Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission: Young People and Politics

Edited by
Andrew Mycock and Jonathan Tonge

Political Studies
Association

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Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission: Executive Summary

Debates about the state of British democracy in recent years have often drawn attention to a decline in conventional political participation and rising levels of political disengagement. Such concerns are founded on evidence of reduced turnouts in national or local elections, declining membership of political parties, and the low standing of politicians who suffer the opprobrium of sizeable sections of the public. Whilst some suggest opportunities created via the newer communication channels of social media indicate continuing interest in politics, the prevailing sense 'on-line' would appear to be one also dominated by cynicism towards political institutions and decline in trust of those taking decisions within such bodies.

A variety of explanations have been put forward that often relate to theories of supply or demand. Supply-based explanations draw attention to the supposed inadequacies of politicians, the unrepresentative composition of decision-making bodies, and the ineffectiveness of parliamentary institutions. Why should, it is argued, we expect young people to want to enter the 'sunlit uplands' of a political system and culture that is not fit for purpose. Demand-oriented explanations of political disengagement highlight the unrealistic expectations that many citizens hold with regards to decision-makers who do not have the capacity to deliver all our aspirations. On this reading, electors need to take more responsibility and engage in a politics which cannot give them all they want.

Analysis of the causes and extent of political disengagement clearly requires accommodation of both perspectives, particularly when considering younger voters. On most measurements of conventional political participation, activity amongst young people appears low when compared to other age categories. For example, the gap in electoral turnout between 18-24 year olds and those aged over 55 is higher in the UK than in any other democracy – a shocking disparity.[1] It would be foolish though to simplistically compare current young voters to previous generations and denunciate them as deficient or even feckless. Harking back to an ill-defined 'golden age' of British democracy overlooks that politics was typically tribal and unrepresentative, with levels of participation significantly skewed by social class, ethnicity and gender.

This short volume adopts a positive tone that goes beyond the simplistic denunciation of young people, and is grounded instead in the belief that it would be neglectful for those interested in the future vibrancy of British democracy to fail to address the acute problem of youth political disengagement. The contributors to the volume are keen to explore ways to better connect younger citizens with political parties, politicians, democratic institutions, and civic society more widely. The volume is thus founded upon the belief that young people are not politically apathetic and should not be demonised or compared to older voters. Civil engagement, in the form of volunteering, is at an all-time high and young people are interested in participating in our democracy when it is made accessible and relevant to them. We believe there are considerable grounds for optimism that a high level of civic engagement, underpinned with a strong political component, can be attained.

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1   Democratic Audit (2014) 'All parties need to commit to a plan for voter engagement, available at http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=2463, 26 January 2014.

To encourage greater numbers of young people to become lifelong politically active and participative citizens will, though, require institutional reform, substantial improvements to political literacy, and an attitudinal step change for older citizens. Those engaged in the pursuit of politics must acknowledge and accept the considerable shortcomings of our contemporary political system and wider culture with regards to young people and actively seek to adopt new approaches to youth citizenship. We are keen to acknowledge the concerted efforts of recent governments of differing political complexions to engage with issues of youth engagement, encouraging cross-party cooperation and establishing networks between youth organisations, academics and others seeking to bolster the health of our democracy. The response of the Political Studies Association, the UK's leading organisation promoting the study of politics, to the government's *The Governance of Britain* Green Paper in 2007, led to very constructive engagement between politicians and academics, with the Chair of the Association and several senior members invited to serve on the Youth Citizenship Commission (2008-9) that examined how to encourage democratic participation as a form of good citizenship. It is in the same positive and cooperative spirit that the Political Studies Association offers the ideas on youth democratic engagement contained in this publication.

The issues explored within this volume are wide-ranging, offering research-led discussion of key areas concerning youth political engagement and solid policy proposals for political parties and other decision-makers to consider. This includes ideas on how to improve youth political literacy via enhanced citizenship classes, connect with social media and promote digital democracy, develop engagement with political parties, revise arrangements for electoral registration, and encourage political activity amongst young women and ethnic minority communities who remain severely under-represented in political institutions. The cases for compulsory voting and a lowering of the voting age to 16 are also analysed.

We recognise that forms of political engagement are varied and ever-changing. Political debates and activity continue to flourish via new communication channels. However, we seek to encourage alternative forms of political action that *complement and increase traditional key political activities* involving parties and elections, for which democratic substitutes are not readily available. None of the ideas contained in this volume will *in isolation* achieve the universally-desired goal of better engaging young people in politics. However, the sum of the parts could represent a more holistic approach required if we are to reinvigorate British democracy.

Jonathan Tonge (Liverpool) and Andy Mycock (Huddersfield)

Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission Policy Proposals

1) Compulsory electoral registration in schools and colleges across the UK.

2) A UK-wide referendum on lowering the voting age to 16.

3) The establishment of compulsory annual MP and local councillor constituency surgeries and political party policy forums aimed at young people to be held in local schools, colleges and community centres.

4) National youth parliaments, assemblies and forums across the UK to be given the right to call a people's ballot or citizens' initiative referendum on a topic of their choosing.

5) The UK and devolved governments to establish out-reach activities involving political parties and youth groups to mobilise ethnic minority and Muslim young people to address issues that concern them.

6) The Westminster All-Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Parliament should establish an inquiry on Young Women in Politics in order to explore the reasons for and rectify the relative absence of young female representatives in local and national politics.

7) The introduction of statutory provision in citizenship education programmes in schools, colleges and universities across the UK of training for young people to use social media in critical participative ways.

8) The formation of a standing Commission on Education for Citizenship to monitor provision in schools and colleges in England (as recommended in the Crick Report of 1998).

9) All political parties in the UK to undertake a review of the terms of young party membership and the relationship between youth wings and the main party with the aim to increase opportunities for young people to influence policy more significantly and develop participation.

10) Creation of a 'Charter for Citizenship' for Higher and Further Education institutions across the UK.

Theme 1

Reforming Political Culture and Participation

Some progress made, still much to do: Youth political engagement since the Youth Citizenship Commission

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Recent governments have, to different degrees, acknowledged the need for greater youth engagement in politics and society more widely. The Labour Government of 2005-10 recognised that civic and civil disengagement were serious issues which the state had a responsibility to address. The 2007 *Governance of Britain* Green Paper noted that there was still a lack of appreciation of the importance of the contribution of young people to the democratic process and called for the government to establish the Youth Citizenship Commission (YCC). Established in 2008, the Commission was staffed by individuals of varying backgrounds (including the authors of this piece) and invited to examine how young people define citizenship and to explore how that citizenship might better be connected to political activity. Additionally, the YCC was asked to lead a consultation on whether the voting age should be lowered. It reported to government in June 2009 (YCC, 2009a), making sixteen policy recommendations while also advising the government there was no compelling case to lower the voting age (YCC, 2009b).

The Brown government responded positively to the YCC final report, endorsing virtually all of its findings. In places, however, its formal response (HM Government, 2010) read a little too much like a trumpeting of existing examples of good practice, confined to a select number of government departments, whereas the thrust of the YCC's arguments was for a much more comprehensive development and extension of the useful schemes of political engagement already evident. The Labour government was however voted out of office before it could implement any of the policy recommendations.

The impact of the Youth Citizenship Commission

What has happened since then? Let us start with the good news. A cross-party consensus would appear to have emerged in acknowledging the need for the state to take action in bolstering youth citizenship. This has ensured a modest degree of policy continuity from the previous to current governments, although, regrettably, neither has sought to acknowledge this. The Coalition government that came into power in May 2010 has clearly drawn heavily on the recommendations of the YCC in designing youth citizenship policies. For example, the *Positive for Youth* initiative, a 'cross-Government policy' launched in 2011, stated its intention to promote youth voice by involving young people in decision-making and auditing of youth services. The Coalition government also implemented the YCC's recommendation to establish national scrutiny groups to 'youth proof' policies affecting young people through equality impact assessments. These proposals strongly mirrored the YCC's own recommendations on the importance of youth-led policy formation and scrutiny at all levels of government. It also followed the YCC's proposal to provide sustainable funding for the UK Youth Parliament.

Commendably, the current government has, against the original instincts amongst Conservatives, backed the YCC support for citizenship education to be maintained as statutory subject within the secondary school curriculum in England. In Opposition, the then shadow Education Secretary, Michael Gove, promised to strip down the 'politically

motivated' curriculum (Paton, 2009) and questioned the efficacy of Citizenship, asking: 'When it comes to citizenship, community cohesion and a sense of national solidarity, why is it that we imagine a particular subject put on the National Curriculum can address these deep and long standing challenges?' We concur that it is asking too much of a single subject to transform youth democratic participation, but to remove that subject would have weakened it considerably. The efficacy of citizenship education in promoting democratic participation and civil engagement has surely now been proven, having been subject to more than a decade of rigorous statistical testing (Tonge, Mycock and Jeffrey, 2012; Whiteley, 2012). As such, government support for the subject is a welcome confirmation of evidence-based policy.

We continue to argue the need for the centrality of citizenship education as part of a programme of civic regeneration across the UK. Recent reforms of the curriculum appear however to prioritise social and economic citizenship. We support the idea that the civic and the civil can be linked by emphasising connections between rights, duties and obligations in encouraging socially acceptable behaviour, volunteering and active citizenship via political participation. But in the absence of a Politics GCSE, much rests upon the efficient delivery of citizenship classes infused with a mission to deliver civic education. The original aims and outcomes of citizenship education insisted one of its key roles must be to challenge the 'inexcusably and damagingly bad' levels of political literacy and participation (QCA 1998, 16) and to make young people 'feel that they have a stake in our society and the community in which they live by teaching them the nature of democracy" (DfEE, 1997, 63). We call for a restatement of the need for political literary by placing knowledge of our political system at the heart of the citizenship curriculum. This will complement, not usurp, the civil engagement aspect of citizenship classes.

Another policy area where the current government clearly engages with the final report of the YCC is on the issue of civic service. Although the concept of the 'Big Society' has had some difficulties gaining traction, its outworking in terms of youth engagement in the form of National Citizen Service (NCS) is significant. Whilst not opposed in principle, the YCC final report and subsequent research (see Mycock and Tonge, 2011) has drawn attention to the limitations of civic service programmes, encouraging some recognition of international comparisons. Although the government targets for the expansion of NCS are admirably optimistic, recruitment has failed to meet targets set during each year the programme has run so far. NCS has expanded considerably but lacks universality in opportunities for young people to participate both in England and Northern Ireland, where the programme runs, and in Scotland and Wales, where it does not. Moreover, the claims regarding its long-term impacts on the attitudes and behaviours of young people are simply not sustainable on current evidence (see, for example, NatCen, 2013).

Our primary concern though is that the civil engagement involved in NCS, whilst welcome, is not extended to substantial forms of civic engagement. As such, it is an initiative which does not attempt to address key issues of democratic participation, beyond an unproven hope that social activism will crossover into political activism. Despite implicit claims to the contrary, there is no evidential link between young people participating in NCS and increased knowledge, skills, or preparedness to participate in formal or informal modes of political activism (cf. Birdwell and Bani, 2014). Indeed, it is noteworthy that the independent assessments undertaken by NatCen have not sought to test if NCS participants are more predisposed to civic engagement and proponents of the programme rarely laud its potential to build political capital.

Schools as 'sites of democracy'

One area where the Coalition government appears to have failed to engage with the YCC is the proposition to turn schools into 'sites of democracy'. The YCC encouraged the universal adoption of class and school councils and also the election of student representatives on school and college governing bodies. We also encouraged schools to be kept open if they were to be used as polling stations. One of the most important recommendations of the YCC was that compulsory electoral registration of young people ought to be undertaken by schools or colleges. Those concerned with youth political participation ought to also be concerned at the mode of electoral registration, currently being switched from household to individual mode by the government. Under the old system of household registration, the percentage of unregistered young people was estimated as being as worryingly-high as 28 per cent. Analyses of youth non-voting needs to start at first base, by addressing the problem that many youngsters are not even eligible to vote, courtesy of their non-registration by parents. As such, the low turnouts reported amongst youngsters understate the problem, as they are expressed as a percentage of an electoral register from which many are missing.

The current government has responded with the 'Rock Enrol' initiative, which shifts electoral registration responsibilities to schools and colleges is welcome. Electoral registration will be promoted in schools via the provision of information packs for teachers, with the support for community volunteers, and can form part of active citizenship classes. However, the voluntarism of the scheme is hugely regrettable. Registration will be patchy, according to where volunteers enter schools and the degree to which schoolteachers respond to the initiative. Electoral registration in schools and colleges ought to be compulsory, in the same manner in which the registration of births, marriages or deaths, or the completion of a census form, is required. Recent suggestions to introduce on-line voter registration should be welcomed (see Watson, 2014) but voluntarism in the electoral process should be confined to the decision whether or not to vote, but should not underpin the composition of the electoral register.

Lowering the voting age?

The Labour party's laudable concern with youth disengagement has continued in Opposition. In 2013, they establishment of the 'People's Politics Inquiry' designed to examine aspects of political culture, democratic participation and how to reconnect people to parliament, designed to address Britain's 'flat-lining democracy'. Usefully, the Inquiry does not seek refuge in denial of the challenges in reconnecting with young citizens and it supports the YCC proposition to develop alternative modes of political discussion, such as encouraging political debate and decision-making through social media. Labour's Inquiry is not however sufficient in addressing the need to revitalise traditional forms of engagement. This is, in part, is because the development of Labour's youth citizenship policy appears to have been pre-empted by the party's determination to lower the voting age.

In his 2013 party conference speech, the Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, expressed his desire to 'give a voice' to young people by giving the vote to 16 and 17 year olds and 'make them part of our democracy'. Miliband's support for lowering the voting-age was rightly grounded in a belief that voting in elections is important – a merciful rejection of

over-publicised Russell Brand-esque inanities concerning a precious right for which many people died. Many citizens who get into the habit of voting early in life may well continue to do so as they get older. But while there *are* some serious arguments for lowering the voting age in an ageing society, it is not a panacea to issues of youth engagement and could actually prove more damaging in long term to youth political activism.

The primary drawback with the proposition to lower the voting age is that it is a response to the symptoms of political disengagement – declining turnout - rather than the causes. Adjustment of the voting age, whatever its merits or deficiencies, will not redress the numerous issues which impair civic engagement amongst young people. The YCC final report noted that young people do not feel politicians or policy-makers take them or their concerns seriously. Political parties develop few youth-centric policies in elections that might resonate with younger voters – or fulfil such promises once in power. Young people feel elected politicians are often inaccessible to them and are poor at communicating policy in terms they are familiar. Moreover, there are few young politicians that younger voters can emphasise with and the political culture that drives local and national democracy is often perceived as infantile and insular. It is clear that democratic participation is hindered by issues of trust and efficacy of politicians and the political system.

Moreover, Miliband's focus on possession of the vote as the key determinant of democratic citizenship would suggest that those under the legal voting age – regardless of whether it is 16 or 18 – are not part of 'our democracy'. This is a deeply segregated approach that appears to simply seek to shift the 'glass ceiling' of full citizenship downwards without recognition that ages of responsibility do not coalesce around the age of 16. Proponents of 'votes at 16' regularly cite issues of marriage, taxation, and army service as evidence of the right to vote. Such claims are open to contention in terms of universality across the UK and overlook a wider age inconsistencies with regards to citizenship rights. Furthermore, the YCC undertook an audit of the ages of responsibility and noted successive governments had encouraged an upward trajectory. For example, young people between the ages of 16 and 18 are now compelled to continue in education or training, a state-imposed restriction not applicable to older citizens. It appears rather at odds to deny potential young voters unfettered access to the rights and freedoms of full citizenship but argue they are politically mature enough to vote.

Some proponents of 'votes at 16' appear to believe that structural reform in terms of voter eligibility will transform how government and political parties engage with and represent young people (Adonis and Tyndall, 2014). By expanding the electorate, politicians will radically alter their attitudes and actions towards young voters, encouraging a shift with regards to policy focus towards younger voters and more young people standing for election. Such optimism is laudable but speculative, based on assumptions that political elites will voluntarily reform established forms of practice and representation due to moderate expansion of the youth electoral constituency. It is not explained why political parties and politicians have typically overlooked or sought to engage with the large group of 18-24 year-old voters.

The points raised above do not preclude the possibility of lowering the voting age at some point in the future. But the enhancement of youth political engagement to encourage life-long modes of participation requires a more sophisticated review of the quality as well as the quantity of participation. Supporters of 'votes at 16' rightly seek to enhance our democracy but fail to acknowledge that focus on the reform of the franchise places

the responsibility for decline in democratic participation squarely on the shoulders of the electorate. The detrimental impact of an under-reformed political system and culture that has become increasingly insular, self-selecting, and unrepresentative is clearly a significant contribution to political disengagement. Suggestions that young people should be compelled to vote in their first eligible elections, as recently proposed by the IPPR think-tank (2013), similarly seek to address the symptoms not the causes of youth political disengagement.

There are lessons to be learnt from other countries where evidence suggests that lowering the voting age to 16 has little negative impact on overall turnout levels, with newly-enfranchised young voters voting in similar numbers as their older counterparts. The benefits can be short-term though. For example, the experience of Brazil suggests that disillusionment amongst 16 and 17 year-old voters can quickly set in if the political system and its actors are not prepared to reform their attitudes and behaviour (Barbosa et al, 2014). This has seen youth turnout decline, even though voting is compulsory. More worryingly, experts from Austria and Norway suggest that youth political literacy and engagement beyond elections is not significantly enhanced when the voting age is lowered (Democratic Audit, 2013). The failure to undertake reform of our political institutions, culture and policy frameworks to represent young people more proportionally before lowering the voting age could further diminish the legitimacy of elections and the wider democratic process in the UK in the long-term.

Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission

The current government's undeclared but quiet adoption of many of the YCC proposals mean that examples of good practice in respect of the above are now more numerous than ever in public bodies. The extension of participatory frameworks for young people within national and local public bodies, as recommended by the YCC in 2009, is continuing apace, but good practice remains patchy. Building upwards from citizen participation in schools, communities and local authorities is the best way to secure meaningful and sustained political engagement from young people. Yet there remains a seeming reluctance to place these modes of youth participation on a universal, statutory footing. This needs to be the priority for the post-2015 administration, regardless of its political complexion.

The decline in political capital - citizens' trust in and respect for the institutions of the political system – is a product of weak relationships between young citizens and the state. There are no short-term fixes for this. Reforms to voting systems such as lowering the voting age or introduce compulsory voting will not provide satisfactory redress to the complex causes of youth disengagement. Changes to modes of electoral registration as outlined in this article are a positive step towards connecting with the young citizens but need to be accompanied by a commitment to improve the political knowledge, skills and literacy of young people through citizenship education to enhance understanding of local and national issues and likelihood of voting.

Policy proposal: Compulsory electoral registration in schools and colleges across the UK.

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Vote early and vote often: reinforcing the unwritten rule of representative democracy

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Young people are far less likely to vote than other age groups. In the 2010 general election, only 44 per cent of 18-24 year-olds voted, compared to an overall turnout rate of 65 per cent. Turnout among 25-34 year-olds was also significantly lower than the overall figure. In the 2009 local elections, 10 per cent of 18-24 year-olds voted, compared to 85 per cent of those aged 65 or over. It is of course too simplistic to say there is an automatic – or any – correlation between low turnout and the economic woes that today's young people are experiencing. Age cohorts do not vote in blocs, and to suggest otherwise would be to ignore evidence that members of different generations care about each other, perhaps just as much as they do fellow members of their own age cohort (cf. Kneale et al., 2010).

Equally, however, this does not mean that it does not matter that fewer young people are expressing their democratic preferences. Crucially, population ageing means that, even if they were, they would still be 'out-voted' by other cohorts. This is a very recent (and intensifying) trend that may be helping to undermine an 'unwritten rule' of representative democracy that those whose lives are affected for longest by the outcomes of the democratic process have the greatest influence at the ballot box. In this chapter I outline why lowering the voting age to 16, or even merely holding a referendum on this issue, may be part of the answer.

Voting matters

There is little evidence that young people are any more apathetic about politics than any other age group (Dermody et al., 2010; Hay, 2007). A sense of powerlessness, of not being able to enact change through the ballot box, is a more cogent explanation than contentment for non-voting. Yet that does not make it okay, because representative democracy is a numbers game. Formal electoral processes are not the only way to exercise influence in a liberal democracy, but they are the most important. And it is no good retorting that non-voters have *chosen* not to vote (even though that is largely correct) because large-scale non-cooperation will surely, before long, start to threaten the fundamental legitimacy of democracy.

I base this argument on the under-observed reality that there has never existed a representative democracy, in any large society, without a pyramid-shaped age distribution, that is, a society where the young outnumber the old. The people who will probably be affected for longest, and at a crucial life-stage, by the outcomes of the democratic process have the most influence at the ballot box. This does *not* mean that all young people vote (or even think) in the same way, but it does mean that those seeking elected office have to consider the resonance of their positions and the potential impact of their policies on this group. It also makes young people a key target market for the media through which public debate is conducted.

We will very soon experience, if we are not already, representative democracy in a society with a very different age distribution. In 1991 the median voter was aged 44, and ten years later they were aged 45. At the 2010 general election, the median voter was aged

46, and by 2021 this will have risen to 47. Twenty years later, the median voter will be 50 years old. But these figures do not take into account voter turnout; the median *actual* voter was 49 in 2010 and, if current turnout rates persist, will be 52 as soon as 2021 (see Berry, 2012 for the full analysis). Crossing our fingers in hope that democracy will retain widespread support in these demographic circumstances is not sufficient. Clearly we cannot and should not seek to reverse the increase in life expectancy that lies behind population ageing, but we can seek to mitigate the impact of ageing by protecting the status of young people in formal democratic processes.

Voting at 16 matters

Increasing the political participation of young people is therefore an urgent task. There are a large number of ways that participation may be boosted – including those discussed elsewhere in this volume – that may lead indirectly to higher voter turnout as well as other forms of influence. But since participation *in elections* is the primary focus of this chapter, I concentrate here on changes to the voting process.

Innovative methods of voting have been utilised by electoral authorities in the UK, albeit seemingly with mixed success in terms of increasing turnout. But such innovations have not been judged over a long enough timeframe, and have been limited in nature. Voting by post, text message and online should be available at every election, and heavily promoted, and elections should ideally take place over more than a single weekday. This is not about simply making it easier to vote – with the connotation being that anyone too lazy to vote by the traditional method does not deserve to vote – but rather recognising that traditional methods of voting are out-of-step with the lifestyles and working practices of many of today's young people. Voting should not be easy, but we have to acknowledge that it has become more difficult for some groups than others.

Of course, while such measures may marginally improve the *supply* of voting methods, they will have little effect on the *demand* to utilise them. We can completely eradicate the demand problem, however, by making voting mandatory, as in Australia. This would seem to be the logical conclusion of my argument that we should, as far as possible, increase turnout to mitigate the impact of population ageing on representative democracy's 'unwritten' demographic foundation. The Institute of Public Policy Research has in fact suggested that voting should be mandatory for first-time voters only, in hope of forming the habit (see Birch et al., 2013).

Either approach would, however, be fairly extreme. The benefits of greater participation would have to be weighed against the danger of criminalising a large chunk of today's younger cohorts. The system may in fact breed further resentment as young people are forced to choose between parties they do not believe in. An abstention option on the ballot paper would mitigate this problem, but may also have a deleterious impact on the real business of elections, that is, choosing legislators and governments.

One option that requires further consideration is that of lowering the voting age to 16. This is ostensibly a different kind of 'solution' to those discussed above, in that it seeks to increase the number of young people in the electorate, rather than increase turnout among the existing electorate. On this basis, however, lowering the voting age is not particularly useful. At the 2010 general election, the median potential voter would have been a year younger, but assuming 16 and 17 year-olds voted at the same rate as those aged 18-24, the median actual voter would have been no younger.

There are three main objections to lowering the voting age. Firstly, that voting at 16 should not be classed as a human right because most internationally recognised rights frameworks (rightly) treat people aged under-18 as children. Secondly, that 16 and 17 year-olds lack the maturity to exercise their vote responsibly. Both are valid objections, to some extent, although I believe both are wrong. Voting should be among the *first* rights that we bestow upon our fellow citizens, not the *last*.

The third main objection is that 16 and 17 year-olds are not likely to vote, so we would risk entrenching the habit of non-voting. This argument, however, is not particularly sophisticated. In fact, evidence from Norway and Austria tells us 16 and 17 year-old first-time voters are more likely to vote than older first-time voters, and people that vote in the first election they are eligible to vote in are more likely to vote in the future (Franklin, 2004; Zeglovits, 2013). In contrast to the conventional wisdom, while by 18 disaffection may have taken root among young people, a positive inclination to vote may be more evident among 16 and 17 year-olds, and therefore lowering the voting age would lead to higher turnout among all young people, as it enables a habit of voting to form.

Show of hands?

Inevitably, we cannot escape the fact that allowing 16 year-olds to vote is a contentious issue. In contrast to the enfranchisement of women, there is as yet no consensus that the ability to vote is a basic right for 16 year-olds. As such, as long as opinion remains divided, a referendum (in which 16 and 17 year-olds would be included) would be a useful way to settle the issue. It is worth noting that the voting age in the Scottish independence referendum will be 16.

It is entirely possible, or even probable, that UK voters would choose *not* to lower the voting age. But this does not mean the referendum would have been a futile exercise. Given that extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year-olds would not have a large impact on electoral demographics, the proposition should be considered in terms of its impact on the tendency to vote among young people in general. As such, a referendum could have an instrumental value beyond the actual plebiscite. The referendum would surely generate a national conversation (and front-page coverage) about the political participation of young people, the kind of conversation currently limited to the academy, a handful of non-governmental organisations and, to some extent, young people themselves.

We can expect this conversation to continue even after the referendum, as the result is dissected – particularly the collective preferences expressed by different age groups, including 16 and 17 year-olds themselves. Lowering the voting age to 16 would go some way to increasing the pool of young potential electors. But simply having a conversation about it could, alongside other measures to increase turnout, be an effective way of turning today's potential young voters into actual voters.

Policy proposal: A UK-wide referendum on lowering the voting age to 16.

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Will compulsory voting fix the disconnect between young people and the political process?

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Recent trends across contemporary advanced democracies suggest a deepening disconnect between citizens and democratic politics and institutions (Norris, 2011). Most noticeably, such disaffection is represented by declining electoral participation rates, with people voting in far fewer numbers than was the case in previous decades. In Britain, nowhere is this disconnect more apparent than amongst today's youth generation, and a major concern of our national politicians is that young people seem increasingly reluctant to vote. Only 39 per cent of registered 18 to 24 year olds voted at the General Election in 2001, falling further to 37 per cent in 2005. Their turnout did increase slightly at the most recent contest in 2010 to 44 per cent, but it remained well below youth election turnout rates recorded during the 1980s and 1990s (Henn and Foard, 2014); it was also significantly less than their older contemporaries, with for instance 76 per cent of those aged 65 and over voting in 2010 (Ipsos MORI, 2010).

Although it is recognised that many young people take an active role in alternative forms of participation (such as the 2011 student demonstrations in Britain and the global 'Occupy' movement), their lack of presence at elections often leads commentators and academics to write them off as apathetic and uninterested in democratic politics, or even as anti-political (see Phelps, 2012). Furthermore, the significant generational disparity in electoral participation rates results in the policy concerns of young people being given relatively little priority by the political classes; thus, when elected to office, politicians in government will tend to pursue policies that favour older and other more voting-inclined-groups at the expense of younger and more *non*-voting-inclined groups (Berry, 2012). This generational electoral divide, therefore, has serious implications for contributing to the deepening of existing generational social and economic inequalities.

Why don't young people vote?

In our own research we have been considering why it is that young people do not vote and what might be done to re-engage them with the formal political and democratic processes. In 2011 we conducted an online survey with 1,025 young adults who were aged 18 at the time of the 2010 UK General Election. Perhaps surprisingly given the way that they are often characterised, our survey results indicate that nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of young people claim to have at least some interest in politics. But despite this, more than half (55 per cent) of them feel considerably ill at ease in terms of their own knowledge and understanding of British politics (only 36 per cent claim confidence in such matters). Worryingly, a very large majority (75 per cent) of today's generation of young people do not feel that they can influence the decision-making process.

Interestingly, despite their reservations about how the system operates, young people are still more likely than not to express broad support for the democratic process, and approximately half state that they are committed to the principle of voting (57 per cent) and of the value of elections (48 per cent). Nonetheless, it should be noted that a significant number of young people appear to have lost faith in the democratic process – in either voting (37 per cent) or in the electoral process (28 per cent).

So it's not that young people don't want to vote. Indeed, the majority of our respondents said they were considering voting at the next election (64 per cent). However, their first experience of a general election in 2010 has left many feeling deeply frustrated. The results from our project reveal that they consider professional politicians to be remote and self-serving, with no commitment towards championing young people's concerns. The overwhelming majority (81 per cent) hold a negative view of the political classes, with very few admitting any trust in either the parties (8 per cent) or in politicians (7 per cent).

It is perhaps not surprising that a majority in our survey (57 per cent) claim that although elections allow voters to express their opinions, they don't really change anything (only 15 per cent disagreed with this sceptical statement). Most importantly, young people need to feel that there is a party on offer that shares their own hopes and aspirations – in the absence of any such party, they don't feel encouraged to vote. Thus, there is a noticeable gap between those who would only vote in an election if they cared who won (40 per cent) and those who disagreed with that particular view (27 per cent).

Is compulsory voting the solution to the young citizen-state disconnect?

So what might be done to re-connect today's youth generation to the formal political process and to convert their broad democratic outlooks into attendance at the ballot booth? Is compulsory voting the way forward? Recently, a report published by the *Institute of Public Policy Research* (Birch et al. 2013), has suggested that one way to arrest the decline in youth voter turnout is to introduce a system of compulsory voting for first-time voters. This suggestion is not as radical as it might at first seem. There are several established democracies that have compulsory voting laws, including Belgium, Australia, Greece, Luxembourg – and several more which have all had such systems for at least a period during the modern era (such as Italy, Austria, and the Netherlands).

There would certainly appear to be some major advantages should voting be made compulsory for first time voters. At present, there is a momentum developing in Britain for the idea of extending the vote to 16 and 17 year olds; the Labour party are considering making this part of their platform for office at the next general election, while these younger groups will be granted the right to vote at the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014. It is also argued that compelling these young people to vote will help towards eliminating the generational electoral divide. In doing so, it will force professional politicians, the political parties and future governments to treat young people and their policy concerns more respectfully and on a par with those of their older contemporaries. Furthermore, evidence suggests that voting (and by implication, non-voting) is habit-forming (Franklin, 2004). Consequently, requiring young people to vote will help shape their commitment to voting in the future.

A major drawback of introducing such a compulsory voting scheme for young people is that it singles them out as 'different' from the rest of the adult population, helping to reinforce the stereotype of this current youth generation as apathetic and politically irresponsible. The implication being that it is the behaviour of young people that needs changing - rather than a reform of the political process and of democratic institutions to make the latter more accessible and meaningful for today's youth generation. Furthermore, critics might argue that compelling any young person to vote who has only limited interest in mainstream electoral politics or who feels no affinity with the parties on offer, has serious negative implications for the health of our democratic system; by forcing them to vote, they may develop an attitude of entrenched disdain for the parties, or indeed become particularly

susceptible to parties with antidemocratic tendencies - especially those of the far-right. However, offering the option to vote for '*None of the above*' on the ballot paper may help militate against this latter point.

In our research study, we asked young people if the introduction of compulsory voting would make a difference to their turnout in future elections. Perhaps not surprisingly, the largest group (47 per cent) said it would, although a large minority (40 per cent) reported it would make no difference. Of particular note, Table 1 compares the views of those young people claiming to have voted at the 2010 General Election with those reporting that they had not. These 'Voters' and 'non-voters' were similar in stating that that they would be more likely to vote in the future if compulsory voting were introduced (46 per cent and 50 per cent respectively). However, 28 per cent of those who didn't vote in 2010 said that compulsory voting would make no difference – and that they would continue not to vote. Furthermore, and perhaps worryingly, twice as many previous non-voters (12 per cent) than voters (6 per cent) stated that they'd actually be *less* inclined to vote in the future should compulsory voting be introduced.

Table 1: Compulsory voting by voting behaviour at the 2010 General Election (%)

Would you be more likely or less likely to vote in the future if voting was compulsory?	Voted at the 2010 General Election	Did not vote at the 2010 General Election
More likely	46	50
Make no difference	44	28
Less likely	6	12
Don't know	4	10

Projecting forward, our results reveal important attitudinal differences between those already planning to vote at the next general election, and those intending to abstain. As Table 2 reveals, 58 per cent of those reporting that they were already very *unlikely* to vote felt that compulsory voting would make either no difference to this decision (38 per cent), or indeed make them even *less* likely to vote (20 per cent). From this we can infer that the introduction of compulsory voting would merely serve to reinforce existing feelings of resentment.

Table 2: Compulsory voting by likelihood to vote at the next General Election (%)

Would you be more likely or less likely to vote in the future if voting was compulsory?	All	Very *likely* to vote	Very *unlikely* to vote
More likely	47	50	32
Make no difference	39	42	38
Less likely	8	5	20
Don't know	6	2	10

Re-connecting young people: The challenge for political parties

Evidence suggests that at the root of young people's continuing disengagement from the political process is their deep scepticism of, distrust in, and aversion towards the political class. Our own research (Henn and Foard, 2012) clearly indicates that if this generation is to be re-connected to the formal political process, then the onus is for these same political actors to intervene in ways that might help young people to see the potential value in doing so. For instance, we asked an open question in order to find out what might be done to reverse young people's antipathy towards, the political parties and professional politicians. The responses clearly indicate that young people believe that political parties should do more to directly connect with them, by talking with (7 per cent) and listening to them (16 per cent), by visiting schools, colleges and universities (10 per cent), and by using innovative connection methods such as questionnaires and surveys (10 per cent), holding "Question Time"-style forums, conferences and meetings (7 per cent), and using the Internet, social networking methods (such as Facebook and Twitter) and email (8 per cent). In addition, there is a similarly clear message that political parties and professional politicians should then action young people's concerns. In particular, by adopting a more young person-centred approach and focus in their political work (6 per cent), by involving young people more in doing so (4 per cent), by championing the issues and concerns of young people (10 per cent), and by delivering on their promises (5 per cent).

Conclusion and policy proposals

Does compulsory voting represent a viable solution to the on-going disconnect between young people and the democratic process? It would seem that more young people would vote if such a system were introduced – not surprising if such a system were mandatory. However, whether or not this would mean that they would feel truly connected to the democratic process remains in question. Indeed, forcing young people to vote when they feel such a deep aversion to the political class may actually serve to reinforce a deepening resentment, rather than to engage them in a positive manner and bolster the democratic process.

What is needed is a thoroughgoing review of the way in which formal politics reaches out to, and prepares young people for, political participation. As Gerry Stoker reports in this volume, young people are open-minded about electoral politics and do not have a hardened disaffection. They are more likely than not to express faith in voting and the democratic process although not with the politicians that inhabit that world. A reduction of the voting age so that 16 and 17 year-olds are eligible to vote in all future elections might well help to convince young people that they are valued by the political class, rather than maligned and excluded. This may well help to convert democratic commitment into democratic participation.

Related to this, a key question to be asked is, '*How do we get more young people thinking about politics in such a way that they actually want to go and vote?*' Extending the vote to 16 and 17 year olds should be tied-in with measures to extend and enrich the citizenship curriculum in schools to improve young people's political literacy and help make the idea of democratic participation second nature. Despite their broad support for the democratic process, young people's recent experience of their first general election in 2010 has left them feeling disheartened and somewhat indignant about the political class. The onus is therefore on the political parties and professional politicians to take the lead in reaching out to connect with people – and young people in particular. This would be assisted by developing structures and approaches that enable this generation to see both the

value of engaging with the political process, as well as feeling reassured that there are meaningful opportunities for them to do so. Certainly, young people would welcome an approach from the political parties and from individual politicians that was direct and clearly prompted by a desire to genuinely articulate and then champion the views and interests of young people.

In the run-up to the 2015 General Election, political parties should therefore hold regular youth constituency surgeries which are well publicised in schools, colleges, youth centres and other community centres that are frequented by young people. Parties should also develop policy forums aimed at young people which have the express purpose of listening to and talking with today's youth generation. These policy forums should be both national and community-based to maximise the opportunities for young people to participate. They should be organised as face-to-face meetings that also include 'Question Time' events designed to create stimulating and open discussion of issues that are of significance to young people. They should also use the Internet, mobile technologies and social media to create an e-dialogue with young people that is open, transparent and welcoming - and which signals to young people that their views and active participation are considered of crucial value in shaping policy that captures the imagination, and embraces the interests, of today's youth generation.

Policy proposal: The introduction of compulsory annual MP and local councillor constituency surgeries and political party policy forums aimed at young people to be held in local schools, colleges, and community centres.

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Political citizenship and the innocence of youth

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In their role as citizens, young people bring a certain innocence to the proceedings that for the sake of our democracy we should seek to work with. Rather than despairing about the relative non-engagement of young citizens in formal politics, we should be pleased that their relative divorce from politics has limited their negative experience of it. Cynicism and fatalism about the awfulness of politics is more prevalent among older citizens as decades of negative media, broken promises, expenses and lobbying scandals, and other political failings have taken their toll. The inevitable inexperience of young citizens also brings another advantage: they are more open to the prospects for change and doing things differently. A different political offer – one that opens up decisions to a wider set of influences - could draw in younger people to a greater degree because of their less fixed view of politics and their willingness to believe it could be better.

Inexperience offers potential

In current policy thinking the inexperience of young citizens is often seen as a problem to be fixed. Younger citizens are sometimes seen as naive and in need of a dose of reality. Michael White, the longstanding political correspondent of the *Guardian*, captures this perspective in December 2013 piece: 'Only 46% of 18-to24-year olds actually vote, many saying it makes no difference. Yet they are the same people who complain that oldies (76per cent of whom do vote) are treated better than the young. How about a new word: "Kidiots" (White, 2013). The implication of this argument is that young people need to wake up and recognise that engagement with politics, for all its faults, is the only way they can protect their interests.

A softer line towards the inexperience of youth–the one most prevalent in the Youth Citizenship Commission and many other reports– is that younger people need to be enabled to become citizens. As the Citizenship Foundation website puts it: 'Citizenship education is essential for preparing our young people for our shared democratic life' (Citizenship Foundation, 2012). Young citizens need an active programme of citizenship education, opportunities to engage, and then they will grow into full citizenship, knowing their rights, valuing democratic decision-making and recognising the complexity of political decision-making.

But what if increased experience of politics as practiced in today's contemporary democracies actually tends to make you more negative about the political system? The evidence points in that direction. Disenchantment with politics is greater among older citizens than younger citizens. In June 2013 a University of Southampton/YouGov poll (Jennings and Stoker, 2013) asked a representative sample of British citizens about the capacities and limitations of politics to meet today's social and economic challenges. As Table 1 shows, negative responses about the failings of the political system were more prominent among older citizens. That is not to suggest that younger citizens were giving glowing reports about politics but they were less negative than others. Across almost every measure, older citizens hold more negative attitudes about the capabilities and intentions of politicians. Yet belief that government can make a difference is slightly stronger among these groups. Disappointment is, perhaps, the inevitable product of belief that politics and government can make a difference but is failing to do so.

A December 2013 poll by *ICM/ The Guardian* shows a similar pattern of differences between citizens based on age; indicating that negativity towards politics becomes concentrated with age (ICM Research, 2013). Whereas anger towards politics and politicians was identified as their most instinctive response by over half of all citizens above 45 years old, among citizens aged between 18-24 anger was chosen by only a third. Admittedly a third of the youngest citizen group chose boredom as their main reaction to politics, although 5 per cent said they were inspired by it, compared to 0 per cent of those aged 65 and over. Younger citizens shared many of the same issues as other citizens when it came to identifying what puts them off voting. Many, like other citizens, feel that politicians are on the fiddle, that parties do not represent their mix of views or are too similar. The top concern for all citizens was the failure of politicians to keep their promises. Yet on that point younger citizens were more forgiving with 59 per cent of those aged 18-24 picking that concern compared to higher proportion in all older age groups, reaching the high point of 70per cent of those citizens aged 45-54.

Table 1: Negativity towards Politics and Age

% Agree that politics is	18-24	25-39	40-59	60+
Too short-term and media driven	70	74	82	87
Too dominated by self-seeking interests	56	69	75	79
A waste of time	16	31	25	26
Has technical capacity to solve problems	20	23	18	18
Can make a difference on major issues	58	61	60	70

Source: YouGov/University of Southampton Poll, June 2013.

Younger citizens are more willing to change

So the evidence suggests that engagement with politics tends to make you more negative about it. Am I then moved to back the suggestion of UK comedian Russell Brand (Brand, 2014) that politics is so bad that the only thing to do, if you are young, is stay away from it? That Brand has captured one part of the concerns of many young (and not so young) citizens is clear. But what he fails to recognise is that many would welcome a shift to a more effective and dynamic democracy rather than his vacuous concept of revolution. In short, there is evidence that if the politics on offer got better, or perhaps worse, many citizens, but younger citizens in particular, would shift to become more positively engaged.

There are good reasons for thinking that citizens might not be fixed in their interest in politics. After all in many parts of our lives what we do and how we react is dependent on context and circumstances. Testing this prospect in terms of politics through survey work undertaken with the *Hansard Society* (2012) in 2011/12 we found (as reported in Table 2) that about half of citizens would shift to greater interest in politics given the right trigger and that the younger citizens rather than older ones could be drawn into politics to a greater degree if the context for engagement changed.

We used survey responses to negative and positive triggers to see their effects on people's level of interest. The negative trigger is based on the idea that many people do not really want to engage that much, but if politics becomes really bad, in terms of the self-serving behaviour from politicians and powerful interests , more citizens would get themselves involved.

Table 2: Interest in politics by age and triggers

Age Range	Fixed Interest %	Negative Trigger %	Positive Trigger %	Numbers in sample
18-24	44.8	24.5	30.6	245
25-34	47.1	18.2	34.7	340
35-44	52.3	16.3	31.3	294
45-54	52.6	17.7	29.7	293
55-64	51.3	11.1	37.6	271
65-74	60.3	8.2	31.5	232
75+	65.0	7.7	27.2	169
All ages	52.4	15.4	32.2	1844

Source: Audit of Political Engagement Survey, December 2011 and January 2012
(NB: percentage figures are rounded).

Another line of argument sees it differently, arguing that what is needed to get citizens involved is a positive trigger, a sense that politics could be better, less rigged and where the views of citizens might come to matter in a way that they do not now. In those circumstances people would be more willing to lend their interest and voice to political proceedings.

For the population as a whole, we found that just over half were fixed in their preferences. But that of course means half of citizens could be persuaded to shift to greater interest in politics. For those that changed their response, the positive trigger proved twice as powerful as the negative trigger in stimulating a change of interest. Younger citizens are less fixed in their pattern of interest and as a result more likely than older age groups to be triggered into greater political action.

A chance to set the political agenda

So in the light of the evidence and analysis presented above, I support a policy proposal that builds on the proposal of others to give the vote in all elections to citizens from 16 years-old onwards. Not only should we give young people the vote but we should give them more control over the agenda of politics. My proposal is to give the UK Youth Parliament, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales the right to call a people's ballot or citizens' initiative referendum on a topic of their choosing. How they come to select the one topic for any one year would be down to them. The formation of the specific question could be subject to approval by the Electoral Commission. The question would be posed to voters at the same time as when other elections are being held. In years of the local elections the ballot would be advisory but would give a powerful message. In EU Parliament and General Election votes the ballot would be decisive on the grounds that all voters would be entitled to a say.

The rationale is to make a shift in the kind of politics on offer and so build on the innocence of youth. Young citizens might just have, in enough numbers, the desire, the imagination, and the lack of cynicism to challenge the way in which politics is done in contemporary democracies such as the United Kingdom. Backed by a reinvigorated programme of citizenship education, 'oldies' – such as myself –might be able to ride on the coat tails of the young towards a better democratic politics.

Policy proposal: National youth parliaments, assemblies and forums across the UK to be given the right to call a people's ballot or citizens' initiative referendum on a topic of their choosing.

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Theme 2

Building Youth Citizenship Capacity

Political Engagement among ethnic minority young people

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In the anxious debates about youth political apathy in the UK, connected to low levels of electoral participation among 18-24 year olds since 2001, it is suggested that ethnic minority young people are even less likely to turn out to vote compared to young people generally or older ethnic minority groups, and that they are less civically engaged. In the aftermath of the 2001 riots and the 2005 London bombings, such narratives increasingly focused on young Muslims, centred on concerns about political disaffection, failed integration, a lack of social capital consonant with democratic participation, or violent political extremism. Such concerns have been expressed in other European states also.

Given the extent of public and media attention paid to political disengagement among ethnic minority and Muslim young people, it is surprising how few studies there have been that directly explore their political experiences and engagement. In the UK, where ethnicity statistics are routinely collected in a range of domains, there are relatively few survey-based studies of political and electoral participation that disaggregate by both ethnicity and age. Similarly, although there is increased anxiety about young Muslims' political disengagement or radicalisation, few survey studies disaggregate patterns of political engagement by religion and age. Those studies that do examine patterns of political engagement among these young people do not necessarily support these crisis narratives.

For instance, the view that political disengagement is more pronounced among ethnic minority young people is challenged by the recent Ethnic Minority British Election Study (EMBES) of engagement among ethnic minorities in the 2010 General Election, which found that whilst age was a significant factor determining turnout across all ethnic groups, the effect of age was actually *weaker* among ethnic minorities than for White British (Heath et. al., 2011, 262). Analysing data on patterns of political participation among 'immigrant youth' in Belgium across a range of repertoires of political action including voting, party membership, protesting, boycotting and 'buycotting', Quintelier (2009, 929) found that migrant youth of non-European backgrounds were 'the most politically active group, ahead of both Belgian and European immigrants'. Her work also dispels views of young Muslims as politically disaffected, finding high levels of activism among young Muslims, and – contrary to prevailing perceptions – Muslim young women especially.

This finding echoes recent events in the UK in relation to some successes of the Respect party, which achieved electoral victories in areas of Muslim settlement, where the activism of young Muslims, and especially Muslim young women, were notable features of the campaigning. The perceptions of lower levels of political participation among ethnic minority young people, then, are not well substantiated, whilst those studies that do exist do not necessarily sustain generalised 'crisis' narratives. Between apathy and extremism, however, lie a range of forms of political action that require a broader account of political engagement.

Changing patterns of participation

There is a set of literatures suggesting that declining levels of electoral and party participation in established democracies sit alongside increasing levels of engagement in civic, voluntary, or other informal modes of political engagement. Seen from this view, political participation is not so much declining as changing. This has led to new horizons

in political participation research focusing on: informal and 'DIY' modes of participation; lifestyle activism (e.g. political shopping); virtual forms of activism; or direct engagement through forms of networked governance.

Some argue that these forms of participation are particularly prevalent among the young. This has been accompanied by research exploring the political subjectivities that underpin these action repertoires. Bang (2005) for instance identifies the emergence of what he describes as 'everyday maker' participants, who prefer to engage in informal, ad hoc political associations in 'stop-go', concrete, DIY projects. Similarly, McDonald (2006) identifies 'new grammars' of political action, characterised by preferences for personalised, 'DIY' and expressive activism in fluidly constituted, horizontal networks, in contrast with 'civic-industrial grammars of action' characterised by engagement through formally constituted, vertically integrated political institutions.

Debates on, as well as the study of, ethnic minority or Muslim young people's politics have generally not been connected to these analyses of shifting trends in citizens' political participation. Data from my research with Richard Gale (O'Toole and Gale, 2013), on ethnic minority young people's political engagement, however, demonstrate their relevance. We found very diverse repertoires of action among our respondents, including but also beyond electoral engagement, and perspectives on engagement that support arguments concerning the emergence of 'new grammars of action'. Whilst our respondents did engage with mainstream politics, they were not strongly engaged in this arena. Despite having often very full political biographies, few saw electoral or party politics as the main terrain for the expression of their political interests.

Politically interested and knowledgeable, many of our respondents were sharply critical of the quality of participatory opportunities offered via electoral and party politics and sceptical of the capacity or willingness of political institutions to address the issues that concerned them. Instead, respondents tended to prefer more personal, immediate and DIY forms of action, rather than through vertically integrated institutions of representative politics, and this was expressed in their orientations towards quite localised, everyday and online forms of activism. Even when activists in our study involved themselves in formally constituted political organisations, such as political parties, they tended to do so in ad hoc ways, without formally joining or submerging their identities in such organisations.

On-line activism

For many activists, the possibilities for direct, everyday forms of action were greatly facilitated by access to web-based forms of activism. There is research suggesting that globalised forms of communication and networking have made internet based political action increasingly significant, and, facilitated by new technologies, contemporary forms of action are increasingly concerned with global issues. An important aspect of this development is the enhanced scope for networking, consciousness-raising and DIY activism. In our study, activists' use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was important in facilitating more direct forms of engagement with global and international issues, and these captured the imaginations of many activists – in ways which found little equivalence at the level of national politics.

Importantly, engagement with global issues was not solely an outcome of diasporic ties, in which ethnic minority young people engaged with the issues and politics of their countries

of heritage. Whilst these were often important, engagement was also underpinned by more globalised orientations, made possible through the use of ICTs, which: enabled access to a range of media and information sources; enhanced possibilities for creating and disseminating, rather than only consuming, political information; enhanced their capacity to campaign with little need to invest in organisation-building; and facilitated engagement in personalised, networked forms of activism.

Identities and new grammars of action

Our research found that ethnic and religious identities were significant in animating political action among our respondents – not least as a consequence of their experiences of being externally categorised in relation to ethnicity, race or religion. Thus, for many, experiences of racism, or pathologising discourses on ethnic minorities or Muslims, were politicising. This was manifested, for example, in activists' responses to policing practices – particularly stop and search and use of counter-terrorism powers, which had directly or indirectly affected a *very* large proportion of our respondents – negative schooling experiences or in relation to stigmatic public discourses on Muslims or areas of ethnic minority or Muslim settlement. Such experiences tended to compound a sense of dissatisfaction with, or alienation from, mainstream public and political institutions.

A notable finding was the significance of religious, particularly Muslim identities, in animating political activism, and in ways that stood apart from ethnic or cultural ties. The events of 9/11, the war on Iraq, or the 2005 London bombings and subsequent counter-terrorism measures and public and media discourses on Muslims and Islam, were cited by many as politicising experiences. Additionally, many cited Islam as a framework giving meaning and substance for linking personal ethics and political action, sometimes in ways that provided legitimacy for political activism in the face of parental opposition, e.g. by referring to Qur'anic principles to counter culturally derived objections.

Whilst activists' political commitments were often framed by ethnic or religious identities, these were not exclusive commitments that were incompatible with identification with Britishness, or with commitments to broader political communities or ideals. For example, whilst concerns with global issues, campaigns or organisations might be underpinned by a concern with Muslim values, or identification with a broader Muslim community (the *umma*), this was typically not confined to Muslim issues or societies, but linked to broader issues such as the international terms of trade, debt, development, humanitarian and emergency relief, or the maldistribution of resources globally.

Conclusion

Ethnic minority and Muslim young people have become increasingly visible in public debates that have focused on political disaffection and – in the case of Muslims – on political extremism. Yet, neither of these claims is particularly well-substantiated by empirical data. Furthermore, the significance of varied repertoires and modes of activism can be obscured by a conceptual focus on forms of mainstream and electoral participation alone. The experiences of activists in our study demonstrate grammars of action that are founded in: a preference for hands-on, direct forms of activism; a tendency to mobilise in horizontal, loosely organised groups or networks rather than

vertically integrated institutions with highly formalised regulation of membership or activity; engagement with concrete projects rather than abstract debate; personalised (rather than individualised) modes of interaction that do not require activists to submerge their identities into formal organisations; and above all a politics founded on the scope for activists to make a difference.

Lack of engagement in mainstream politics certainly matters in democratic terms, but, I suggest, the possibilities for connecting young people with mainstream political institutions rest in the capacity of those institutions to adjust participatory opportunities to these flatter, more networked, personalised, 'DIY' forms of activism. Political institutions need to engage with young people from ethnic minority and religious communities on concrete issues and campaigns in which they can be directly involved (on- and off-line), rather than on inviting young people to increase membership, organisation-build, or participate in mock-political youth structures that are disconnected from actual decision-making.

Furthermore, participatory opportunities for ethnic minority and Muslim young people need to focus on engaging them as citizens, rather than as problem groups who are disengaged, poorly integrated or at risk of radicalisation. Traditional approaches to encouraging youth citizenship have often relied on forms of engagement with community leaders or through traditional authority structures. The current under-representation of ethnic minority groups in a range of political institutions continues to undermine their credibility – not because young people necessarily wish to be represented by someone from their own ethnic or religious group. Indeed, our research found plenty of scepticism about such essentialist approaches to group representation. Rather, their lack of ethnic, religious or social diversity tended to undermine young people's faith in political institutions' capacity to address the issues that concerned them.

Policy Proposal: The UK and devolved governments to establish out-reach activities involving political parties and youth groups to mobilise ethnic minority and Muslim young people to address issues that concern them.

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Young women and politics: Developing engagement for the 21st century

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Young women aged between 18 and 24 constitute the sector of the electorate least likely to vote. Given this fact, it is worthwhile focusing upon the political education of young women and girls *per se* to see if there are measures that can be taken to get them to engage more with mainstream politics. Why should the focus be upon young women in particular as opposed to young people as a generic grouping? Many young women appear as equally disconnected with mainstream party politics and participation in elections as their young male counterparts, and their attitudes and behaviours tie-in with the findings of the burgeoning literature on young people and politics (see, for example, Henn et al. 2005; Kimberlee 2002; O'Toole et al. 2003; Phelps 2004). But while they are clearly interested in many political issues, young women often face gender-specific challenges that limit their political participation and democratic representation.

It has been widely acknowledged that the under-representation of women in formal politics highlights the continued gender stratification of political power (see, for example, Krook and Childs, 2010). As the *Sex and Power* report (2013: 13) recently noted, it is '… now almost 40 years since the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, and over 80 since women got the right to vote equally with men, yet women, still, are all too often missing from politically powerful positions in the UK'. In 2014, only 22.5 per cent of representatives in the UK Parliament, 32 per cent of local councilors, and 33.3 per cent of UK MEPs were female. This, in part, reflects historical limitations that underpinned by a British parliamentary system dominated by the electoral principals of first-past-the-post but suggests that other factors continue to limit the election of women and their elevation to positions of power within British political institutions and parties.

Indeed, although research suggests that women are better represented when elected by proportional electoral systems, such as those adopted in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, there has been a lack of proportionate increases of numbers of women elected to UK devolved institutions since 1999 (see ERS, 2011; Potter, 2013). This would suggest that issues of female under-representation are a residual feature of politics in the UK at all levels and cannot be addressed by reform of electoral systems alone. The adoption of all-women shortlists and other positive candidate selection measures have improved the chances of women being elected but their adoption has proven partial, sporadic, and controversial. But although such approaches will not solve all potential barriers to the greater representation of women in electoral politics (Childs and Evans, 2012), there is growing support across the political spectrum for their use (see, for example, BBC, 2014; Rundle, 2013). Moreover the gendered norms of British political culture appear resistant to change, thus presenting further barriers to female representation and engagement with formal politics. Increases in numbers of women politicians have not yet facilitated a significant shift in the masculine values and practices often driving mainstream politics across the UK. Recent announcements by a number of female MPs in Westminster stating their intention not to stand for re-election in 2015 highlights ongoing disillusionment with parliamentary life and its political culture.

Women's voices and physical presence are still peripheral in British politics in the 21st century. This is somewhat surprising considering that women (comprising 52 per cent of the electorate) have the potential to have a significant impact upon the outcome of the electoral process. Women's votes, or in this case young women's votes, should not be taken for granted or overlooked. But although young women may be no less politically engaged and informed than men, they do appear to be less active. There is a worryingly low turnout of young women in the 18-24 year old age bracket when compared to their male counterparts (see Table 1). Although the figures for both men and women were up slightly on the 2005 general election, young women in this age category were the least likely to cast their vote at the last general election.

Table 1: Young Men and Women and Turnout

General Election	All 18-24 year olds	18-24 year old men	18-24 year old women
2005	37%	39%	35%
2010	44%	50%	39%

(Source: Adapted from data provided by Ipsos MORI, *How Britain Voted in 2010*).

Childs (2008, 14) notes there are differences between younger and older women in terms of political affiliation and priorities. Young women tend to vote more for parties on the centre-left of the ideological spectrum than their older counterparts and are motivated by issues such as education and family policy (see Table 2).

Table 2: Young People and the 2010 General Election: How they voted

2010 General Election	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrats	Others
All 18-24 year old voters	30%	31%	30%	9%
18-24 year old men	29%	34%	27%	10%
18-24 year old women	30%	28%	34%	9%

(Source: Adapted from data provided by Ipsos MORI, *How Britain Voted in 2010*).

In terms of their political choices, young women do not however appear to differ too much from their male counterparts in how they voted at the 2010 General Election. While the majority of young men supported the Labour Party, the majority of young women voted for the Liberal Democrats.

The relative absence of young women from discussions about youth citizenship in general is well documented (Osgerby 1998, 50; Bhavnani 1991, 28-1). This is somewhat surprising as women's life experiences have undergone significant change over recent years. They are, for example, more likely to remain in education or to enter paid employment (Jowell and Park 1998, 10). Indeed, there are more female full-time undergraduates than males at UK universities, with 55 per cent of current cohorts female compared to 45 per cent male (Ratcliffe, 2013). However, disaggregation of the data in relation to youth unemployment reveals that young women are more likely to be unemployed than young men (BBC, 2013). Such factors are generational and may well contribute to a future politicisation of young women who could be a powerful political voice. This noted, in circumstances where they do not enter either the world of work or academia, so-called 'lifestyle' choices such as young motherhood should also mean that women want and need to concern themselves with political issues and questions.

Politicians and policy makers may well make calculated choices to ignore or at least sideline the views and wishes of young women, especially if they are the sector of society least likely to cast their vote. It should though be of some considerable concern to those interested in the health of our democracy that more young women are not currently seeking to participate in politics. However there is a need for young women to have their levels of political awareness raised to encourage greater political participation, particularly given the continued existence of such issues as sexual discrimination and sexism within society, of the gender pay gap (currently men still earn, on average, 15 per cent more than women) and domestic violence that predominantly involves males using force against women.[2] By addressing such issues, politicians can ensure that young women come to fully appreciate the relevance of politics to their everyday lives and are galvanised into participating through voting and other such activities.

Positive measures to actively encourage young women to see the relevance of politics to their own lives would undoubtedly prove beneficial. By building youth citizenship capacity amongst young people, it would become increasingly difficult for politicians to ignore their voices and concerns. Citizenship classes in schools, a relatively recent introduction into mainstream education across the UK in the past decade or so, might be one way of getting this important message across. By empowering young women through the development of gender-related citizenship knowledge and skills, low levels of female political representation could be redressed. Greater focus upon the lived experiences of young women in citizenship classes could also address the gender divide in terms of political participation between young males and young females. Young women, encouraged to make their voices aired and heard in schools and local communities, could finally challenge long-established notions that the world of politics, to use the old adage, is a 'man's world'.

Electoral campaigns often focus upon specific sectors of society and it is of vital importance that the political parties fighting the 2015 General Election campaign devote some attention to trying to attract young women to the ballot box. Political parties should take heed of the crucial role that young women could play in the election and should therefore focus upon manifesto proposals that would attract their votes. Finally, if the vote for elections to the Westminster Parliament is eventually lowered to permit 16 and

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2   See the UK Government's 'This is abuse' campaign - http://thisisabuse.direct.gov.uk/

17 year olds to vote – as is looking increasingly likely, especially in the light of the extension of the franchise for the independence referendum in Scotland – the question of young women voters will grow to be of paramount importance. The debate and media coverage regarding lowering the voting age will undoubtedly serve to raise awareness of young people and politics and campaigners should be prepared to engage with young women in particular as this could stimulate interest and engagement with wider political issues. It is necessary to ensure that these newly enfranchised 16 and 17 year old young women feel that their vote matters just as much as 16 and 17 year old young men.

Policy proposal: The Westminster All-Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Parliament should establish an inquiry on Young Women in Politics in order to explore the reasons for and rectify the relative absence of young female representatives in local and national politics.

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Engaging the brain as well as the heart: Political literacy and social media platforms

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Social media is now common currency in the daily lives of most people, particularly younger people (Langford and Baldwin 2013). The Youth Citizenship Commission's final report noted that the prevalence of these channels offers both opportunities and challenges to political literacy and engagement. Opportunities range from the capacity to receive and share information, but also to interact with a global audience. But challenges are also widespread, and include selective consumption/interaction, inadequate representation of viewpoints, limitations in the space available to communicate, and knowing the degree to which information online is actually valid.

Social media is now more prevalent in politics, being widely employed as a tool of communication by political campaigns (for e.g.: Gibson and McAllister 2011). It also has an important agenda-setting function, with many news stories now broken via channels such as Twitter. We are also beginning to observe social media having impacts on voter behaviour with research by Bond *et al*. (2012) illustrating that receipt of messages on Facebook had an effect on voter turnout in the 2010 US mid-term elections.

The increasing importance of social media in politics is shifting attention to how these tools can be used more effectively to increase political literacy and engagement in order to create a more informed and critical citizenry who are savvy in their social media interactions. Building on our research of social media platforms of the Scottish independence referendum 2014, a dimension of which has explored the content of over 5,300 social media comments on the BBC's *Have Your Say* (*HYS*) discussion threads, this article identifies five points that users of social media platforms need to keep in mind when evaluating contributions and information obtained from these channels.

1. Sufficient representation of viewpoints

A common criticism of certain social media forums is that the hosting website has a bias for one side or the other of a political debate. In many cases, this critique is well founded but, in other cases, this perceived bias might be a consequence of other variables. For example, in our research on the Scottish independence referendum, we would expect to observe differences between the proportions of Scottish and non-Scottish citizens posting on *The Scotsman's* comment forum compared to the BBC *HYS* threads given the audiences they attract. *The Scotsman* is likely to have a disproportionally large number of comments coming from Scottish people while the BBC *HYS* would be expected to feature more English posts than Scottish ones because the BBC attracts a broader British audience.

Population and internet usage/access in different countries also feeds into this. For example, the population of Scotland is estimated to be 5.3 million compared to the population of the rest of Britain of 58 million (Office of National Statistics 2013). Given that internet usage is estimated to be similar throughout different parts of the UK, these population differences could be a factor in terms of the sheer volume of contributions from different regions. For example, we would naturally expect a large proportion of

posts to come from non-Scots in the BBC *HYS* forums, not purely as a consequence of different audiences, but also because there are a greater number of non-Scots in the UK.

A further couple of points that need to be considered are that internet and social media usage tends to be the purview of the young and, at least in terms of political discussions, men are more likely to participate than women (Miller et al. 1999). Consequently, social media is likely to give a greater representation of views of younger cohorts compared to older cohorts, and in certain circumstances, male voices may be preeminent compared to female. All of the above observations need to be factored in when evaluating the representativeness of opinion that is observed in social media forums.

2. Fallacious contributions

We define fallacious contributions as those comments that infer behaviour observed among some people to the entire population – in other words, generalisations. This is best illustrated by a couple of examples, which cropped up during our analysis of the discussion on Scottish independence:

> *"Shows how far the English are removed from democracy when they are incapable of accepting other opinions"* (BBC *Have Your Say* 2012a)

Or:

> *"Come every World Cup we have to put up with the usual 'can't you take a joke' comments from Scots wearing 'anyone by [sic] England' shirts. It's such a shame when the Scots feel so insecure they have to define their sense of Scottishness by their degree of anti-Englishness"* (BBC *Have Your Say* 2012a)

A number of issues are pertinent to the above examples: Firstly, who is the 'we'? Is it a household, a town, a county, a country? Secondly, references to 'the English' and 'the Scots' infer that it is every English or Scottish person engaging in this type of behaviour, which more often than not is unlikely to be the case. Thirdly, what does it even mean to 'be' English or Scottish? Is it about birth, parents' nationalities, grandparents' nationalities, accent, tattoos, residency, or support for the national sports teams? Savvy users need to take this into account when reading/contributing to social media.

3. Flaming and inflammatory statements

Flaming behaviour is when online interactions descend into hostility and users resort to online shouting (as illustrated by using CAPITALISATION of words (Yassine and Haj 2010; and Gorres 2010), which can make the comment appear angry), the use of excessive punctuation (for e.g.: '!!!'), exchanging insults with one another, and/or use of profanity. While we observed minimum levels of flaming in terms of interactions between individual contributors in online discussion forums of the Scottish independence, flaming statements were more likely to be made about political parties and politicians –e.g.: "Slimeball Salmond" or "Clown Prince Cameron" (BBC *Have Your Say* 2012a). The problem with such inflammatory comments is that they can aggravate other readers, stirring up hostility, and as a consequence, detract from the capacity for serious debate. Moreover, negative comments about parties and leaders (and other politicians) can have unintentional consequences such as fuelling perceptions that a national side is being attacked.

4. Clarity of contributions

Comments with dubious meanings often derive from the usage of slang, which bring into question what the contribution actually means. Meanings are likely to depend upon context, the age of the contributor/reader, the region from which they are from and so on. Consequently, one person may not comprehend what another may understand. Considering that we often do not know the characteristics of the contributor and as such the context of the particular phrases they are using (for instance, whether it is street/pop use of language vs. traditional uses of certain expressions), it is advisable that care should be taken to communicate clearly and effectively in these forums. To illustrate, we return to the Scottish referendum case that we explored. One of the main players in the debate is the Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond who features prominently in the *HYS* discussions. However, a substantial number of contributors referred to him by the nickname 'Wee Eck':

> *"Scotland will not be a new Norway whatever Wee Eck think"* (BBC *Have Your Say* 2012b)

However, not everyone may be familiar with Salmond's nickname, particularly if you happen to live outside of Scotland. The potential for confusion and ambiguity to take hold is increased, and this can, contribute in some circumstances to a lack of meaningful discussion on the issue.

In addition, we have to be cognisant of implicit and explicit statements on subjects. For example, 'I'll be voting yes to an independent Scotland in the referendum' is an explicit statement whose meaning is not in doubt. However, we cannot assume that someone who says that 'the naivety of the SNP is staggering' is going to vote 'no' in the independence referendum. They might still support independence and not support the SNP, and indeed might even be critical of the SNP but still vote for them and also vote (or not vote) for independence.

5. Accuracy of information

A key element of social media in politics is the information exchange opportunities it provides users. However, we need to keep in mind two things when evaluating information we obtain from these channels. Firstly, many social media forums are constrained by a maximum number of characters (for example, a 140 character maximum for Twitter). As a result, it is arguably harder to convey what one means, and, moreover, character space for substantiation of arguments may be lacking.

Secondly, the accuracy of information being provided also needs to be considered. In our analysis of the Scottish referendum, countless pieces of information and data were exchanged in the discussions, but not all of it was accurate or substantiated by original source material. The implications of the failure to consider the veracity of information from these channels are aptly illustrated by the case of the 2011 Irish presidential election. In this case, information emanating from what subsequently turned out to be a false Twitter account played a key role in shaping the final debate between the candidates. The events arising from this debate were subsequently shown to have a determining impact on the result of the election (O'Malley 2012). Consequently, it is crucial that users should consider the source of the information and assess if there are any means to

substantiate the information they are being provided with (e.g.: are there links provided to the original source of the information?).

Our research suggests that readers and contributors to social media platforms should bear in mind the following:

- Are there problems when there is a limit to the number of characters one can use?

- If a contribution is supplying information, is this information correct and can it be verified, and indeed cross-checked/triangulated?

- Can a contribution ever be balanced or nuanced?

- Does it matter whether the forum one posts in is moderated (such as the BBC threads) or not (such as a Twitter feed)?

Conclusions

Considering the growing popularity of social media and its agenda setting potential, it is evident that citizens would benefit from knowing more about these channels and the way they operate, which would then allow citizens to cast a critical eye over what they read, see, and hear via social media. One means of doing this would be for citizenship education across the UK to incorporate strategies that provide young people with the skills and knowledge to allow them to approach social media in critical participative ways. Building on the above observations, we have devised a series of social media teaching exercises and materials for Scottish secondary schools that have been distributed with the support of *Education Scotland*. Access to these teaching materials (which also include additional materials on analysing and interpreting survey and polling data), is available through the 'Materials and Resources' section of the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (see Eichhorn et al. 2013).

However, our findings go beyond Scotland. Many of the comments on the BBC *HYS* reveal that all types of citizens in the UK (and indeed beyond) would benefit from knowing about the issues we explore in this article. As a first step, we propose that schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland find ways to make use of the teaching materials we have devised. We then propose that university research methods courses incorporate examples in their lectures (e.g.: ecological and individual fallacies), and that social media sites use our research to provide a checklist of 'things to think about' before engaging with social media forums.

Policy Recommendation: Statutory provision in citizenship education programmes in schools, colleges and universities across the UK of training for young people to use social media in critical participative ways.

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Theme 3

Informed Citizenship for
Life-long Participation:
Enhancing Political Skills and Literacy

Enhancing the political literacy of young people – a shared responsibility

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> *'We should not, must not, dare not, be complacent about the health and future of British democracy. Unless we become a nation of engaged citizens, our democracy is not secure.'*

These are the words of the then Lord Chancellor, quoted in the seminal Crick Report in 1998 (Crick 1998, 8). The advisory group on 'Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools', chaired by Professor (Sir) Bernard Crick, was set up in 1997 with cross-party support. It was a response to concern about increasing signs of a breakdown in shared engagement in society. These included anti-social behaviour, lack of community spirit and a decline in participation in civic and political practices. There was a specific concern that such decline was affecting young people especially, creating what was termed a 'democratic deficit' time bomb.

It was, therefore, no surprise that the Crick Group focused its deliberations primarily on young people. The solution proposed was for an emphasis on 'political literacy'; defined as 'educating young people to be effective in public life'. This is broader than political education and involves blending civic knowledge and active citizenship in an 'education FOR citizenship'. Such an education aimed at bringing about 'no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally'. The Crick Report was accepted by all party leaders and led, four years later, to the introduction of statutory Citizenship for all students age 11 to 16 as part of the National Curriculum in England in 2002. It was closely followed by a similar strengthening of citizenship education in other UK countries.

What happened 1998 to 2010?

The promotion of 'political literacy' through education continued apace in the decade following the Crick Report. New curricula and initiatives were launched at primary, secondary, post-16 and university levels, as well as in civil society. Teachers, new and existing, received training and a plethora of advice, guidance and frameworks were produced to assess, monitor, inspect and evaluate the progress of pupils, teachers and education institutions alike. Meanwhile numerous research studies were initiated at local, national, European and international level in order to create a strong evidence base to inform on-going policy and practice which highlighted:

1) *Evidence of the benefits, both short and long-term, of developing political literacy through effective education for citizenship for pupils, schools, communities and society.*

As a major recent study concluded, high-quality citizenship education 'has lasting effects on social and political engagement, and teaches skills useful across academic disciplines and in the workplace' (Circle 2013). There is a clear link between civic knowledge and current and intended political participation, with those with higher levels of knowledge more likely to participate (Schulz et al. 2010). Civic knowledge is also boosted by discussing controversial issues in modern society and this, in turn, helps to develop skills of deliberation, collaboration and public speaking. Meanwhile, belonging to student

groups is shown to increase engagement in community life and politics. Indeed, many schools testify to the benefits that have come about from citizenship education as a result of encouraging pupils to take more responsibility for the shared life of the school and the wider community. The CELS-CIVT study found evidence that the first cohort to have statutory Citizenship in schools had increased civic knowledge and enhanced civic skills and attitudes that were impacting on their political and civic engagement in their early 20s as they made the transition to adulthood.

2) *Models of effective practice in the delivery of high-quality education for citizenship.*

Evidence from the NFER longitudinal study of Citizenship and Ofsted subject inspections between 2000 and 2012 showed that many schools do deliver the subject with imagination and confidence (Ofsted, 2010 and 2013; Keating et al., 2010). It also highlighted that the quality of provision and pupils' civic knowledge is intrinsically linked to the quality of teaching. The best teaching and provision is where there are trained specialist teachers leading the subject, who plan the provision and ensure that learning is assessed. This means that pupils in these schools receive regular Citizenship lessons which enable them to develop their civic knowledge and skills and experience active citizenship throughout compulsory schooling. Similar models are identified at European and international level (Eurydice, 2012; Schulz et al., 2010; Hahn, 2010).

3) *Considerable gaps in the knowledge, skills, experiences and confidence of pupils and teachers and in school provision.*

Ofsted's reports highlight that even in schools where provision is strongest there remain weaknesses in the teaching of key aspects of Citizenship including political literacy. Schools are not addressing all aspects of the statutory Citizenship curriculum sufficiently, particularly where the subject is taught by non-specialist teachers who lack expertise. In particular, some teachers find the political literacy aspects of the curriculum and teaching controversial issues intimidating. There remain considerable gaps in the numbers of those trained to teach the subject. The number of initial education places available for Citizenship (currently around 120) is considerably fewer than for other National Curriculum subjects.

New concerns – 2010 to present

These developments highlighted that, though a good start was made in the decade following the Crick Report, there was still much work to do to ensure every pupil receives a high-quality education for citizenship that develops their political literacy. By 2010 the political and education landscape was considerably changed from that in 1998 when the Crick Report was published. It has continued to change apace through to 2014. This presents new concerns and challenges for promoting young peoples' political literacy through a high-quality education for citizenship. In particular, the worldwide economic crisis has provided a new and harsh backdrop to any discussion about policy and practice. There is growing evidence that the crisis is having a seismic impact on civic and political participation, with increasing numbers of people, particularly amongst young people, expressing declining levels of confidence in politicians and in the workings of the political process at national and European level (Hoskins and Kerr, 2012).

Meanwhile, in the UK the election of the new Coalition Government in 2010 ushered in changed policy emphases and policy implementation in response to the crisis. Chief amongst these in education has been the establishment of overarching policy frameworks, such as the new National Curriculum 2014, which are then implemented on the ground with limited government involvement. This encourages market forces to form new delivery partnerships and mechanisms, leading to what critics call the 'balkanization' of education. Having something in a policy framework is no guarantee that it will be delivered effectively on the ground.

The new Coalition Government was initially advised by an Expert Panel to remove Citizenship from the statutory National Curriculum. However, following a concerted campaign led by the pressure group Democratic Life, Michael Gove, the new Secretary of State for Education, decided the subject should retain its statutory status for all 11 to 16 year-olds. However, this period of uncertainty resulted in schools reducing their provision and support for Citizenship and some withdrawing from using the GCSE Citizenship Studies. Meanwhile the new 2014 Citizenship curriculum has changed emphases with more weight given to civic knowledge and the prominence of financial and social citizenship at the expense of the political. Also civic knowledge is uncoupled from active citizenship with the latter being promoted through the flagship National Citizens Service (NCS).

On top of this curriculum shift, the freedom and flexibility given to schools and colleges to determine their own curriculum approaches (with new Academies and Free Schools exempt from the National Curriculum) and the pressures of Ofsted targets, league tables and education for employability are seeing citizenship drop in prominence in political and education terms. Indeed, there are now clear signs that since 2010 promoting education for citizenship and political literacy has slipped down the agenda for policy-makers and private funders alike, at all levels. This is leading to a dissipation of experience and expertise that has been built up in the system in the decade following the Crick Report. The irony of these shifts is that given the political, economic, social, and technological challenges facing society and young people in particular, the need for high quality education for citizenship that helps young people to develop political literacy is greater than before. It is arguably more important now than in 1998 when politicians rallied behind the Crick group.

What needs to happen now?

Fourteen years on from the seminal Crick Report the concerns that brought the group together remain as topical as ever. However, there is much still to do if the aims and vision of the Report, as endorsed by all political leaders, are to be achieved in practice. Above all, what is needed is a renewed public commitment from political and civic leaders of all persuasions to support the promotion and enhancement of the political literacy and civic participation of young people through a high-quality education for citizenship. This could be achieved through the formation of a standing Commission on Education for Citizenship, as recommended in the Crick Report (1998), to monitor provision in schools and colleges in England. This would, like the advisory board that led to the introduction of Citizenship in the English National Curriculum, be comprised of representatives from across the political spectrum and experts from education and academia. This needs to be matched by a similar practical commitment from school and

college leaders and governing bodies in schools and colleges. Without such a collective commitment there is a very real concern that a dangerous complacency and disregard for the health of UK democracy will continue to take root. Young people will not be taught how 'to become a nation of engaged citizens' and we will sleepwalk into a long-term democratic crisis in the UK.

Policy Proposal: The formation of a standing all-party Commission on Education for Citizenship to monitor provision in schools and colleges in England (as recommended in the Crick Report of 1998).

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Young people and political parties

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It should be not considered revelatory news that traditional political parties in Western Europe are struggling to attract members, particularly younger citizens. It is difficult to retrieve reliable figures on political party membership due to complexities of membership eligibility, lack of reliable registers, and evidence of over-reporting in general population surveys. However the overall trend over time is clearly downwards (McGuinness, 2012) and the proportion of young members joining political parties has declined significantly over time (Bennie and Russell, 2012).

At the same time two other trends can be identified in the political landscape that has affected the ways that citizens engage politically. The first observable trend is that political parties have changed in many western societies from being mass membership parties to becoming 'catch-all' parties that seek to attract people with more diverse viewpoints and thus appeal to more of the electorate. This has encouraged a political culture in many states whereby parties have become more organisationally elitist and ideologically homogenous. As a consequence the role and function of the member has changed (Heidar, 2006). Political parties now rely less on their members for running the party and winning elections, and more on opinion polls, centralised organisations and the employment of political 'professionals' (see e.g. Stoker, 2006).

The second trend is that although many citizens have disengaged from formal politics, they have not ceased to behave politically. Rather, scholars have argued that citizens now more readily engage with 'non-institutionalised' political groups and activism, such as supporting charities or attending protests (Dalton, 2008). It has been argued that young people are especially attracted to such alternative forms of political activism because they are more interested in *doing* politics (e.g. Marsh *et al*, 2007; Bang, 2004).

Young people and political parties

Regardless of such shifts in the patterns and functions of political participation, the relationship between young people and political parties is a complicated one. Historically, British political parties have rarely attempted to engage with young people or consider issues of youth citizenship or political participation (Mycock and Tonge, 2012). Conversely, research suggests that young people have increasingly viewed political parties as remote, infantile and divisive in their approach to public debate and policy formulation, and embarrassing in their occasional attempts to appeal to younger generations (YCC, 2009). Furthermore, young people have proven most likely to complain that their interests are overlooked by political parties both in terms of policy-formation and electoral campaigning. This has led to a significant disconnection between young people and political parties evidenced through low levels of party identification and composite reluctance to join, donate to, work for, or campaign for them across the UK.

Most main political parties have established youth wings with the express intention to attract younger members, some of whom might be intimidated by joining the main organisation (Heidar, 2006). As the age profile of members of political parties has grown increasingly older, youth wings have been recognised as possessing the potential to address the under-recruitment of young people (Bennie and Russell, 2012). This noted,

youth wings and young members are typically separated from the main party, meaning relationships with the parent party are conditional and contested.

Youth wings have some independence from the main party to develop their own positions on policy and organise events such as annual conferences (Mycock and Tonge, 2012). However they are dependent on the main party for funding and their representation and influence is determined by the main party. While some youth wings have seats on the main party executive and/or have some input in policy formation, others do not (Russell, 2005). As such, scholars have classified them as semi-independent (Lamb, 2002) - at the margins of the main party membership who see the primary function of young wings as recruiting, training, and socialising new members and future leaders (Henn et al., 2002).

The segregation and peripheralisation of young people in political parties is evident both in terms of membership and their role in developing policy. There is no agreement between political parties regarding the lower and upper ages that defines 'youth' membership, thus reflecting wider uncertainties as to distinctions between youthhood and adulthood. Youth membership for most parties typically falls between an age-range of 15 and 30 years-old, thus excluding younger citizens and extending youth status well beyond most legal definitions of the age of responsibility. If someone within the age threshold defined for youth membership seeks to join the main party, they automatically become members of the youth organisation. At first glance, this might suggest a close relationship between the two organisations in terms of common recruitment and membership bases. However, it is clear that young members of political parties are treated differently to their older counterparts whose membership is not codified or defined in age-specific terms.

Moreover, while many parties have made concerted efforts to include young people in the formation of policy (Bennie and Russell, 2012), their marginalisation is still evident. Political parties remain reluctant to give young members too great a voice in party affairs, concerned that potentially radical policy proposals could alienate older voters (who are seen as more likely to vote). Young members are thus mainly consulted on youth issues rather than mainstream 'adult' policy that might also affect young people (Mycock and Tonge, 2012).

New approaches to youth political party membership

It is clear that there are tensions within political parties over how they relate to their young members and the way that young members want to *do* politics. The membership of young people in political parties should be seen as positive both in terms of providing opportunities to encourage active life-long forms of citizenship and also strengthening democracy by making their voices heard. However there is urgent need for a review of the terms of party membership offered to young people, particularly regarding opportunities within political parties offered to younger members, and the organisational relationships between youth wings and the main parties.

Although the role of youth wings as recruitment agents is important, political parties should recognise this is not their primary or sole function. Recent research suggests that youth wings are not particularly good at recruiting new members, as the majority of the active youth members are not trained or allocated such roles and thus to a large extent fail to do so (Rainsford, forthcoming). Moreover, the premise that youth wings should train young members for roles within the main party potentially drains the youth factions of good leaders and leadership. It also places them in an unfair position in relation to

other 'full' members of the party as the segregation of young members from the main party structures means that they have limited political experience and skills.

Developing good leaders and leadership through the synchronisation of youth and mainstream wings of political parties are not enough though. There is an urgent need to ensure young members have the means to run youth wings effectively and gain appropriate experience. Therefore the youth wings need to have their own budgets and exercise full control over the allocation of the money. This would strengthen their independence and enable the development of a stronger voice in the political party. It is also vital that youth wings are given the opportunity to extend their influence beyond youth-focused policy issues and are able to shape party policy more widely. The systemic 'youth-proofing' of party policy would be a positive step towards integrating younger members more deeply into political parties, thus reducing practices of policy segregation. For example, youth wings should be involved in the development of the 2015 general election manifestos to ensure that they reflect the interests of their young members and young people more widely.

The structural reform of political parties with regards to youth wings is not sufficient on its own to reform how young people engage with political parties. As noted earlier, young people in particular are attracted to single-issue politics and this suggests they are keen to *do* politics differently. However, the political parties are not equipped to accommodate such changes in political behaviour. When a young person joins a political party they often have an issue in mind that they want to engage with and work on. Current approaches limit the potential for young people to develop single issues within political parties as membership is more typically framed by attending constituency meetings or party election campaigning. As Bennie and Russell (2012, 15) note, the 'rather exclusive and arcane atmosphere that often dominate local meetings' reflects a 'familiarity with party regulation' that acts as barriers to effective youth participation. As such, it is understandable that many young people are not attracted by party politics or excited by the prospect that they can change things through traditional forms of engagement.

Political parties clearly need to integrate young new members better and give them the opportunities to work on issues that motivated them to first join their respective parties. As such they need to take back campaigns from single-issue groups and focus on engaging young people in their own communities. This type of engagement is of particular importance when appealing to those young people who are too young to vote. Engagement with political parties on youth-defined issues could prove a powerful way of allowing young members to interact with the formal policy-making process. By giving young people the opportunity to work on issues that concern them, political parties can become relevant again and would emphasise the importance of active membership within a party. Moreover, political parties can contribute directly to the development of political skills and literacy through the promotion of a political culture that reaches out and seeks to include young people in shaping youth-centric policy.

Policy proposal: Political parties in the UK should each undertake a review of the terms of young party membership and the relationship between youth wings and the main party with the aim to increase opportunities for young people to influence policy more significantly and develop participation.

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Promoting youth participation in democracy: The role of higher education

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Youth participation in democracy is an issue of great concern in the UK, with policy-makers, pressure groups, academics and commentators trying to understand and respond to historically low levels of electoral turnout, membership of political parties, and levels of trust in the political class, especially amongst young people. Since the onset of the global financial crisis, young people have borne the brunt of public spending cuts, from increased university tuition fees to the closure of youth centres, and are faced with a hostile labour market for new entrants. But despite their marginalisation in public policy, recent research has demonstrated that young people are not apathetic – they are interested in 'politics', broadly defined, have their own views and engage in ways they feel are appropriate to their everyday lives. They remain concerned about their communities but have turned to alternative forms of democratic engagement. Indeed, it is young people themselves who are diversifying political participation: from consumer politics, to community campaigns, to international networks facilitated by online technology.

Young people are much more likely than older citizens, however, to reject formal politics, with negative consequences for representative British democracy. Compared to other European countries, youth turnout in national elections is very low, and the gap between youth and general turnout is alarming (Sloam, 2013). Moreover, the distancing of citizens from traditional political and social institutions has left a vacuum in socialisation. In this context, educational establishments play a more pivotal role than ever in fostering citizens' civic and political engagement in their transition from youth to adulthood. In our view, educational institutions could do a great deal more in this regard, and our focus here is on the potential social role of higher education (HE).

Citizenship education in the UK

The UK government has control over education policy only in England and citizenship education provision differs in the four UK home nations. In England, citizenship education has been part of the non-statutory personal, social and health education framework at primary level, and a statutory subject in secondary schools since 2002 (Kisby, 2012). Prior to this, citizenship lessons had never been compulsory in English schools, although citizenship had been one of five non-compulsory, cross-curricular themes of the National Curriculum since 1990. The current Education Secretary, Michael Gove, confirmed in February 2013 that citizenship would be retained as a statutory foundation subject at secondary school level and a revised, slimmed-down citizenship curriculum was finalised in September 2013 following a consultation process. This will be taught from September 2014. Whereas policy has been developed for primary and secondary education, HE is an area that has been consistently overlooked with regard to the promotion of active citizenship.

In our view, democracies need active and informed citizens, willing and able to play a part in the democratic process so as to safeguard and bolster democratic principles. Citizenship education is important as a means of connecting young people to the political

system, helping them make sense of a complex political world and thereby strengthening democracy. As such, citizenship education can be defined as a subject that is, or ought to be, concerned to:

- provide students with knowledge and understanding of political ideas and concepts, and local, regional, national and international political processes and institutions;

- develop students' skills, to enable them to engage in decision-making, critical thinking, debate, and to participate in civic and political activities; and

- instil in students values which make it likely they will want to engage in British democracy.

Citizenship education and higher education

There is a large body of literature (both theoretical and empirical) that has drawn connections between education and democracy (e.g. Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Schulz et al., 2013). Several studies have highlighted educational achievement as being the most reliable predictor of citizens' civic and political engagement (e.g. Nie et al., 1996). However, it is also true that the democratic ethos of schools, universities and colleges has an important bearing on the likelihood of future democratic engagement (e.g. Kerr et al., 2007).

Declining participation in civic and political institutions has created something of an 'institutional lacuna' in the political socialisation of young people in liberal democracies (Flanagan et al. 2012). In the past, institutions like churches, trade unions and political parties provided opportunities for young people, in their transition to adulthood, to get engaged in politics and in their communities. Today, much of that institutional 'scaffolding' is gone. In this context, educational institutions, with their wide reach, play a central role. Clearly, not all young people go on to study at universities and colleges (about fifty per cent do so in the UK), but with such a substantial number now passing through Higher Education establishments, these institutions have the potential to promote political participation amongst a significant proportion of UK citizens. The large participation gap between college students and non-students (above and beyond social class) illustrates the pivotal role universities and colleges can play in fostering civic and political engagement (Sloam, 2013).

In the UK, attention has started to turn to the role Higher Education institutions can play in cultivating the knowledge, skills and values young people need to engage effectively in democratic life. The role of universities in promoting citizenship was formally recognised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in its Strategic Plan for the period 2006-2011. This stated:

> '[Higher Education] plays a key role in developing active citizens, and sustaining a civilised, more tolerant and inclusive society. Graduates are, on average, more likely to vote in elections, hold more tolerant attitudes to other races, and are more likely to be involved in their communities through voluntary activities' (HEFCE, 2006, para. 42).

The potential role of higher education

Higher Education is an important new territory for the expansion of citizenship education. Although some efforts have been made to promote active citizenship in universities and colleges, they are often tied to voluntary service and rarely integrated into the learning process. In the few examples where this has happened, its implementation has tended to be sporadic and ad-hoc, usually dependent upon the personal initiative of particular lecturers. The UK could learn much in terms of the provision of citizenship education from universities and colleges in the United States, where it is highly developed, and promoted through organisations like Campus Compact, a national coalition of college and university presidents committed to the civic purposes of higher education.

Youth engagement initiatives are often co-ordinated by such organisations, which turn these commitments into practice. They are also supported by significant investment in centres that co-ordinate internships, service learning and participation in community action projects, which allows Higher Education teachers to easily integrate political participation into academic courses and programmes (Colby et al., 2007). Indeed, much of the impetus for the promotion, evaluation and reform of citizenship education in the US comes from Higher Education, which acts as a centre for advanced research and as a laboratory for democratic engagement and citizenship education. The value of this level of democratic engagement for US universities and US society is significant, as illustrated by the explosion of civic engagement and political participation on campuses over the past few years.

In recent years, British universities have become increasingly involved in two dimensions of social activity, 'widening participation' and community/voluntary service, and have become more aware of the value of student participation and feedback (e.g. through the National Student Survey). These two developments make it more likely that Higher Education institutions will be amenable to citizenship education (for themselves, their students and their communities). However, we regard the current neglect of citizenship education and, indeed, the failure to recognise the importance of *political* participation as a huge, missed opportunity.

In our view, citizenship needs to be recognised as a key skill, civic and political participation should be promoted in all colleges and universities, and the development of citizenship capacities must be sufficiently resourced. Students who complete citizenship courses should receive suitable recognition for their efforts, and such programmes need to be run by staff who have received appropriate training and who have adequate resources to deliver the courses. Moreover, it is very important that it is active citizenship and not simply volunteerism that is promoted. This requires several things to happen. First, when engaging in forms of participation on campus or in local communities, all those taking part must be closely involved with the organisation of tasks. Second, engagement in particular action needs to be closely linked to critical discussions about the broader political context within which the specific activity, say, voluntary or charitable, is taking place. And finally, if desired by those involved following such discussions, further appropriate civic or political participation should be undertaken, such as writing letters to MPs or other relevant actors, organising demonstrations and petitions, and so on.

Conclusions

The problem of youth disengagement from particular forms of civic and political participation requires responses that ensure young people's political concerns are actively addressed and which promote trust in mainstream politics, a sense of duty and political efficacy amongst young people. Although we recognise that improvements to the supply of politics are urgently required – politicians and political parties must radically rethink their policies and practices if they are to appeal to young people – we are particularly concerned with the issue of political socialisation. As young people are much less likely to engage with traditional political institutions such as political parties or trade unions, they lack the institutional scaffolding to support their engagement. As they rarely or never see or meet an elected representative, they are likely to take a negative view of politicians and the policy process. These issues can be addressed by higher education institutions playing a much greater role in promoting civic and political engagement by young people.

We propose that leaders of universities and colleges across the UK make a public declaration of support for citizenship education to promote the civic and political participation of young people in British democracy on further and Higher Education campuses and in local communities. By getting such institutions to sign up to a 'Charter for Citizenship', they would declare a public interest in developing political knowledge and understanding, democratic skills, and values that will enable young people to engage in such participation. The 'Charter for Citizenship' for citizenship in higher and further education would be overseen by the Political Studies Association Young People's Politics specialist group, which would develop networks and also monitor and benchmark the progress of universities and colleges in achieving their civic goals.

Policy proposal: To create a 'Charter for Citizenship' for Higher and Further Education institutions across the UK.

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