

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People
Wednesday 29th October 2014
13.00-14.30
Committee Room 3, The Scottish Parliament
Chair: Marco Biagi MSP

Young people's participation in the referendum – what will the legacy be?

Attendees

Marco Biagi, MSP
Alison Johnstone, MSP
Abeer Alatawi, University of Edinburgh
David Ashford
Jeni Bainbridge, Children in Scotland
Lorne Berkley, Quarriers
Gareth Brown, Scottish Youth Parliament
Carey Douglas, ENABLE
Jacqui Dunbar, Barnardo's
Dr Jan Eichhorn, University of Edinburgh
Fee Ferguson, Children in Scotland
Maurice Frank, Personalised Education Now
Lorna Goodwin, Carers Trust
Jonathan Hancock, Children 1st
Terry Harkins, Dalkeith Midlothian Kinship Carers
Dr Claire Houghton, University of Edinburgh
Lydia House, Scottish Parent Teacher Council
Martin Lahiffe, CLIC Sargent
Jenny Lees, NUS Scotland
Cath Logan, Big Lottery Fund Scotland
Caroline Macleod, RNIB
Dr Kirsteen Mackay, University of Edinburgh
Lynda Maguire, Dalkeith Midlothian Kinship Carers
Ellen Maloney, Fostering Network
Carrie Manning, The Prince's Trust
Garry McGregor, Befriending Networks
Paul McIlvenny, Youth Scotland
Keir McKechnie, Includem
Catherine McKenna, Scottish Government Elections and Constitution Division
Claire McPherson, Scottish Government Elections and Constitution Division
Louise Morgan, Carers Trust
Eloise Nutbrown, Save the Children
Captain Graeme Parkhill, The Salvation Army
Sarah Paterson, YouthLink
Michael Shanks, Includem
Terri Smith, Scottish Youth Parliament
Kay Steven, Scottish Women's Aid
Juliet Swanm Electoral Reform Society Scotland

Kay Tisdall, University of Edinburgh
Paul Traynor, Carers Trust
Linda Whitmore, ENABLE
Xiaohui Wang, University of Edinburgh
Mark Wong, University of Edinburgh

Apologies

Claire Burnett, RCPCH
Fiona Barlow, Samaritans
Morag Coleman, Families First St Andrews
Mig Coupe, Mindroom
Kathleen Deacon, The Spark
Fiona Jones, Clan Childlaw
Sara Lurie, Fostering Network
Brian Magee, COSCA
Lesley McNab, CHAS
John Nelson, Scottish Adoption
Andrew Sirel, Legal Services Agency
Dr Chris Wiles, Division of Clinical Psychology in Scotland
Elaine Wilson, Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland

Panel

- Terri Smith, Vice Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament
- Jenny Lees, Campaigns Delivery Officer, NUS Scotland
- Dr Jan Eichhorn, Chancellor's Fellow (Social Policy), University of Edinburgh School of Social and Political Science
- Juliet Swan, Campaigns & Research Officer, Electoral Reform Society Scotland

Juliet Swan, Electoral Reform Society Scotland

ERS Scotland collaborated with the Scottish Youth Parliament, NUS Scotland, Young Scot and others to promote registration amongst young people. This included a registration week and an event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

They lobbied for 16 & 17 year olds to be included in the franchise and would like the franchise to be devolved in order to continue to enthuse young people about politics.

Juliet Swan opened by talking about what good democracy looks like. She talked of the support for votes at 16 and that the ERSS had supported the franchise bill and that they more generally support the devolution of the franchise.

Dr Jan Eichorn, University of Edinburgh

Dr Jan Eichorn carried out extensive research into young people and voting attitudes to the referendum. It was a unique set of data which showed their levels of general political interest were very similar to those of adults, their likelihood to vote increased substantially throughout the campaign to unprecedented levels and they mostly had talked to different people about the referendum and sought out information from multiple sources.

Crucially however, young people showed that they made up their minds in more complex ways than we often portray them as doing. Over 40% had a different voting intention than the parent we interviewed, for example. Even more crucially, while those who had talked to parents were more likely to vote in the referendum, they were no more or less likely to have greater self-perceived political confidence or understanding. Parents were not seen as a source of trustworthy political information and young people did not simply follow their views.

Those who had discussed the referendum in school, however, tended to have greater levels of political confidence and understanding. School played a distinctive role.

A lowered voting age itself is not necessarily a key driver to engage young people with representative politics. But through schools there is an opportunity to achieve this our data suggests (and confirms research from Austria where the voting age was lowered to 16 for all elections in 2007). We need more research to analyse how young people engage with normal elections in Scotland as well – however, even in the special case of the referendum we saw a greater number associating themselves again with political parties in 2014 compared to 2013, suggesting that through engaging actively with politics in schools when enfranchised early young people may even see more relevance in political parties again.

Terri Smith, Scottish Youth Parliament

The Scottish Youth Parliament have called on the political leaders of Scotland and the United Kingdom to include lowering the voting age to 16 as part a new devolution settlement for Scotland and the wider United Kingdom.

The Scottish Youth Parliament and partners have campaigned for the voting age to be lowered since the Scottish Parliament was established 15 years ago. The young people of Scotland have proved that they take the right to vote seriously and justify for it to be extended across all UK elections. With over 80% of young people registered to vote, young people have proved that they take the right to vote seriously.

SYP were funded by government to run 'Aye Naw Mibbe' during the referendum, a project designed to help ensure that young people had access to impartial information, such as how to register to vote, and were able to keep up to date with opportunities to engage in the debate with upcoming events.

Terri Smith told the CPG that young voter engagement is the future. Young people struggle though to find relevance with current party politics, referendum was opportunity for that discussion. It was a great success story for youth engagement. But what does meaningful political engagement mean? Young people want to know facts and to be spoken to on their terms, political parties need to target young people for future elections.

Jenny Lees, NUS Scotland

Campaign for positive change, we support the extension of votes @16. The referendum dispelled the myth of young people not being interested in politics, young people though wanted to build on these ideas being talked about. Would have to say that timing of the referendum was not ideal for students and would like to see in future on the day registration being possible. We would like to see electoral law devolved to Holyrood.

Group Discussion

Paul McIlveny, Youth Scotland

Young people felt empowered by decision making process, there is an important role for youth work in continuing this and supporting ongoing work and that general sense of empowerment in young people's lives.

Enable Scotland

On the way forward, peer support workshops in schools, it is intriguing that when teachers are out of the way, young people engage more.

Includem

Issue around those young people who are not in school being excluded.

Haggeye

Need to look to the future as there were accessibility issues for our young people, for example campaign leaflets were not accessible.

Voices against Violence

Continuing political engagement is needed and also making young people more resilient to avoid the disillusionment that may come with not getting the result they hoped for.

Salvation Army

Point made about adults/politicians not answering young people's questions, it can be off putting and politicians really need to think about how they engage, young people do not like being fobbed off, they like direct answers to their direct questions.

General comments around the legacy of the Referendum

- Extend votes for 16 and 17 year olds in all elections
- Devolve election law to Holyrood
- Upskill and inform staff in schools around political engagement
- More targeting of young people and those who are from the most disadvantaged backgrounds
- Need to support teachers and those in informal education, neutral materials, making sure that space to debate this issues is across the board in Scotland so all young people can participate
- Peer education is an important part of continuing that engagement

Actions

The CPG agreed to make a submission to the Smith Commission around the issues raised at today's meeting.

Next meeting is Wednesday 26 November 2014

Please see attached letter to Smith Commission on behalf of the CPG on Children and Young People.