

Votes at 16

Could lowering the voting age turn around youth apathy towards politics? Children's Express asks some young activists.

It's a disturbing fact that more 18-to-24-year-olds voted for Big Brother than turned out at the last General Election.

This lack of interest shown by young people in the UK has become a huge concern for many people involved in the political system. That's one of the main reasons behind a campaign calling for votes for 16-year-olds, which was launched at Westminster in January this year.

The campaign is being co-ordinated by the Electoral Reform Society, with the support of various children's rights groups. It's also backed by the Liberal Democrats.

They're hoping that reducing the voting age will make more young people feel politics is relevant to them. But is it what we want? We asked young people from across the UK if they thought it was a good idea and as expected their views were wide and varied.

Jonathan Hudson, 16, from Birmingham has been involved in organising the campaign and is very much in favour of lowering the voting age. He likens denying 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote to denying women the vote in the last century: "At 16 you can pay taxes, get married, join the army and die for your country so you should be able to vote."

Jonathan says the campaign is now taking off with the introduction of citizen education, which means there are loads of 16-year-olds who know about voting and politics but just aren't able to vote.

Tessa Roberts from London is also a supporter of votes for 16 year olds: "Voting means having a say in what's going on in the world. I think I am mature enough to vote. The difference between someone my age and someone who's 18, in terms of understanding what's going on around them, I really don't think is that great."

But not everyone feels the same way. Lucy Tobin from London believes that because 18 is the official age when you become an adult in the eyes of the law, so it should also be the age of voting: "Young people would just vote the way their parents vote or they won't vote at all. I think we should leave things as they are."

Richard Slade from Hatch End agrees and says that lowering the vote is not important when there are more pressing concerns for society: "I think a lot of young people are too immature to know which way to vote. They may just vote for people who are cool or 'in' at the time and not really think about policies.

"They may only vote for things that affect them and forget the rest of society." Richard adds that by allowing 16-year-olds the vote, it's possibly that politics will be affected in a bad way.

Stephen Bull from London agrees and feels that he is not personally mature enough to vote: "I don't think that I would make the right decisions, because I don't know enough about politics. I think young people would use their vote, but some may abuse it and vote for any old party."

Charlotte Jones from Fleet in Hampshire also has strong opinions on the subject of maturity: "If we're not responsible enough to drive at 16, then we shouldn't really be responsible enough to vote. At 16 the majority of students aren't actually mature enough to make responsible decisions about who they actually want in power and to lead Britain."

The last time the voting age was changed was at the 1970 General Election, when it was lowered from 21 to 18. So while there are many young people who don't feel they are responsible or mature enough to be voting to decide who they want running our country, others feel it's well and truly time for another change.

"Young people have something to contribute and those who aren't mature enough probably won't register to vote," says Joseph Whitbourn from Guildford in Surrey.

The voting age has been reduced to 16 in eight countries - including Brazil, Croatia and the Philippines - but not in any European Union country. Iran even has a voting age of 15.

Jonathan Hudson believes giving more young people the vote would put youth issues higher up the agenda: "If the voting age was lowered politicians would need to engage young people more easily, for example on student fees. Labour wouldn't get elected if they were going to introduce student fees and loads of young people were able to vote."

Miriam Yafai, 16, from Sheffield supports lowering the voting age and says that if young people were given the right to vote at 16, they would feel more empowered and politically motivated to understand why decisions are made by the government.

But Miriam adds that just giving 16-year-olds the vote is not enough. She says a lot will still need to be done if they are to change young people's views on politics and encourage them to actually vote: "Some 16-year-olds will use the vote once it's given to them because there are obviously causes they support. But the problem is that many will still find it irrelevant because they feel nothing will change. A common view among young people is that politics is really boring."

Miriam reckons the only way that young people will use the vote and understand what they are voting for and why is to educate them through schools: "Political education should be obligatory in schools and in some ways it is with citizenship."

"Not enough time has been given to educating the future of Britain in the workings of government. You will only understand the voting process if you engage in it," she says.

About the team

This story was produced by Neil Hampton, 15, Ben Baginsky, 17, Gabriella Gay, 16, and Chris Fletcher, 17. It was published on Sky TV's [Reach for the Sky](#) website.

8 comments

voting

I think that we are still too young to vote.

Jasmine Howells (age 13) from Manningtree, 09 February 2011 14:44

The Vote

In my arguement to many young people of 16 are challanged by there GCSE's. This is all to much for a young oerson to take in as they are getting to grips with a new life. They have to experience a new challenge in life. They are not mature or thinking straight for a desision like the vote, becasue they cant make a random vote. No 16 years olds should not get the chance to vote

Reece Kirkham (age 18) from Manningtree High School, 09 February 2011 14:32

Votes at 16

I think that 16 year olds should be able to vote, because if 18 year olds can what difference does 2 years make? 16 is the age when you make your own decisions and become responsible for your own actions. If were allowed to get married, etc then i think we are mature enough to get the vote for 16.

Hannah Whiteman (age 13) from Manningtree, 09 February 2011 14:32

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