happen. It has already happened in Scotland and will soon happen in Wales and possibly Northern Ireland. English 16- and 17-year-olds should not be left behind by the Parliament that exists to represent them.

Students and apprentices at colleges in my constituency, or interns in my office, are not too young to vote. They are impressive and sensible. They are capable of making reasoned judgments. I have the same feelings when in discussions with youth councillors, youth mayors and Members of the Youth Parliament across the country.

Do not approach this issue with calculations of party advantage.

Let us unite in trusting and engaging with our country's future.



**Vicky Foxcroft MP**  
*Labour Party*  
APPG Vice Chair

Lowering the voting age to 16 is an issue which I have been passionate about since joining Parliament. In 2015 I brought forward a Private Members Bill to extend the right to vote to 16- and 17-year-olds, which unfortunately fell at the Second Reading.

However, I'm confident that this is something we can achieve in the future. It is ridiculous that 16-year-olds pay taxes, can marry and can join the army but aren't allowed to help decide who runs the country that they contribute so much to.

I have also had the pleasure of working alongside the UK Youth Parliament on knife crime and youth violence and recently attended a debate which they held in the House of Commons. I've constantly been impressed by their knowledge of politics as well as their passion for change. They are the best ambassadors for votes at 16.



**Norman Lamb MP**  
*Liberal Democrats*  
**APPG Vice Chair**

The whole focus behind the Votes at 16 campaign and APPG is that young people should be allowed a say over their future. Over the last five years, we've faced a series of votes which have had unprecedented importance. The EU referendum outcome impacts on young people more than anyone. The decision reached is certain to shape their lives. It's only right that they should be allowed to take part in the democratic process.

I strongly supported the case for 16- and 17-year olds to vote in the 2014 Scottish referendum. I argued for votes for 16- and 17-year olds in the 2016 EU referendum. And if the current Brexit situation results in a second referendum, I strongly believe that 16- and 17-year olds should vote too.

Votes at 16 will also help to improve political engagement among young people, which is worryingly low. Too many young people are disengaged from the political process. That's a problem in itself – we should aim for all our citizens to take an active interest in our democracy. But historically low turnouts among young people have also resulted in a political culture which too often fails to take the interests of young people seriously. Instead, the risk is that political parties focus their attention disproportionately on older people, where turnout is much higher.

16- and 17-year olds can join our armed forces, they can get married, and they can pay taxes on their income if they are in work. Yet they are not allowed a say in the level of those taxes or what they might be used for. It only seems fair that they enjoy the same right as their fellow citizens to take part in the democratic process and have their voice heard. Given that 16- and 17-year olds take on significant responsibilities as part of our society, it's only correct that the Government should correspondingly grant them the right to have a say in society's decisions.

Many of the people who tell us that young people are not mature enough are Members of Parliament who spend their time in the Chamber bawling, booing and bickering at their opponents. They are the ones who could do with a lesson in maturity!

Extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year olds is the only fair thing to do. I strongly believe that reform is needed, and the APPG aims to bring about that change. Let's finally allow young people a say in their future.

# The Case Already Made - Scotland



**John Lamont MP**  
*Conservative Party*

I admit that I am a convert to the idea of extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. When I was a Member of the Scottish Parliament, I along with my other Scottish Conservative colleagues, voted against lowering the voting age in Scotland.

At that time, we objected to lowering the voting age not because we opposed a discussion about the franchise, but because we did not support singling out the Scottish independence referendum for a trial extension of the franchise. During that campaign and indeed since then, I have spoken to many young voters, at school debates, hustings and on polling days. It was clear that many of them were taking their responsibility very seriously, that they were turning out to vote and that their experience will have hopefully encouraged them to participate in future elections. Given the way in which this age group have conducted themselves and given that this change has now been made in Scotland, I am now a supporter of votes at 16.

In this country, there is no single age at which all responsibility and liabilities are imposed at once and where we draw the line is largely arbitrary. An 18-year-old can vote, but they can't adopt a child, they can't supervise a learner driver. It seems to me that there are valid arguments for having the voting age at 16, 17 or at 18. And this isn't an argument about when we become adults. There is no fixed age at which that happens and of course, not all 16- and 17-year-olds are equal (just as not all 42-year-olds are equal!)

However, what I do find convincing is that when the voting age has been reduced, turnout rates of 16- and 17-year-olds were found to be comparable to those of the electorate at large and higher than 18- to 20-year-olds. If lowering the voting age will help to increase overall turnout rates, then that is a compelling reason to look very closely at lowering the voting age. And on a purely practical level, we can't just ignore the fact that the voting age has been lowered in Scotland and will soon be lowered in Wales, but the franchise remains different in Westminster. Like it or not, the decision has been made in other parts of the UK and now we have an uneven system across the UK which I do not think is satisfactory.

This isn't really a decision which should be based on party politics. If it is the right thing to do, it shouldn't matter who young people are more likely to vote for. However, I'd point out that it was accepted wisdom that 16- and 17-year-olds would overwhelmingly support Scottish independence in 2014, but that did not turn out to be the case.

We're talking about an extra 1.5 million votes here, which sounds like a lot, but that would be around 3% of the electorate. Factoring in lower registration rates and we're talking about less than 2% of the electorate. This would be a change with a small impact on the overall result, but a huge impact on young people, who will be given a voice for the first time.



# The Case Already Made - Wales

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**Jo Stevens MP**  
*Labour Party*

In October, votes for 16- and 17-year-olds in Wales became a step closer. The policy passed its first hurdle as the National Assembly for Wales overwhelmingly agreed to introduce new legislation to extend the franchise for National Assembly and local government elections to those aged 16 and above.

A Bill will be introduced in early 2019, using powers recently devolved to the National Assembly under the Wales Act 2017, to extend the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. Alongside this the Bill is expected to include provisions to change the name of the Assembly and make other changes to the Assembly's electoral arrangements including new methods of voter registration and a new electoral system.

Passage of the Bill will require a super-majority of 40 Members – two thirds of the Assembly's 60 members – to vote in support but it is expected to pass this threshold easily as support for votes at 16 spans the political divide in Wales. The Votes at 16 campaign received strong support from Assembly Members from Welsh Labour, Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Welsh Conservatives. It is hoped that the changes will be in effect before the next Assembly election in 2021.

In addition to simply extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds the Assembly Commission has also committed to working with young people and stakeholders to ensure the highest possible level of participation from 16- to 18-year-olds in future elections. Following the impressive turnout in the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, the bar is certainly set very high. It remains a travesty that after 80% of eligible young voters signed up to vote in the Scottish Referendum in 2014, they were then denied a say in the EU Referendum in 2016.

As Wales now joins Scotland in introducing votes at 16 for national and local elections, the pressure is on for England and Northern Ireland to ensure a universal franchise across the four nations of the UK.

With UK Government enthusiasm for introducing votes at 16 seemingly low, we are likely to see a situation in which 16- and 17-year-olds in Wales will have the right to vote in National Assembly and Local Government elections, but not UK General Elections. Not only does this create an uneven franchise, it could mean efforts to persuade young people to vote could be severely undermined, according to Elin Jones AM, Llywydd (Speaker) and Chair of the Assembly Commission.

The increased weight of the youth vote in Wales and Scotland will mean the Welsh and Scottish Governments will feel the pressure to pursue a policy agenda that benefits (or at least doesn't disproportionately harm) young people. Without extending the franchise, young people in England and Northern Ireland will continue to miss out on this protection.

# The Grassroots Campaign

British Youth Council

**Jo Hobbs**

*CEO British Youth Council*

Launched in 2003, the Votes at 16 Coalition is made up of young people, organisations and a large number of politicians representing all the major political parties in the UK. There are over 70 organisations that are involved in the Coalition; these include national organisations such as the Electoral Reform Society, the National Union of Students and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

2018 has been an eventful year for the Votes at 16 Coalition. A number of coalition members led actions which strengthened the campaign; these included engaging with college principals across the UK to launching a publication detailing support for extending the franchise within the Conservative Party. Peter Kyle's Private Member's Bill and the creation of the All Party Parliamentary Group also demonstrate continuous growth for the campaign within Parliament.

The National Union of Students (NUS) supported actions focussed on schools and colleges lobbying MPs to support Peter Kyle's Private Members Bill. The Bill seeks to enfranchise 16- and 17-year-olds and received cross-party sponsorship from former ministers Norman Lamb and Nicky Morgan. Unfortunately, the Bill's second reading was interrupted but is expected to resume in 2019. The Coalition are optimistic that it will gain the support it needs to reach Committee stage. Although the debate on the Bill did not reach a vote, a wider range of young people were informed on the campaign and the Coalition gained new supporters.

The British Youth Council supported Members of the Youth Parliament to lobby their local councils to pass motions in favour of extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. As a result of this work, we saw an increase in the number of Councils supporting the campaign from across the political spectrum. We are keen to continue growing the number of supportive councils and will continue to work with local Youth Councils to do this. This appetite for change was also demonstrated by the Electoral Reform Society's publication entitled 'Civic Duty – The Conservative Case for Votes at 16 and 17'. The publication featured senior Conservative figures calling for the Prime Minister and fellow MPs to back the campaign and to 'seize the opportunity to show leadership and inspire a new generation of active citizens'. Contributors included young Conservative Cecilia Parker and Miles Briggs MSP as well as former Minister Nicky Morgan MP.

The Welsh Assembly's intention to introduce the Welsh Parliament and Elections (Wales) Bill was also fervently supported by the Coalition. The Bill's proposals include lowering the voting age for local and Assembly elections in time for the next scheduled election in 2021. It is expected that the final Bill will pass with ease in 2019. Should this be the case, Wales will be the second nation to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local and devolved assembly elections following Scotland in 2015. This will mean that two out of the four nations in the UK will have granted 16- and 17-year-olds access to voting. All that is left is for Westminster to follow suit.

The Coalition has been campaigning for Votes at 16 for 15 years and much ground has been covered. We recognise that the persistent campaigning from the grassroots has created the largest impact; we will keep going until our democracy fully engages 16- and 17-year-olds.

# Public Opinion and Votes at 16

**Joe Greenwood**  
YouGov

Recent public opinion on extending the franchise to 16-year-olds is broadly unresponsive, though there are signs that this can change. YouGov has asked their respondents whether they would support reducing the voting age to 16 on multiple occasions since 2012, with net support ranging from -40% to -19%. Answer options have varied over time with such changes potentially having a significant impact on the answers given. Most comparable are the August 2013 and November 2017 results, offering the same answer options. In the former case, net support was at its lowest (-40%) whilst in the latter case net support was markedly higher though still roundly opposed (-27%). When asked without the 'Neither support nor oppose' option in September 2013 and February 2015, net support was higher than when the ambivalent answer was offered (-36% and -19% respectively), suggesting that the unsure may break slightly in favour.

The impact of altering the answer options indicates the importance of framing. This was starkly illustrated by a survey experiment conducted by Ipsos MORI in December 2015, which showed that when asked about 'giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote', net support is +11%. By contrast, when asked about 'reducing the voting age from 18 to 16', net support is -19%. The questions were asked in the context of, and specifically mentioned voting in, the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, which likely had an impact on the answers given. In that light, YouGov replicated the survey experiment without reference to the referendum in November 2017, finding less dramatic but nevertheless important results. When asked about *extending* the right to vote net support was -15%, whilst *reducing* the voting age produced net support of -27%. Whilst public opinion is broadly opposed, it is clear that how we talk about the issue can influence opinion. This is an issue on which at least a section of the public do not hold staunch opinions and are open to being persuaded in either direction.

To test the related messages that the public would be likely to receive in such a debate, YouGov ran a subsequent survey experiment asking about two further areas regarding changing legal age. The first was regarding purchasing alcohol and, unsurprisingly, the public overwhelmingly opposed to lowering the legal age (net support ranged from -66% to -69% depending on wording). In the second area, marriage without parental consent, public opinion was less dramatically but still strongly opposed (ranging from -46% to -58%). Asking respondents about these other areas before posing the question about the voting age does not appear to have as dramatic effect as the question wording. Perhaps surprisingly, asking about other legal ages first seems to increase net support for votes at 16 by approximately 5% (whether the question is asked in terms of extending rights or reducing the voting age). By contrast, asking about *extending* rather than *reducing* the voting age seems to increase net support by roughly 12%.

Overall, the public remain broadly opposed to extending the franchise to 16-year-olds, but there is scope for convincing at least a section of them of the merits of the cause. Crucially, their favourability is likely to be strongly related to other political and demographic characteristics. Fundamentally, whilst some voters are open to being influenced by the manner in which we ask them about votes at 16, and the narratives that are built around the issue, there are also those who are likely to hold strong and immovable positions on extending the franchise.

# Inspiring a New Generation

**David Hughes**  
*CEO Association of Colleges*

The Association of Colleges represents further education colleges. Our members support 2.2 million people each year, including over 700,000 16-, 17- and 18-year-olds. Colleges care deeply about how they support young people to shape their lives and improve their chances in work. Between 16- and 18-years of age, students are at a critical transition between being a child and an adult. Colleges help young people enter the world more confident about themselves, their place in the world, as adults independent from their parents and as valuable members of our society.

If we don't help them in that transition to think about politics and democracy and our participative system, then we're failing those young people. If our participative democracy is to be successful, across all classes and sections of society, we need to do more to help young people understand why they should vote, how to vote and what voting means. We need to inspire them to be confident in the political process and democracy we all live in.

We should extend the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds as soon as possible. Alongside it we should make sure that the education system, colleges and schools principally, have a duty to make sure that young people are informed, supported, and given the kind of understanding they need to use their vote wisely. Whoever they may vote for, at least they can vote based on an understanding of the system and of the importance of their decisions, and they can go on voting for the rest of their lives.

**Darren Hughes**  
*CEO Electoral Reform Society*

There is no silver bullet for improving participation in politics and no singular cause. But, the way people come into contact with politics in their formative years is crucially important for the future of our democracy. This is based on evidence of what's happened within the UK on the topic of engaging young people with a really important issue and its consequences.

When they can vote, 16- and 17-year-olds have higher rates of turnout than 18- to 24-year-olds – during the Scottish referendum, for example, 75% of 16- and 17-year-olds voted and 97% said they would vote in future elections. They accessed more information from a wider variety of sources than any other age group. As we can summarise from all of the evidence that has come through; if you vote in your first election, you'll carry on voting on and on and on. This is what we all want as democrats, to keep that momentum going. Extending the right to vote would allow that seamless transition from learning about voting to putting it into practice.

One of the things we need to reflect on as we move more and more to thinking about the political differences across the UK and wanting to hold together the four nations of the UK, is that we're about to have Scotland and Wales having votes at 16. This leaves our country divided when it comes to the franchise and sends an unfortunate and adverse message to the next generation about their place in our democracy and our United Kingdom. The time for extending the civic duty of voting and equalising the franchise is now. The Prime Minister should seize this opportunity to show leadership – and inspire a new generation of active citizens.

# Growing Citizenship and Engagement

Professor Tonge, Dr. Mycock and Dr. Loughran

Leverhulme Trust Voting Age Project

*Our two-year research project on the voting age involves examining attitudes towards change among 16- to 17-year-olds and the existing 18+ electorate. Working with the survey data firm, Survation, we have analysed opinion among more than 2,000 people in those two categories.*

## 16- to 17-year-olds:

Here, there is extensive support for lowering the voting age to 16. 71% of this age category 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. Scotland, where the voting age is now 16 for all bar Westminster elections, are highly supportive, as might be expected. Those from higher income households are very supportive, whilst those in public housing or where the main income provider is unemployed are less so, whilst still offering majority support. Voting is not necessarily connected to adulthood though. 63% of the sample said they considered it began at 18, compare to 23% saying 16. In terms of responsibility for ensuring sufficient political understanding to vote, 39% said schools, 25% government, 12% parents and 9% political parties. A lack of trust in politicians is evident. Asked to state the level on a 0 (don't trust at all) to 10 ('trust a great deal') only one-quarter of respondents offered a figure of 6 or higher.

## 18+ Sample:

Among the existing electorate, there is still some convincing to be done by advocates of Votes at 16. 42% support such a change compared to 40% opposed. That more adults now favour lowering the age of franchise than reject the idea is nonetheless very significant. In its last major study of the issue in 2003, the Electoral Commission's *The Age of Electoral Majority* report found that 83% of adults believed 18 to be the correct minimum age of voting. So it appears that public opinion may have substantially shifted.

There is a clear age difference, which almost mirrors the age curve in terms of party support (Labour young; Conservative older voters) from the last General Election. Young people largely support a lowering of the voting age. This support goes down steadily and then flips to a majority in opposition to Votes at 16 at around 45 at which point opposition gets progressively stronger. The East, East Midlands, Yorkshire & Humber and South East have the most extensive opposition to the policy. London is where support is strongest (contrary to the 16/17 sample). London is the only region with support levels significantly above the mean.

The relationship with party support is as one might expect. Labour voters are strongly in favour of lowering the voting age, with Conservatives strongly against. Liberal Democrat voters are in favour but less supportive than Labour voters. Age seems to be driving most of the variance. There are also significant social effects. Wealthier households are far more likely to support Votes at 16. Those in poorer households are more likely to oppose than favour. Education follows a similar pattern with recipients of Higher Education most supportive.

The overall message is that the Votes at 16 campaign has won the backing of 16- and 17-year-olds and is doing far better than was once the case among the existing electorate. However, there remains work to be done by advocates of change regarding working-class and older electors.

# The Psychology of Voters

**Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison**

*Electoral Psychology Observatory, London School of Economics*

In considering whether the lowering of the voting age to 16 can be and has been successful where implemented, it is critical to consider three critical facts:

- 1) The crisis of youth electoral participation predominantly corresponds to “cohort” effects rather than age effects, i.e. it is not a case that if people do not vote when they are young, they will do so later on in life. Instead, not voting in the first two elections of one’s life means becoming a likely chronic abstentionist, while voting in one of these critical early-life elections results in long-term participation;
- 2) A vast majority of young people – including those who do not participate in elections – say that they want to and are excited at the idea of voting. Young people vote less than average for both technical and substantive reasons. The main substantive reason is a perception that parties and politicians ignore them and their concerns, and technical reasons include high mobility, often living in areas where they are unfamiliar with local issues, social fabric and candidates. They also often feel intimidated by the registration and electoral processes. By contrast, not being interested or not caring are not key reasons for youth abstention;
- 3) In practice, electoral franchise does not result in a specific age of the first vote, but in an age range for the first vote. Thus, the vote at 18 means one’s first General election typically takes place between ages 18 and 23, whilst with the vote at 16, it will be between ages 16 and 21.

With those three crucial elements in mind, lowering the voting age to 16 improves electoral participation, repeat participation, and democratic satisfaction both by improving the match between the psychological and ergonomic needs of the people and by creating a virtuous systemic circle.

With regards to the first element, the early twenties are arguably the worst possible years to have one’s first vote when it comes to “technicalities”. It is the age when citizens are most mobile (and therefore more likely to not be able to vote easily on Election Day, or even have changing or unconventional addresses which makes it harder for them to use postal voting – this was notably true with the EU membership referendum organised at the end of June after the end of the academic year for most universities), when they are most likely to live in new or unknown environments where they are unfamiliar with local issues, candidates, or even the location of their polling stations, and where personal circumstances are changing at a rapid pace which can make it harder to focus on electoral campaigns. By contrast, between 16 and 18, young people are likely to still live with their parents, go to school, and benefit from a more stable personal situation and environment favourable to electoral participation.

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When it comes to the second element, lowering the voting age to 16 mechanically increases the number of young people in the electorate and therefore creates an incentive for political parties to make a greater effort to address young people and their concerns as not doing so becomes more costly electorally. As a result, this helps to resolve the main reason why many young people do not vote: the fact that they feel that the political system is not really interested in addressing them.

In practice, both elements are overwhelmingly confirmed by the worldwide experiences of lowering of the electoral franchise. First, it should be noted that a move to an electoral age of 16 is very much a worldwide trend with an increasing number of countries having moved in that direction or that are indeed considering implementing it. The countries which have lowered the voting age to 16 have not reneged and overwhelmingly see the change to franchise as successful. This is true in terms of turnout. 16- and 17-year-old first time voters are consistently proving more likely to vote in elections than their 18- to 24-year-old counterparts. The difference was an astonishing 21% in the Scottish Independence referendum according to ICM (75% vs 54), and in Austria, the difference has stabilised around 8-10% across elections, always in favour of 16-17 year old new voters.

Even more critically, however, this turnout increase builds up over the long term, and young people who start voting at 16-17 continue being more likely to vote thereafter. As a result, Austria – the only EU country with a franchise at 16 in all elections – now has the highest proportion of young people aged 18-35 who have voted (79%).

Not only that but young Austrians also have among the highest interest in politics in Europe, and research has shown that the quality of their vote (i.e. their effort to seek information and to ground their electoral choice in knowledge) is at least comparable and often higher than that of other generations. Those findings are reinforced by our own research conducted by the team at the Electoral Psychology Observatory (EPO) that shows that young people tend to be more sociotropic than most other generations in their vote, i.e. they tend to give greater consideration to what they think is best for their country compared to what is best for themselves in choosing how to vote. In that sense, voting gets the “best” out of young people and also makes them feel more integrated, closer to other citizens, and feel greater ownership of - and therefore - acceptance of existing laws and institutions.

Finally, voting tends to be a lot more emotional for young first time voters. They are very excited at the idea of their first time, and lowering the electoral franchise will likely work best if it comes with supportive measures and initiatives that aim to make young people’s first election special. We have developed a range of such measures which have been piloted in conjunction with several worldwide Electoral Commissions and Election Management Bodies, resulting in significant increases in turnout, long term repeat turnout, and democratic satisfaction. Whilst civic education is also important, it is crucial to note that many teenagers can be resentful of being “told what to do”, and as a result, not all forms of civic education work equally well, and ill-conceived measures may even be counter-productive. Here again, we have developed analyses of best practice based on international experience.

## Where Next for the Campaign?

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**Rt Hon Nick Morgan MP**  
*Conservative Party*

On July 2nd 2018, we marked the 90th anniversary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act in which our Parliament and Government extended the franchise to give women the same voting rights as men.

In the 21st century it seems almost incomprehensible that women weren't allowed to vote for hundreds of years. But at the time many people, including women, felt that we would be unsuited to making such decisions and that it would disturb the natural order of things for the right to vote to be shared with men. And, of course, there was a time when the right of male suffrage was very limited too.

In the same way that allowing all men and women to vote seemed a brave step forward – but is now something we wonder why it took so long to achieve – I think the time has now come to allow votes for 16- and 17-year-olds. That is why I am a member and supporter of the All Party Parliamentary Group.

There is no doubt that the age of adulthood is a bit of a hotchpotch with different rules for leaving school, getting married, carrying a knife and joining the armed forces. But that reflects society's evolving views about these issues and may change in the future.

To me, there is one overwhelming reason why this area has to be addressed. By accepting that 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland could vote on their future in their 2014 referendum, the arguments for not extending the franchise further were completely undermined.

Earlier this year the Welsh Government announced its intention to allow 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in Welsh local elections, and voters of that age can already vote in Scottish local and Parliamentary elections. If we think we're a United Kingdom or we believe that rules should be consistent then it's a question of when the rest of the country is going to catch up - we have already accepted change on this.

The most patronising argument which really doesn't stack up is that 16- and 17-year-olds are not mature enough to vote. Making such a sweeping generalisation on the basis of no evidence whatsoever should be given no air time.

At the time of writing we are all celebrating the centenary year of when some women got the vote. 100 years ago I wouldn't have been able to be a Member of Parliament and certainly not a former Cabinet Minister as a woman. The same arguments against extending the franchise were engaged 100 years ago to the day.

There is no political knowledge test which the rest of us are required to pass before we vote. If 16- and 17-year-olds could take their responsibility seriously in the Scottish referendum, then why wouldn't they do so in UK General Election and English local elections?



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In the same way that the suffragettes and the suffragists needed visionary men to support their cause, our 16- and 17-year-olds now need older voters to support theirs.

Fear of change is an understandable reason to do nothing – but it sends a powerful ‘not welcome’ message to those who remain excluded. Just like the suffrage movement, the majority is there and the Government is aware of it. Any constitutional legislation that is brought in front of Parliament will likely find a Votes at 16 clause amendment passed by majority.

Parliament and the Government have a choice – we can either do this, take the lead and get the credit for actually making the change, or we can be dragged kicking and screaming into something that is going to happen anyway.

No single party has a monopoly on the youth – it is time we recognised this and worked towards something inspiring and fundamentally engaging for young people. This is our responsibility.



**Jim McMahon MP**  
*Labour Party*

For me, any conversation about improving the lives of children should include placing them at the heart of policy making. We want policy and politics done by people, not to people – and this means young people too.

Some of the building blocks for involving young people in our democracy are in place. But we have stopped short of giving these same young people a vote in national elections. A fundamental starting point is giving a great stake in the franchise for young people by lowering the voting age. Every opposition to lowering the voting age that I’ve heard is framed with the question, “what have young people done to deserve this”. Yet young people are under-represented at every level of British politics.

In parliament, only 2 per cent of MPs are under 30, despite 16 per cent of the UK’s population being aged 18 to 29. In the period from 1979 to 2017, the average age of MPs at elections has been consistently around 50-years-old. The statistics are similar at the local level, with just over 2 per cent of councillors aged below 29. But we can see plenty of examples where young people, when engaged, have risen to the challenge and strode to become active in politics.

Historically, political parties in the UK have not engaged with youth issues. Demographically we are witnessing what is referred to as a ‘youth bulge’ – there are more young people aged 15-29 living in the UK today than at any point in our history.

# Where Next for the Campaign?

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*Continued...*

Globally, one in four people on the planet alive today are aged between 15 to 29. But in the UK, like everywhere else in the world, we have an ageing population. From a policy perspective, this means we have an important opportunity to invest in young people in order to secure our country economically, democratically and societally.

Thinking about the big picture, opting to continue ignoring young people's issues is counter-productive to the interests of the UK. But how can we pledge to invest more in youth issues, but not give young people a greater say in what those issues are, and who represents them?

Young people are more educated, vocal and politically literate than ever before. This has happened organically, through easier access to online news, articles and platforms for expressing views (though often on platforms like Snapchat that are not frequented by politicians!). And it has happened through structural changes too.

For example, in 2002 the New Labour government mandated schools to teach compulsory citizenship classes – including a small dose of political education. Studies have evidenced its success in boosting civil and civic engagement, but there is a long way to go.

Lowering the voting age should come hand-in-hand with statutory political, civic and democratic education in schools in the years leading up to 16. It will be a first in British history, and it will lay a solid foundation for civic engagement from an early age.

There is a growing sense of awareness of the implications of decisions taken in parliament and elsewhere on the wellbeing of young people. It is an obvious point, but it has been brought into sharp focus by the Brexit vote, as well as the independence referendum in Scotland.

A study by the Princes Trust showed that over half of young people are fearful for the future following recent political events, such as the decision to leave the EU. This feeling is compounded by issues such as housing, the rising cost of education and uncertain employment prospects.

From my experience, if you put young people's issues on the table, young people will engage with politics. But that engagement will drop off if young people don't have the vote. You risk an apathy setting in from an early age, as young people with a hunger for politics realise their voices aren't really being heard.

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