

# vconsultation input

## A response from v to the Youth Citizenship Commission votes at 16 consultation

January 2009

### 1.1 About v

v is the charity launched in May 2006 to champion youth volunteering in England. The charity is responsible for implementing the recommendations set out in the Russell Commission report and accepted in full by the Government. Our key objective is to create a significant and lasting change in the quality, quantity and diversity of youth volunteering.

v was established to build on the excellent work already being undertaken in the youth volunteering sector, both in terms of creating new and additional opportunities, and by extending the reach of existing opportunities to those young people who have not previously volunteered.

#### To date, we have:

- commissioned 875,000 new volunteering opportunities.
- developed and launched the site **vinspired.com**, a one-stop shop web-based portal for young people wanting to access volunteering opportunities.
- launched our youth fund **vcashpoint**, putting funding directly in the hands of young people developing initiatives for community benefit.
- launched the new National Youth Volunteering Programme, **vinvolved**. Through **vinvolved**, we are investing over £75m over three years in:
  - the creation of 107 **vinvolved** teams across every local authority area in England. These teams are hosted by local third-sector organisations and will build networks, promote youth volunteering and broker young people into opportunities
  - Youth Action Teams, groups of young people who will work alongside **vinvolved** teams and be local ambassadors for youth volunteering
  - direct delivery of new youth volunteering opportunities through 158 organisations
  - received pledges of £35 million from the private sector for youth volunteering through the match fund programme
- launched **v talent year** – a new structured full-time volunteering programme with support and training to assist progression into employment, education or training.

## 1.2 Introduction

v welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the work of the Youth Citizenship Commission. v as an organisation does not have a view on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16, instead we are seeking to represent the views of young people that have engaged with us through our website. We have a strong desire to see young people empowered and taking responsibility for decision-making.

We conducted a survey of the v-inspired panel on the issues of lowering the voting age to 16, their feelings towards politics in general and whether young people that volunteer are more likely to vote. The panel is made up of young people aged 16-25 who have registered their interest of volunteering through our website [www.vinspired.com](http://www.vinspired.com).

Our survey did not seek to be representative of all young people, we wanted to reflect the views of the panel members on our website. We received 578 responses between 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Our response focusses on three main questions in the consultation questionnaire:

- Do you think the voting age should be lowered? Why or why not?
- Do you think the voting age should be lowered to 16 in all elections?
- What more can be done to encourage new electors to vote?

### Demographic information

It is worth noting that our panel is largely dominated by females and of people aged 16-18 (54%), this is a typical skew for the youth volunteering market in general.

The majority of respondents are aged 17 (25%). 22% aged 19-21 and 23% aged 22-25. 50% of total respondents are from southern England (24% from London, 17% from the South East and 10% from the South West), 15% from North West England. 68% are at school, college or university, 17% in full-time paid employment and 4% unemployed, looking for work.

Full details of the survey responses are attached in Annex A. Consultation responses and v research can be downloaded from the vinfozone on [www.wearev.com](http://www.wearev.com)

If you have any questions regarding our response, please contact:

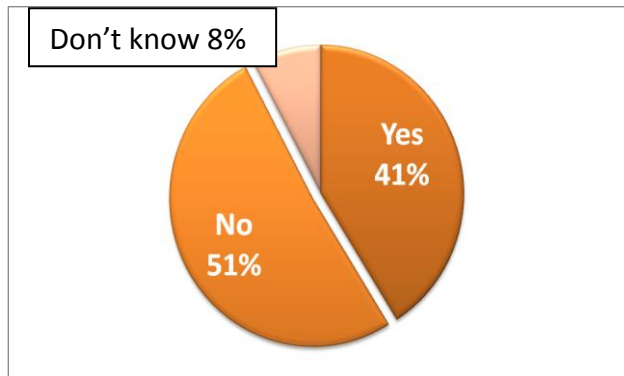
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## 2.1 Consultation question: Do you think the voting age should be lowered?

By a small minority our respondents felt that the voting age should not be lowered.



The top reasons respondents gave for not lowering the voting age:

- I don't think 16 year olds know enough about politics to vote (53%)
- I don't think they have enough life experience to vote (20%)

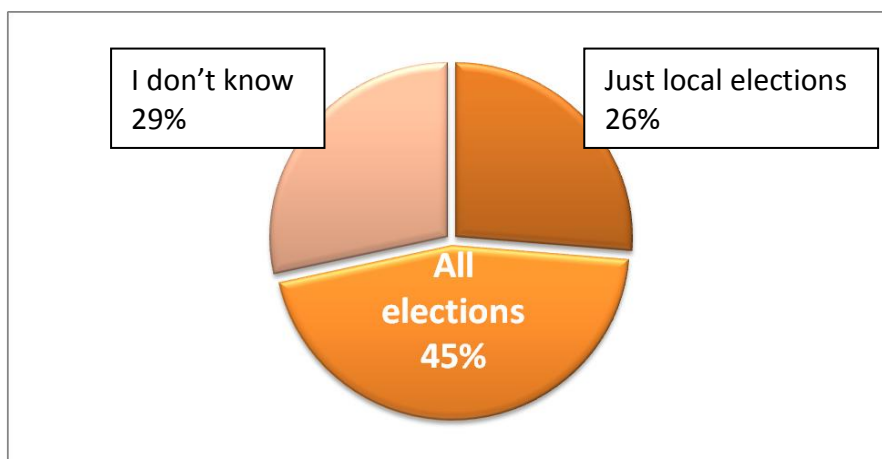
Other reasons were 'I don't think they would bother to vote anyway' (12%) and 'I don't think we can trust their judgement' (8%).

The top reasons respondents gave for lowering the voting age were:

- Everyone deserves the right to shape the future government (27%)
- 16 year olds have valid opinions (23%)

Other reasons were 'If they feel informed enough, why not?' (15%) and 'I think this would encourage them to be interested in politics' (13%).

## 2.2 Consultation question: Do you think the voting age should be lowered for all elections?



Our survey did not ask the reason for the responses.

## **2.3 Consultation questions: What more can be done to encourage new electors to vote?**

The question we asked in our survey was 'What could be done to get more young people to vote?' The top three rated responses were:

1. To offer online voting
2. Just by having more politicians that I can relate to
3. Just by getting a politician that's worth supporting

It is clear from the results of the survey that the way these young people believe that they will be motivated to vote is by making politicians and policies relevant to their lives and to engage them through the communications channels that they use. There are parallels that can be made with the way that v is engaging young people in volunteering – by making it relevant to their lives, by creating opportunities that match their passions and interests and by bringing into play methods of communication which they utilise in their day to day lives.

## **2.4 Other findings from the survey**

### **Volunteering and voting**

As a volunteering organisation we wanted to find out what our panel thought about the relationship between volunteering and voting. Volunteering can often be the first step on a young person's journey to becoming a more aware and engaged citizen. Where young people have never previously been trusted with decision-making, some volunteering opportunities can be transformational, and enable young people, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, to take on genuine responsibility for the first time.

**Survey question: Do you believe that young people that volunteer are more likely to vote than those that don't?**

56% of respondents believe that volunteers are more likely to vote than non-volunteers and this is because volunteers are already showing an interest in improving the community (65%). The second most popular reason was 'because they believe they can make a difference' (23%).

26% of respondents did not believe that volunteers are more likely to vote than non-volunteers. This was mainly because someone that volunteers isn't necessarily interested in politics (56%) and because any person could be interested in politics (39%).

### **Feelings towards politics**

We took to opportunity to ask our panel members about their feelings towards politics in general.

**Survey question: How do you feel about politics?**

The vast majority expressed some level of interest in politics with only 5% not interested at all.

18% were very interested in politics, 33% would like to learn more about politics and 25% would like to be informed but weren't particularly bothered.

Others did not think the government represents their values (9%) and didn't think the public had any control (5%). A smaller percentage think political parties are all the same (3%) and are more interested in taking part in protests than voting (2%).

The responses demonstrate a level of interest in politics for which young people are often not credited. The young people surveyed have a strong desire to find out more about politics and a sense that they do not know enough.

**Survey question: If you were Prime Minister what would be the first thing about the government or the country you would change?**

A vast range of opinions were expressed from this open ended question. The main themes that emerged were education and training, young people, immigration, the environment, the economy and war. The level and range of responses suggests that young people feel passionate about certain issues that they feel are relevant to their lives and to the world in general. Some of the responses have been highlighted in Annex A – the full survey results.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

As stated above, v as an organisation does not have a view on whether the voting age should be lowered. We hope that the views of our online panel will be a helpful contribution to the Commission's thinking on this subject. As well as working to help young people take and lead action in their communities through volunteering, v aims to give young volunteers a voice and to help them find ways to engage with politicians and policy makers on a broad spectrum of issues.