

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS



Policy 2:

All over 16's resident in the UK should have the right to vote in all UK elections.

Endorsed by:



What's this all about?

Young people told us that voting in elections is an essential way for them to participate in a democratic society and make decisions about their future. They make informed decisions about their lives every day and so want to make decisions about the leaders that shape the country's direction. But to do this, young people recognise that political literacy education must also be improved, and governments across the UK must be doing more to actively tackle disinformation and misinformation. Young people want to learn from political experts and be able to find accurate and up-to-date information easily, without second-guessing its source or validity.

"If we are considered old enough to marry, consent and take exams which change the courses of our lives, we should be allowed a say in our own government"

– Young woman aged 14-17

"An understanding of the world does not begin the day you turn 18."

– Young woman aged 14-17, Scottish Borders

What are young people in Scotland calling for?

- Young people call for a minimum entitlement to comprehensive citizenship and democratic education that is taught by teachers and youth workers who have received

specialist training and support, and who have access to high-quality educational resources.

“But with this, education on politics and international relations needs a drastic improvement. It needs to be universally offered, consistent, cohesive and regularly updated to reflect the changing dynamics of politics. It should be taught by practitioners and experts; rather than from a textbook that will go out of date as soon as it is printed.”

– Young woman aged 22-26, Edinburgh

- **Decision makers must take tangible action against misinformation and disinformation. This means platforms and companies are held accountable to remove false and dangerous information when it’s shared online.**

“Many young people who haven't yet left highschool are uninformed about prominent political issues leading to their opinions being easily swayed and influenced by others.”

– Young woman aged 14-17, Edinburgh

- **Voter registration should be promoted within schools and community settings to ensure young people are aware of their rights and the voting process in advance of elections, in particular in advance of their first-time vote.**

“Allowing this age group to vote would encourage political engagement among younger citizens promoting a habit of participation.”

– Young woman aged 14-17, Clackmannanshire

Evidence and Support

- [Together - Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights](#) consulted 229 children and young people - including 9 MSYPs for their [State of Children's Rights in Scotland 2024](#) report. It found that a common theme amongst the children and young people consulted was the desire for genuine and inclusive opportunities to take part in decision-making. It was the most frequently mentioned issue when children and young people were asked about life in Scotland and the role of adults around them.
- Young people expressed strong views on voting rights, with many noting that while they can vote at 16 in Scottish elections, they have to wait until 18 to vote in UK elections. Children and young people feel that votes at 16 is an important way for them to have a say in how Scotland is governed. Comments from young people include: “I don’t feel like I have much say in decisions, although I have more than I do with the UK Government. I like how we get to vote earlier, as that gives us more power”, “Most of my friends are quite annoyed that we’re not allowed to vote in the General Election but it’s [votes at 16] incredibly important because it allows young people to share their views and also show that the Parliament and the Government appreciate our views and understand how important it is to hear what we think as young people and allowing us to make political change.”

What has SYP done?

Previous [SYP Consultations](#) includes [SYP's response to the UNCRC Incorporation Guidance Parts 2 and 3 \(2024\)](#). The [SYP Policy Log](#) includes policies on improving participation in politics; the right to vote for all over 16s and young offenders; additional funding for the Scottish Youth Parliament and several other policies relating to youth participation. Please also see [here](#) for more information on Votes at 16.