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Information providers / counselling structures

The Office for Civil Society at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS [1]) has general responsibility for raising political awareness and encouraging political participation. As its remit also includes youth policy, there has been a focus on the engagement of young people.

The Education Outreach Team [2] of the Education Service of the UK Parliament runs interactive workshops, covering themes ranging from debating to voting and elections, for students aged 7 to 18, in schools around the UK.

The Electoral Commission [3] is the official regulator of elections. Some of its campaigns, such as promoting eligibility to register to vote, are aimed mainly at young people.

Youth-targeted information campaigns about democratic rights and democratic values

Democratic engagement programmes and resources

The Office for Civil Society runs a democratic engagement programme [4], under which funding was provided in 2014 for the charity UK Youth [5] to develop an online ‘Democracy Challenge’ tool, designed by young people.
Together with its young steering group, UK Youth Voice [6], and in partnership with the Cabinet Office, UK Youth developed a 15-hour group learning programme [7] for youth workers and others to run with young people aged 16 and over. It is aimed at developing young people's understanding of democracy and voting, and increasing their interest through creative, imaginative and meaningful activities. The programme is considered likely to be most effective when used with young people whose engagement with politics and the democratic process is relatively low, but who have some interest in social and community issues and who care about making a positive change in their communities and beyond.

The Cabinet Office (which was responsible for youth policy before the transfer of responsibility to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in July 2016) has a range of other democratic engagement resources for young people, developed in collaboration with a number of national organisations. This includes Rock Enroll! [8], a resource pack containing four 45-minute interactive lessons explaining why young people should register to vote, and with an easy-to-read guide to voting and registering to vote.

UK Parliament Week [9] has been developed by the Houses of Parliament as part of its Outreach and Engagement Service. It is a programme of events and activities and an online conversation to connect people with the UK Parliament. Although the programme is not specifically targeted at young people, there is a section [10] on the website where one can sign up to receive a kit with ideas for schools and youth organisations to get involved in running or attending events.

In the run up to the UK General Election in May 2017, young voters aged between 18 to 24 were able to book a free place on tours of the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. The move aimed to engage young voters with the democratic process and encourage them to register and vote.

In December 2017, the Government launched a five-year, Democratic Engagement Plan [11]. The Plan does make specific provisions to provide youth-targeted information campaigns on democracy. It states the government plan to explore further initiatives and programmes to provide extra-curricular education and resources on democratic engagement, through the Suffrage Centenary Fund. (See ‘Scope and contents [12]’, in the article on ‘National strategy to increase youth participation’).

### Voter registration

Ahead of the UK General Election on 8 June 2017, which was held a little over seven weeks after it was announced, the Electoral Commission [13] ran a public awareness campaign aimed at encouraging anyone not already registered to vote to do so by the deadline. The campaign was targeted specifically at known under-registered groups, including students and 18 to 34 year olds.

In order to avoid message confusion with the local elections taking place Wales, Scotland and some parts of England, the campaign only started two weeks before the registration deadline. The campaign involved tried and tested TV, radio, social media and search advertising in Great Britain and press, outdoor, radio and digital display advertising in Northern Ireland. The new social media advertisements used GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format files) for the first time, which ran at specific points in the campaign reminding people to register as soon as possible in order to meet the deadline.

The third annual National Voter Registration Drive [14] (NVRD) was held over a week in February 2016. This is run by the community interest company Bite the Ballot [15]. Bite the Ballot provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation [16] and works to engage, inform, and inspire citizens aged 16 to 25 to participate in democracy. Activities during the week of the NVRD involved social media and online platform campaigns and holding registration drives in schools, colleges and university campuses nationwide. In the 2017 General Election, Bite the Ballot
relaunched its #TurnUp campaign, collaborating with illustrators and artists to create artwork to be shared as a part of their Twitter campaign, to ensure young people registered to vote. More details can be found on their case studies page.

Additionally, the National Union of Students (NUS) launched their #GenerationVote campaign to encourage students to register and vote in the 2017 General Election by working collaboratively with student unions across the country to promote voter registration drives at universities.

Ahead of the referendum on membership of the EU, nearly 3 million applications (2,920,092) to register to vote were made between 6 May 2016 (the day after the May elections) and 9 June (the extended deadline for registering to vote in the EU Referendum). A quarter of these were received from young people aged under 25. More than half of the total applications were from people aged under 35.

The Electoral Commission used mobile advertising for the first time in 2015 to directly encourage students to register to vote online. Tens of thousands of students with mobile phones on specific networks received SMS/MMS messages with a link to the website they could register to vote on. In addition, the Electoral Commission re-launched a YouTube advert aimed at encouraging young people to vote.

Online registration, introduced in 2014, has made registration easier, simpler and faster and is more in tune with the digital methods many use to interact with services, particularly young people. Since June 2014, more than 5.6 million applications to register to vote were made by people aged 16-24, 4.3 million of these were made online.

Promoting the intercultural dialogue among young people

Primary responsibility for promoting integration and cultural understanding lies with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly known as the Department for Communities and Local Government).

Projects funded by the department which focus on young people include:

- **Anne Frank Trust UK**: an organisation which challenges all forms of prejudice and discrimination among 20,000 young people, and inspires them to become active and responsible members of their community

- **Show Racism the Red Card**: a project to run workshops for 9400 11-to-18-year-olds in schools across England, to deliver a programme of work designed to combat the influence of the far right on young peoples’ attitudes and behaviours.

Further information on the Government’s community integration policy and activities, for the period between 2010 and 2015 is available.

The Integrated Communities Strategy, published in March 2018, by the Secretary of Education, Hinds, and then, Secretary of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Javid, replaces the former integration policy (see above). It attempts to devise a plan to ‘tackle the root causes of poor integration’ in order to create a more integrated and united Britain. The Integrated Communities Strategy green paper announced £50 million will be utilised to:
• support the new Cohesion and Integration Network,

• support new migrants and resident communities to integrate into the community,

• ensure all children and young people are prepared for life in modern Britain,

• increase opportunities for all young people, whatever their background,

• support teachers to promote British values and integration

• mitigate residential segregation,

• increase economic opportunities, in particular, for ethnic minorities and women,

• increase the number of apprenticeships,

• and challenge practices that hinder integration and equal rights.

In July 2018, the new Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, announced a new £7 million ‘Integrated Communities Innovation Fund’, to contribute towards the Integrated Communities Strategy and address the causes of poor integration and support projects that will encourage integration.

Allocation of the funding is yet to be announced.

**Promoting transparent and youth-tailored public communication**

The UK Government operates within a general system of open government, based on the principle that ‘governments and institutions work better for citizens when they are transparent, engaging and accountable.’

Details are in the third UK Open Government National Action Plan, covering the period 2016 to 2018.


In a 2015 report by the House of Commons Commission on Digital Democracy, the key targets and recommendations outlined included: by 2020, the House of Commons should ensure that everyone can understand what it does by using plain English language and the use of more infographics and visual data; Parliament should be fully interactive and digital; and by 2016, all published information and broadcast footage should be available online freely for the public. The targets and recommendations contribute toward creating a more open and transparent government
(note, however, that the action plan is not specific to young people).

The Commission, which is particularly interested in the role of young people in the UK democracy, reported [35] in January 2015. Its recommendations included that the House of Commons should take further steps to improve active involvement by young people, which might include:

- encouraging young people to participate in the e-petitions system
- youth issue-focused debates which involve young people and MPs.

It also recommended that the House of Commons, as part of its professional communications strategy should pilot and test new online activities, working with national and local partners, to target and engage specific groups who are not currently engaged in the democratic process. One of the potential target groups identified was 18- to 25-year-olds not at university.

The Children’s Commissioner [36] for England aims to communicate appropriately:

We always make sure our communication with children and young people is relevant and appropriate. We use methods of communication which children can understand including producing versions of our reports specifically for children and young people.

The Children’s Commissioner also has a young expert group to advise on its communications work.

See ‘Young People’s Participation in Policy-Making [37]’ for transparency in decision-making.