



HANSARD
SOCIETY

HeadsUp Forum

www.headsup.org.uk

'Make Your Mark - Should the voting and candidacy ages be lowered?'
(October 1st - 17th 2003)

A debate exploring the cases for and against lowering the age of electoral majority

The low turnout at the 2001 general election has been well documented. Most observers would agree that low election turnouts are damaging to representative democracies such as that in the UK. There are lots of opinions on what should be done to address the problem, and one of the most debated is the call to reassess the minimum voting and candidacy ages.

We decided to open a HeadsUp forum where young people from across the UK could share their views on the age of electoral majority and learn about voting and electoral systems.

Following the publication of its consultation paper on the age of electoral majority, the Electoral Commission invited HeadsUp to submit the findings from the forum for use in its review process. The forum was, therefore, not only a means for young people to develop their political awareness but to actively participate in a consultation process, the results of which will be fed into Parliament.

Students from ten schools took part in the forum - dubbed 'Make Your Mark'. The schools were a mixture of state and private institutions. The ages of the participants ranged from 11 - 17 years olds; some got involved as individuals but most were brought to the site as part of their Citizenship, Modern Studies or Politics lessons.

The forum ran from October 1st - 17th and was actively moderated throughout by the Hansard Society's Citizenship Education Programme. Supporting notes for teachers were available online, and the students were invited to make use of background information which covered voting and electoral systems in detail.

Under the general forum question - 'Should the voting and candidacy ages be lowered?' - three sub-questions were each assigned their own topic-space. These were:

- Should the voting age be reduced from 18?
- Should the candidacy age be reduced from 21?
- If not by lowering the age of electoral majority, how else might electoral turnouts be boosted?

The debates were lively, informative and filled 210 pages. What follows is a summary report of the key findings and quotes from each.

Lowering the voting age... up for it or against?

Verdict... The forum supports a reduction in the voting age and 16 years old is felt to be the most appropriate minimum age.

It was very close but a majority of HeadsUp students were in favour of reassessing the voting age. The support shown in the HeadsUp Forum reflects previous research conducted by groups such as the Votes@16 Campaign and MORI. Indeed, in a poll run on the HeadsUp site during a previous debate, 81% had voted for a reduction in the voting age. We were interested to hear the opinions behind the statistics.

The right age

By far the most common argument used in support of lowering the voting age cited the various other rights bestowed upon the individual when they reached 16 years of age:

gemmlak: *i think the voting age should be lowered. 16 year olds can get married and have jobs, so why can't they vote?*

In the UK having the franchise is regarded as a right of adult citizens. Traditionally, 18 is viewed as the age at which a UK citizen enters adulthood. However, students posting comments such as the example given above also saw having a job or sexual intercourse as adult responsibilities. The fact that the legal benchmark for the latter activities was set at 16 was taken by many of the students as an indication that in our society 16 was the age at which you became 'adult'. Thus, from their point of view, 16

year olds should be able to vote. Others were not as convinced by this argument:

Katscot: *Marriage and sex is up to you and effects you but voting effects the whole country.*

Money matters

A group of students rested their arguments in support of lowering the voting age on the 'no taxation without representation' argument:

SarahD: *I believe the voting age should be lowered, but only for people who pay taxes. Imagine having to pay taxes to a government you have no say in? Once you get a job, and have to pay taxes, you must be responsible enough to vote in an election.*

It was interesting that out of all the points raised in favour of voting at 16, those opposed failed to produce any counter to this line of argument.

Other opinions were also justified on economic grounds, particularly in relation to the fact that at 16 years old, young people are often required to pay 'adult prices' for a number of services:

Awood: *why do people 16 or over have to pay adult rates for leisure... if they have to pay adult prices then SURELY they must be able to make a decision on how and who runs the country.*

However, the 'anti' faction did have a reply to this:

Jbelcher: *is deciding who runs the country as important as buying a ticket to go ice skating? I think that there is a definate lack of maturity when it comes to voting and teenagers.*

Life experience

The question of whether teenagers had sufficient maturity to participate in elections generated a great deal of debate. The 'lack of maturity' was one of the main arguments utilised by those opposed to a reduction in the voting age:

Georgia: *I think we should stick at 18. My brother is 16 and i would dread to think of him having a vote. Many 16 year olds worry about their hair and boyfriends/girlfriends more than politics.*

Although positive about young peoples' involvement in the political process, those who posted comments like the one above, believed that voting required a minimum level of 'life experience' which under-18s lacked due to their youth. Still, a common response highlighted the formidable demands already made of teenagers and how these compared to voting:

ltrv03: *voting doesn't put pressure on people, it just gives them a chance to have a say in how the country is run. Its much less pressure than exams which 16 year olds take. They can handle voting!*

The absence of maturity was felt to open up opportunities for irresponsible voting and exploitation of young people. Political parties and politicians, they feared, would be able to target young people with gimmicks and sensationalist policies:

laurat: *i think lowering the voting age would be totally wrong, i know if i was given the vote i would vote for some stupid party which would do no good for the country. young people would abuse the use of their vote... i dont think 16 year olds take things like voting seriously, we had a pretend election at my school and there were people standing for all the different partys and guess who won? the green party. because they want to legalise cannabis as many of the people in my school would like this to happen*

Indeed, some viewed with suspicion the fact that the voting age was debated at all:

victspar: *We don't think the voting age should be lowered. It seems like a ploy to try and win more voters, not a genuine concern*

There was some anxiety that party political issues could cause tension between young people. This point was checked by students who pointed out that no one was obliged to reveal their voting intentions if they chose not to. Still, for others extending the franchise would go a long way toward encouraging teenagers to openly discuss politics with their peers:

JenniferMcN: *I think they should lower the voting age because if you are allowed to vote at a lower age it might encourage more young people to vote. it might also encourage younger people to share their opinions more as well.*

Supporters of lowering the voting age found the 'life experience' argument difficult to counter. They felt that this provided another example of responsible young people being discriminated against because of a reckless minority:

hypedonsugar: *I am totally up for lowering the voting age!! I think that every1 gets a really bad impression. It is the few bad ones that ruin it for the rest of the teenagers!*

Having a choice

For others, if decisions being made in Parliament were going to affect the lives of 16 year olds, then those individuals should be able to vote for the decision-makers. For these proponents, increasing the electoral pool would increase the quality of representation achieved in elections:

alanjohn: *If you lower the age then there will be more people allowed to vote and therefore number of people voting will also increase... I think that we should still have the choice even if we don't use it.*

A number of students from both sides of the argument took up this middle ground and argued that teenagers should have a choice of whether to use their vote or not:

devil: *loads of people say 16 year olds r not mature enough and i half agree. if the age was lowered 16 year olds who DO care and ARE more mature would b able 2 vote and the 1's who don't care don't hav 2 bothr*

Nevertheless, the fact that granting 16 year olds the vote was no guarantee that they would take part in elections, was all-important for some of the participants:

Oclinton: *If there had not been such a low outcome of voters at the last general election then there would not be any debate about whether to lower the voting age*

That it was proving difficult enough to draw existing voters to the polling stations was a significant feature in the arguments of those against widening the electorate. Such a move, they believed, would aggravate the problem:

rosahatf: *no other European Union country has a national voting age lower than 18. Surely it would be better to focus the government's energy in encouraging those who already have the vote to use it, rather than extending it to a whole load of young people who don't*

Election know-how

Moving on from the discussion of 16 year olds preparedness in terms of maturity, students on either side of the debate picked up on the disparate levels of political literacy amongst under-18s. In the forum itself it was evident that some students were very clued-up, others lacked substantial

knowledge; most of the students placed themselves as somewhere in the middle. Political awareness was highlighted as an important aspect of taking part meaningfully in elections, and the insufficiency amongst teenagers was identified as problematic when it came to the potential of extending the franchise to 16 year olds:

trillian: *I think that the voting age should be lowered - BUT ONLY if there is more information available and given to youngsters. I am near the voting age and find i know nothing about the parties and what they stand for at all... The only things i know of the parties is the archetypical stereotypes and the present leaders, which do not necessarily represent the parties true aims and ideals.*

We asked the students whose responsibility they felt it was to inform young people about politics. The students said politicians had a major part to play but schools were seen as being in the best position. Citizenship education, of course, was introduced to address political literacy. Yet the majority of students responding to this line of questioning failed to see a link between Citizenship and building political awareness. The presence of Citizenship in the curriculum is new and thus unfamiliar, however, it is clear that there is work to be done in terms of selling Citizenship to students.

An element amongst those 'opposed' believed you either had the required knowledge or you didn't. However, the outlook amongst those 'for' a reduction was more inclined to be more positive and proactive:

happyjeans: *I think most 16 year olds dont know about polotics because they dont need to, if they were allowed to vote they would probably learn all they need to and vote sensibly.*

Again, when faced with points of view that questioned the quality of young people's political awareness, some of the supporters cast aspersions on the capacity of those already entrusted to vote:

Johanna: *people seem to think how old the person is depends on how intelligent they are. I know many 15 year olds who could beat my dad in a questionnaire about politics, and they are not obsessed with it.*

Indeed, that some of the students lamented their parents' inactivity when it came to voting, suggests that although schools have got an important part to play in engaging young people with politics, so too do parents:

benmars: *My mum doesnt vote and i see it as a vote missing. I would happily take that vote and vote for what i think is the most worthy party*

Conclusions

This forum showed that young people were totally capable of understanding the various arguments for and against lowering the voting age. Those who wanted to maintain the current voting age were as articulate and vocal as those who supported a reduction. The participants also demonstrated that they recognised voting as an important factor in political participation, which says a lot about the willingness and ability of young people to engage not only with political issues but conventional political structures as well.

The candidacy age... higher, lower or stick?

Verdict... The forum opposes a reduction in the candidacy age

In the debate on lowering the minimum voting and candidacy ages, candidacy consistently comes out as the least alluring. In this HeadsUp forum, the candidacy age discussion was dwarfed by the debate on the voting age, but those students who did consider the question had some interesting insights.

On the question of lowering the candidacy age, the outcome was a lot clearer. The participants in the 'Make Your Mark' forum were not in favour of reducing the candidacy age. Indeed, a good proportion of those opposed to lowering the candidacy age were in favour of lowering the voting age.

Representing

For those who were in favour of reducing the candidacy age from 21, the point was one of representation:

majesty: *i think it should be lowered because younger people need someone to represent themselves in Parliament*

A number of students thought it was a strange contradiction that 18 year olds could vote but were unable to stand as candidates, and on this basis voiced their support for lowering the candidacy age.

Maturity

In their arguments against a reassessment of the candidacy age, the 'opposed' expressed doubt over the capability of under-21s to stand for elected office. As in the voting age debate, the 'lack of maturity' point was

raised, a deficiency that seemed all the more significant when it came to candidacy:

Louise90: *I feel that the candidacy age should remain the same as if it was made younger possible candidates may not have the time to go to university and get some life experience before they become MPs.*

Skills

In addition to life experience, the students also recognised that practical skills were of great importance to potential politicians. Quite naturally young people lacked these on account of their youth:

Goldilocks: *I do not think the candicy age should be lowered, because this country needs somebody who has experience in this field, as it is such a challenging one, and someone who really knows what they are talking about... if we did lower the age we could end up with somebody who couldn't run the country properley and cope with such a pressurising job!*

However, participants could not agree on where these practical abilities should be cultivated. For some, the best way to become a strong candidate was to have built up abundant political experience. Others did not view this route as favourably and suggested a different approach:

Kadair: *we should be encouraging politicains who have worked jobs similar to those of the voters, and who have an insight into the people that they will be representing not people who have never known anything but politics*

Celebrity

During the debate former Hollywood movie star, Arnold Schwarzenegger, was elected Governor of the American State of California. We asked the students what they thought about this route into politics. Many of them were favourable, and defended his right to run for and take up office:

Shrek: *just cuz hes an actor doesnt mean that he cant help other people and make the state better*

Some students had a more negative view on the influence of celebrity in politics. They felt it was a particular concern when in the context of elections:

hypedonsugar: *I fink dat ppl may fink dat an MP is fit and dat will influence em. I fink dat if we lower da age den females will start 2 use dere body to influence ppl. Just like sum celebs!*

Even those who were more confident about the ability of the UK electorate to see past celebrity-status or good looks, were anxious about the effect celebrity-status could have on UK politics:

Doris: As for the argument that if 18 yr olds were able to be MPs, people would be swayed by their looks, do you really think that Tony Blair and all the labour party were voted in at the last election because they were good looking?? Have you seen them? I think you underestimate the reasons why people vote. If politics demises to the realms of celeb world we really are in trouble!

Conclusions

Young people often perceive parliamentarians as 'old, grey men' who cannot empathise with the concerns and points of view of their younger constituents. Such perceptions, whether justified or not, create formidable barriers when it comes to connecting young people with their elected representatives. However, as has been demonstrated in previous HeadsUp Forums the young people do not necessarily see the solution in the fielding of younger candidates. Rather the current politicians and their parties should work harder to consult with young people and then to treat this interaction with the same consequence granted to adult constituents.

A HeadsUp Forum exploring the role of the MP and young peoples' perceptions of politicians was held in June 2003. A summary report is available online.

Compulsory voting and other big ideas to boost turnout.

Verdict... The forum is opposed to compulsory voting but can see some merit in alternative means of casting a vote

Like the candidacy age debate, this discussion topic was overshadowed by the debate on lowering the voting age. Nevertheless, we felt justified in opening a space in the forum where the students could suggest other means of boosting turnout as alternatives to lowering the age of electoral majority. After all, even though the Electoral Commission believes the time is right to review the age of electoral majority, there are no guarantees that the Government will take any further action on the matter.

Voting obligation

We set up as a hook the proposal of making voting a compulsory activity in the UK. The overwhelming thrust of the ensuing posts opposed this suggestion. However, even when taking issue with the idea of compulsory voting, students conceded there was a problem with the low turnout at recent elections:

Louise90: *I do not feel that Compulsory voting is an option, it is going against peoples democratic rights if they are forced to do something. Of course there is a current and very real problem with voter apathy however I think that the problem with this is more disillusion with the government rather than a lack of want to vote. If you feel that it does not matter which party gets in as they will all end up lying and implimenting the same policies then why should you bother voting at all?*

It was interesting that the comments made by some students deliberating on the reasons behind low turnouts reflected the expressions of disillusionment made by adults:

Peachlia: *In some ways i think compulsory voting is a good idea as over the centuries people have fought and died for the right. However you need to make people feel like their vote counts. Issues that affect young people and the general public such as price of housing, university fees, price of living are not really influenced enough by our vote. These decisions are made by politicians. The MP's are too out of touch with how much everything costs. They have enoough money. How many of them have evr lived on a council estate or still work for the mininum wage, or bring up their children without being able to afford child minder.*

It was also intriguing to see time and time again during this HeadsUp Forum these students, who were below voting age and seen as members of an apathetic generation, expressing the value they saw in voting:

Cinderella: *i think it is sad. So many people demonstrated against the war in iraq, yet probably many of them did not vote in the last election. People should learn to express their views more through voting.*

Still, even for the sake of boosting electoral turnout in a representative democracy, these students saw compulsory voting as an infringement of their rights - people should vote but not be forced into it.

Voting technology

So, if not lowering the age of electoral majority or making voting compulsory, how else might turnout levels be boosted? In past forums, some students had suggested alternative ways of casting votes, for example online or via mobile phones:

Saffs: *if i could vote i might be interested in doing it with a text. some people worry about the cost but i text all the time. what would one other text matter when its as important as a vote.*

The main rationale behind these suggestions was that they would provide more options for voters and in many cases might prove a more convenient way of participating in elections. However, there was not universal acclaim for the benefits of harnessing ICTs:

Tblair: *I agree that we need to make it easier for people to vote but the security problem of email and texting would make our election results not as reliable. We could have more corruption in politics, which there is enough of anyway. Making voting easier doesn't make politics more appealing to the electorate.*

Even those who supported the utilisation of new technology cautioned against placing too much consequence on its capacity. If the internet was going to be presented as a voting option, then we must be careful not to restrict it to the few:

peacemaker: *If we introduced text voting and email voting, we would have more results, and so a better summary of the thoughts of British people. Many people do not have the internet, and many do not have computers. Some do not have mobile phones. If this is the case, they should be able to pop down to the local library to vote online.*

Conclusions

Again, what was evident from the discussion in this topic-space was that the young people felt there was always room for innovation but parliamentarians could also make more effective use of the tools already at their disposal to engage young people and wider society to a greater extent.

A wider discussion of the merits of voting online and via mobile phones was conducted in a previous HeadsUp Forum exploring the role of the MP and young peoples' perceptions of politicians. A summary report is available online.

The HeadsUp project was set up as a rolling-pilot to investigate the potential of ICT to teach political literacy and encourage young people's participation in the political process. In the summer of 2004 the Hansard Society's Citizenship Education Programme will publish the findings from 12 months of managing the HeadsUp project.

Each individual forum provides a representative sample of what young people think about topical political issues. The next HeadsUp Forum will run from November 17th - 28th. It will explore the development of new laws through Parliament, with particular focus on anti-social behaviour legislation.

Ross Ferguson
Web Coordinator



Key Quotes

Lowering the voting age... up for it or against?

The right age...

gemmlak: i think the voting age should be lowered. 16 year olds can get married, pay taxes and have jobs, so why can't they vote?

lizamill: If sixteen year olds are considered mature enough to have sex, get married and have full time jobs, we should be able to vote - It is ridiculous to imply that a one off vote once every five years is more important than the birth of a child, which will affect you every day of your life.

katscot: Marriage and sex is up to you and effects you but voting effects the whole country. Children at the age of 16 are still often seen as naive therefore a politician might try to bribe children into voting for them. then they might change their views once elected.

matibake: we are for the lowering of the voting age in the United Kingdom. we are for it because we think 16 year olds are perfectly capable and mature enough to reach a mature and sensible decision regarding who runs their country and how they run it. at the age of 16 you can get married, join the armed forces, have children and pay taxes. These facts are proof that 16 year olds are mature and able to contribute to the running of the country. Decisions made in parliament effect the lives of 16 year olds, therefore, they should be given the right to vote for their desired party.

chlowils: i think that the voting age should be lowered to 16 because at 16 you can leave school, get married, get a full time job, pay taxes and join the arm forces. If people can do that surely 16 yr olds should be given the right to vote!

clarspyr: we feel strongly about lowering the voting age because we know that at 16 you can join the armed forces. If you can fight and even die for your country is it not important that you can vote to decide whether a war should happen and how it is going to be fought?

Money matters...

phoehorr: If working 16 years olds have to pay taxes to the goverment then they should be allowed to have a say with what happens to their money.

Awood: why do people 16 or over have to pay adult rates for leisure... if they have to pay adult prices then SURELY they must be able to make a decision on how and who runs the country.

fredbyro: By lowering the age limit, we would be increasing the representation of the tax-paying population, making the elections more representative.

SarahD: I believe the voting age should be lowered, but only for people who pay taxes. Imagine having to pay taxes to a government you have no say in? Once you get a job, and have to pay taxes, you must be responsible enough to vote in an election.

Life experience...

gemmlak: Some 40-years olds don't make responsible decisions so if we're "not responsible" enough, they should not be allowed to vote either! Young people are the future of Britain and we should be able to take part in the shaping of our future.

Georgia: I think we should stick at 18. My brother is 16 and i would dread to think of him having a vote. Many 16 year olds worry about their hair and boyfriends/girlfriends more than politics.

camilea: We think that the minimum voting age should not be lowered for the following reasons:

It would cause tension between teenagers due to voting for different parties.

Teenagers are very easily influenced and we think that their rights to vote may well be exploited by adults.

Teenagers may feel obliged to vote for the same party as their parents

littles: Just because sum1 doesnt vote it doesnt mean dat they are not mature. They have chosen not to vote because they dont think it will make the difference or because they are too busy to vote.

alichewi: having a childhood is important, we should not force young children to have to make difficult decisions too early. They need time to be a child, to be carefree.

JBelcher: is deciding who runs the country as important as buying a ticket to go ice skating? I think that there is a definite lack of maturity when it comes to voting and teenagers.

Having a choice...

hypedonsugar: I am totally up for lowering the voting age!! I think that every1 gets a really bad impression. It is the few bad ones that ruin it for the rest of the teenagers!

DizzeeRas: I think it should stay at 18. People at the age of 18 wouldn't vote because of someone they like but because they feel privileged to be able to vote. A lot of the 16 year olds don't care much about politics and wouldn't have the time to think about who they are voting for due to GCSE's! My brother has just finished his GCSE's and believe me, he wouldn't of had time to vote or to study who/what they are voting for.

benmars: My mum doesn't vote and I see it as a vote missing. I would happily take that vote and vote for what I think is the most worthy party

rosithom: We believe that by lowering the voting age to 16 year old will give youths too much responsibility that they will not be able to handle. We do not have the right understanding of government or politics to use our vote wisely. We are 16 years old, and we know that our interests do not lie in politics and the government. We are more concerned with things such as fashion. So we believe that we will not be using the vote to our full potential and that the majority of 16 years old will not actually use their power to vote. In the year 2001, only 39% of young people voted in the general election. Meaning over half the young people did not consider voting worth while. By looking at this information we believe that the percentage voting at 16 years will be even less than this.

matibake: teenagers who vote will keep it to themselves and since when have you had a general conversation about politics and who your parents vote for? it is not a typical conversation and many people prefer to keep their views to themselves, therefore unless you choose to discuss your opinions there should not be rifts between teenagers.

leninlives: the only thing that affects 16yr olds is drink sex and drugs. they don't want the pressure of voting

amanleip: After the novelty had worn off, young people would take it for granted and not go, like the people in the 18-24 age category do now. what's the point?

alanjohn: If you lower the age then there will be more people allowed to vote and therefore number of people voting will also increase... I think that we should still have the choice even if we don't use it.

devil: loads of people say 16 year olds are not mature enough and I half agree. if the age was lowered 16 year olds who DO care and ARE more mature would be able to vote and the 1's who don't care don't have both

rosahatf: no other European Union country has a national voting age lower than 18. Surely it would be better to focus the government's energy in encouraging those who already have the vote to use it, rather than extending it to a whole load of young people who don't

lrv03: voting doesn't put pressure on people, it just gives them a chance to have a say in how the country is run. Its much less pressure than exams which 16 year olds take. They can handle voting!

Oclinton: If there had not been such a low outcome of voters at the last general election then there would not be any debate about whether to lower the voting age

Election know-how...

sarapars: In our opinion the problem lies deeper. We feel that 16 year olds do not receive substantial education of political matters to make a valid decision.

Elizadam: it is compulsory to study RS lessons in school, it would be much more of an advantage to study politics instead. Politics is not boring when we are educated correctly about it

laurat: i think lowering the voting age would be totally wrong, i know if i was given the vote i would vote for some stupid party which would do no good for the country. young people would abuse the use of their vote... i dont think 16 year olds take things like voting seriously, we had a pretend election at my school and there were people standing for all the different parties and guess who won? the green party. because they want to legalise cannabis as many of the people in my school would like this to happen

kateegli: We do feel that it is important to learn about other peoples religions.. however in the younger years at school we learnt about religions... but now that we are older we would prefer to learn about politics.

JenniferMcN: I think they should lower the voting age because if you are allowed to vote at a lower age it might encourage more young people to vote. it might also encourage younger people to share their opinions more as well.

Star: If u don't vote because u don't understand enough about politics, then don't hesitate! Ask!

heleranc: if we fail to nurture young peoples interest in politics, then we lose it. It also increases representation.

trillian: I think that the voting age should be lowered - BUT ONLY if there is more information available and given to youngsters. I am near the voting age and find i know nothing about the parties and what they stand for at all... The only things i know of the parties is the archetypical stereotypes and the present leaders, which do not necessarily represent the parties true aims and ideals.

Johanna: people seem to think how old the person is depends on how intelligent they are. I know many 15 year olds who could beat my dad in a questionnaire about politics, and they are not obsessed with it.

happyjeans: I think most 16 year olds dont know about polotics because they dont need to, if they were allowed to vote they would probably learn all they need to and vote sensibly. Anyway, who said 18 year olds are more sensible than 16 year olds, you could be under the influence of alcohol at 18!

Star: If u don't vote because u don't understand enough about politics, then don't hesitate! Ask!

Other points...

Saffs: we did suffragettes in history. there were loads of crazy reasons used to stop women getting the vote. like women didnt have the skills or enough brains or that they would just vote the way husbands told them. if you said things like that today people would think you were stupid. but arguments like that are used against lowering the voting age. i think the reasons against arent strong enough. so i support lowering the voting age. i think it should be 16.

Star: This may sound contrivrsal but i really do believe strongly in voting if you have the opportunity do to so!
Think of the suffrigetes! Some of them gave up their lives so that woman could have the right to vote!
Don't let all this be a waste!

victspar: We don't think the voting age should be lowered. It seems like a ploy to try and win more voters, not a genuine concern

sararedm: the only three countries in the world whos voting age is 16 are brazil cuba nacaragura surely if this was a better age more countries would have adopted it by now.

KathrynP: If the voting age was lowered to 16 we could also take part in referendums, there may soon be a referendum about the euro and whether we should join it. Many peopel feel strongly about whether we should join the euro and if we do join it, it will affect are lives for ever, surely we should have that chance whether to change our lives for ever.

Lgraham: I think that 16 year olds should be allowed to take part in local elections but not general elections. We should have the right to vote on matters which will definatly affect us within our home area but i dont think that enough 16 year olds would have the knowledge and sense to use their vote wisely in a general election. Most 16 year olds would not take the time do research any of the parties and their policies and are more likely to vote on impulse due to the novelty factor or be more influenced by gimmicks etc. from parties.

Lowering the voting age... up for it or against?

Representing...

Lgraham: i think that the candidacy age should be lowered. If 18yr olds can vote then surely they should also be able to become candidates. Allowing 18yr olds to vote alone means that they are not truly having an effect on politics if they can't be candidates and have the chance to change things themselves

majesty: i think it should be lowered because younger people need someone to represent themselves in Parliament

Shrek: anyone should be allowed to go up for candidacy it's up to the public to vote for the best person- quite a big responsibility if you think about it

Maturity...

Louise90: I feel that the candidacy age should remain the same as if it was made younger possible candidates may not have the time to go to university and get some life experience before they become MPs.

tigger: people need to have more experience in life to do something like running for MP

Skills...

Kadair: we should be encouraging politicians who have worked jobs similar to those of the voters, and who have an insight into the people that they will be representing not people who have never known anything but politics

Goldilocks: I do not think the candidacy age should be lowered, because this country needs somebody who has experience in this field, as it is such a challenging one, and someone who really knows what they are talking about... if we did lower the age we could end up with somebody who couldn't run the country properly and cope with such a pressurising job!

Celebrity...

Sunnystar: i think that if the candidacy didn't stay at 21 then the parties that get into power might just be the ones that appeal to teenagers not the parties that might do any good

peacemaker: some might vote for the candidate who is the most "cool", but this is a stereotype of children today. Look at the carefully thought out comments being made in these forums! Any comments on my idea?

littles: Whats to say that a 16 year old doesnt know what their talking about? I dont think it's very fair of you to streeo-type teenagers like that.

hypedonsugar: I fink dat ppl may fink dat an MP is fit and dat will influence em. I fink dat if we lower da age den females will start 2 use dere body to influence ppl. Just like sum celebs!

Doris: As for the argument that if 18 yr olds were able to be MPs, people would be swayed by their looks, do you really think that Tony Blair and all the labour party were voted in at the last election because they were good looking?? Have you seen them? I think you underestimate the reasons why people vote. If politics demises to the realms of celeb world we really are in trouble!

Compulsory voting and other big ideas to boost turnout.

Voting obligation...

Louise90: I do not feel that Compulsory voting is an option, it is going against peoples democratic rights if they are forced to do something. Of course there is a current and very real problem with voter apathy however I think that the problem with this is more disillusion with the government rather than a lack of want to vote. If you feel that it does not matter which party gets in as they will all end up lying and implimenting the same policies then why should you bother voting at all?

Lgraham: I think that compulsory voting would be takig away our right to freedom. Also, we complain that 49% of the vote is wasted but surely if someone is voting on impulse for any party inparticular just because they have to vote for someone, then surely this is a wasted vote.

Cinderella: Voting should be a persons choice not a compulsory duty. That is what a democracy is all about - FREEDOM to vote.

Louise90: I do feel that until there is a good opposition party then the dissillusionment with the government will simply grow. At the moment there is no one to challenge the current governement and with no good opposition then there is not much point in very many people voting at all

Cinderella: i think it is sad. So many people demonstrated against the war in iraq, yet probably many of them did not vote in the last election. People should learn to express their views more through voting.

Peachlia: In some ways i think compulsory voting is a good idea as over the centuries people have fought and died for the right. However you need to make people feel like their vote counts. Issues that affect young people and the general public such as price of housing, university fees, price of living are not really influenced enough by our vote. These decisions are made by politicians. The MP's are too out of touch with how much everything costs. They have enough money. How many of them have evr lived on a council estate or still work for the mininum wage, or bring up their children without being able to afford child minder.

Voting technology...

Saffs: if i could vote i might be interested in doing it with a text. some people worry about the cost but i text all the time. what would one other text matter when its as important as a vote.

Tblair: I agree that we need to make it easier for people to vote but the security problem of email and texting would make our election results not as reliable. We could have more corruption in politics, which there is enough of anyway. Making voting easier doesn't make politics more appealing to the electorate.

Goldilocks: I also agree text voting would be great because the voting numbers would really improve as people wouldn't have to travel for ages to get to a polling station. If we brought in compulsory voting some people wouldn't be able to choose therefore making a bad descion and putting someone terrible into power!!

peacemaker: If we introduced text voting and email voting, we would have more results, and so a better summary of the thoughts of British people. Many people do not have the internet, and many do not have computers. Some do not have mobile phones. If this is the case, they should be able to pop down to the local library to vote online.