

Votes at 16

"We need a national debate on lowering the voting age to 16. This debate needs to continue until the voting age is finally lowered, because while we deny 16 year olds the franchise, we are denying them a human right.

The time has come to stop this abuse of human rights being practiced in every part of this country.

Fifteen years ago, the UK first ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This gave children the right to have their views given due weight in all matters that affect them.

At 16, a person can leave school, go to work, pay tax and claim benefits.

But at 16 a person does not have a say on workplace legislation, taxation, nor on how our benefits system is structured.

These are matters that affect 16-year-olds, but far from giving them 'due weight', their views are ignored.

The message that we are sending to young people is that we don't care what they think.

In fact, we hardly know they exist until they start hanging around in groups wearing hoodies.

The Prime Minister recently launched his Respect Agenda. I totally support him. But respect should be mutual.

We rarely show respect to young people and yet we are surprised that they behave disrespectfully to us.

It is down to us to rebuild relations, but to do so we must demonstrate our faith and trust in young people.

The best way to do that is to give them responsibilities and, in this case, civic duties.

What better way is there than to give them the vote?

Another common concern is voter turnout.

True, the younger you are the less likely you are to vote.

True, a lower voting age may even decrease overall voter participation.

But the very serious issue of diminishing turnout cannot be addressed by denying younger people the right to vote.

We have to give people a positive reason to participate.

If a young person's 18th birthday happens to fall the day after a General Election, that person will be



knocking 23 before they get another chance to vote in a national election.

No-one is advocating raising the voting age to 23, so why are we so intent on preserving a clearly flawed system?

And for those who oppose lowering the voting age, what is so terrible about a 16-year-old putting a cross on a ballot paper?

In what way would that undermine democracy?

A 16-year old may not make the right decision for the right reason, but democracy isn't perfect and politics is subjective whether you're 16 or 106.

Finally, to all those people who support the current system on the grounds that hardly anywhere else in the world allows its people to vote before they are 18.

Again, this is perfectly true.

But since when was that a good reason not to do the right thing?

The franchise has always been a measure of how civilised a society is.

We led the fight against apartheid. We gave birth to the Suffragettes.

It's time we led the way again. It's time for Votes at 16."