

Austria lowered the voting age for young people like me, and transformed politics. The UK should do the same

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. At what age do you think maturity is reached? Explain your answer.
2. What is the legal age for driving, working, voting and marriage where you live?
3. What are some arguments for and against lowering the voting age?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. Then, complete each example sentence using the same word. You may have to change the form of the word.

burden	curriculum	deem	demonise	Dickensian
drain	engagement	eligible	grant	overwhelmingly
project	stark	threshold	turnout	

1. _____ means *simple, obvious or completely clear*.
This photo captured the _____ contrast between the sandy desertic backdrop and the cactus forest bordering the beach.
2. To _____ is to calculate how much of something is expected in the future.
The global coal demand is _____ to steadily decline in the next decade.
3. To _____ is to officially give someone something.
The organisation has proposed to _____ animals constitutional rights and declare them sentient beings.
4. To _____ is to consider or judge something or someone in a particular way.
The court has _____ the accused mentally unfit to stand trial.
5. _____ is *completely or strongly*.
I'm looking forward to watching her latest film, which received _____ positive reviews.
6. If someone or something is _____, they satisfy the necessary conditions or have the essential qualities.
You might be _____ for financial aid or grant funding.

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7. _____ is the number of people who vote in an election.
A national initiative offers discounts and deals to those who have voted in an attempt to boost _____.
8. _____ is how involved someone is in something.
Civic _____ is vital for community health.
9. A _____ is the programme of subjects studied in a school and what each subject entails.
The new _____ attempts to include several aspects of well-being and personal development in primary schools.
10. To _____ is to reduce.
Not getting enough quality sleep can _____ your energy and is one of the most common causes of fatigue.
11. A _____ is the point at which something starts to happen.
A new study suggests that Neanderthals had a lower pain _____.
12. To _____ is to trouble someone with something difficult or unpleasant.
Parents have complained about the lack of work-life balance and requested that schools not _____ students with homework over the holidays.
13. To _____ is to try and make a thing, person or group of people seem evil.
The company claims that environmentalists are _____ oil and gas.
14. _____ is similar to something described in Charles Dickens's books, especially living or working conditions that are below an acceptable standard.
This novel depicts the childhood of Sophia, an unfortunate young girl living in a(n) _____ boarding school.

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A child in 2020 will see a 400% increase in global heating. An adult over 55 will see none. Yet only one of the two can vote

Beth Riding

29 May, 2024

- 1 I know this country needs a change, so I couldn't help but be disappointed when I saw that the general election is going to be held on the 4 July – just two months shy of my 18th birthday.
- 2 Like many other young people across the country, I feel impotent when watching the actions of this government, knowing that I have no say over the decisions being made. Instead, we're forced to watch older members of the public – especially the oldest, who turn out at the highest rate – cast their vote on what will ultimately impact us the most.
- 3 This is perhaps most stark in the case of global heating. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a person who was a child in 2020 is projected to experience a nearly four-fold increase in extreme events during their lifetime under a 1.5 degrees Celsius increase of global temperature, and a five-fold increase under a 3 degrees Celsius increase, while a person aged 55-plus will not experience any of those changes in their remaining lifetime under any warming scenario. Despite this, 16- and 17-year-olds do not have a say in how the government tackles climate change. Instead, we have to sit back and watch as the UK grants 100 oil and gas production licences for the North Sea, and as Rishi Sunak flies in a jet from Leeds to London, a journey that would only take about two hours by train.
- 4 While 16- to 17-year-olds can't vote, they are, however, deemed mature enough to work, pay taxes and join the army; 17-year-olds can drive a car and donate blood. This is an argument that Keir Starmer made recently: if 16- and 17-year-olds are old enough to contribute to society in these ways, then how is it fair that they aren't able to have a say in how that society is run? His comments suggested that Labour might make extending the vote to younger people part of its election manifesto.
- 5 A voting age of 16 can already be seen in Scotland for local and Scottish parliamentary elections, where the outcome has been overwhelmingly positive. A report led by the University of Edinburgh's School of Social and Political Science found that those who had been able to vote from 16 went to the ballot in greater numbers and were more likely to continue voting as they entered their 20s, compared with those who had been able to vote from 18. Lowering the voting age would drive long-term behaviour – something that is desperately needed when it comes to general elections in the UK, after 32.7 per cent of those eligible did not cast a vote in the 2019 general election.
- 6 Similar results were seen in Austria, the first and still one of the only European countries to have a voting age of 16 in nationwide elections, where political interest among young people aged 16 and 17 increased after they were granted the right to vote, with the turnout of 16- and 17-year-olds exceeding the turnout of older first-time voters by eight to 10 percentage points in some regional elections. Current political science research shows that voting is a habit acquired early on in life and is rarely broken once it has been formed.
- 7 Many young people see politics as boring and corrupt, and therefore waste their vote, meaning that their voice isn't heard. Lowering the voting age to 16 would encourage political engagement, a vital part of democracy. The expression of opinions, particularly by young people who have the power to effect change, is now more essential than ever to ensure that the future of the UK offers everyone equal opportunities and a safe living environment.
- 8 The Conservative Party has consistently failed young people over the course of its 14 years in power, with more than 270,000 children waiting for mental health treatment, an inflexible curriculum that drains the creativity out of children, and tuition fees that have risen from £3,000 to £9,250 per year, while repayment thresholds have been lowered, burdening students with debt and discouraging education.

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9 Yet the Conservatives seemingly continue to demonise our generation, promising to bring back national service, a somewhat Dickensian proposal, to “get young people out of their bubble”, when really all we need is to be treated with respect and allowed an electoral voice. In primary school, we are taught to speak up for ourselves, be curious and make our own decisions. Well, now is the time to practise what you preach and let us have our say.

Beth Riding is an A-level student in Cornwall.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 29/05/2024

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3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if each statement is a Fact, an Opinion, or False according to the article. Fix any false sentences.

1. Observing the government gives me a feeling of helplessness.
2. Younger voters have the highest turnout.
3. In the UK, 17-year-olds can drive cars, donate blood, pay taxes and join the army.
4. Under a 3-degree Celsius increase in global temperature, a person who was a child in 2020 is projected to experience a four-fold increase in extreme events during their lifetime.
5. Lowering the voting age has no impact on long-term voting behaviour.
6. In Austria, 16-year-olds can only vote in local elections.
7. Many young people see politics as boring and corrupt.
8. The Conservative Party has consistently failed young people over its 14 years in power.
9. Tuition fees have risen, and fewer students are expected to repay their debt.
10. Promising to bring back national service is a somewhat Dickensian proposal.

4 Key language

a. Complete the collocations from the text with the verb phrases below.

acquire	be allowed	be deemed	be granted	burden
demonise	drive	effect	lower	tackle

1. _____ climate change
2. _____ mature enough to
3. _____ the right to vote
4. _____ long-term behaviour
5. _____ / break a habit
6. _____ change
7. _____ thresholds

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8. _____ (someone) with debt
9. _____ a generation
10. _____ an electoral voice

b. Use the phrases in your own sentences.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Young people should be allowed to vote on what will ultimately impact them the most.
- If you are old enough to pay taxes and join the army, you're old enough to be granted the right to vote.
- Allowing people to vote earlier will increase public engagement, which will ultimately be great for any country.

6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find information about the legal ages in different countries for the following rights.

- drive
- join the army
- get a loan
- get married
- hold an elected government office
- leave school
- purchase alcohol or cigarettes
- vote
- work

b. Discuss your opinion about the best legal age for each right. Give reasons for your perspective.