

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. At what age do you think most people are mature or adults? Explain your answer.
2. At what age can people legally drive, work, vote and get married where you live?
3. What are some pros and cons of 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      drain      engagement  
exceed      grant      project      stark      threshold      turnout

1. \_\_\_\_\_ means *simple, obvious, or completely clear*.  
*I love the \_\_\_\_\_ contrast between the white walls and the bright colours of the furniture.*
2. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to calculate how much of something is expected in the future.  
*The average number of children per family is \_\_\_\_\_ to continue decreasing.*
3. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to officially give someone something.  
*We really hope that they will \_\_\_\_\_ her a study visa.*
4. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to consider or judge something or someone in a particular way.  
*Experts \_\_\_\_\_ the painting to be a fake.*
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is the number of people who vote in an election.  
*We ran out of canapés shortly after the performance because we hadn't expected such a high \_\_\_\_\_*
6. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to be greater than an amount or number or go past a limit.  
*Our goal was to get 1000 new people to download our app, and this week, new users \_\_\_\_\_ that number.*

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7. \_\_\_\_\_ is how involved someone is in something.  
*There is a strong link between student \_\_\_\_\_ and the learning that students achieve.*
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the programme of subjects studied in a school and what pupils study in each subject.  
*Our biology \_\_\_\_\_ helps students understand the basic building blocks of life.*
9. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to reduce.  
*Long pointless meetings always \_\_\_\_\_ my energy.*
10. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the point at which something starts to happen.  
*I don't pay taxes because my earnings are below the tax \_\_\_\_\_.*
11. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to trouble someone with something difficult or unpleasant.  
*Some people don't want to \_\_\_\_\_ their friends with their problems, but talking about problems can be very therapeutic.*
12. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to try and make a thing, person or group of people seem evil.  
*For a while, the media \_\_\_\_\_ carbohydrates, but many experts argue that we should eat carbohydrates, though in moderation.*

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**Beth Riding**

**29 May, 2024**

- 1 I know this country needs a change, so I was disappointed when I saw that the general election is going to be held on the 4 July, 2024 – just two months from my 18th birthday.
- 2 Like many other young people across the country, I feel helpless when watching this government, knowing that I have no say over their decisions. Instead, we're forced to watch older members of the public 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 in global temperature, 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 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 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 why can't we have a say in how that society is run?
- 5 A voting age of 16 can already be seen in Scotland for local and Scottish parliamentary elections. 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 voted from 18. Lowering the voting age would drive long-term behaviour.
- 6 Similar results were seen in Austria, the first European country 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.
- 7 Many young people see politics as boring and corrupt and, therefore, waste their votes. Lowering the voting age to 16 would encourage political engagement, a vital part of democracy. The expression of opinions, particularly by young people, 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.
- 9 Yet the Conservatives seemingly continue to demonise our generation, promising to bring back national service 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 school, we are taught to speak up for ourselves, be curious and make our own decisions. Well, now is the time to let us have our say.

Beth Riding is an A-level student in Cornwall.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Decide if each statement is true or false. Correct all the false statements to make them true.

1. The writer feels helpless when observing the government's actions.
2. Younger voters have the highest turnout.
3. Only children under two in 2020 are projected to experience a fourfold increase in extreme events during their lifetime.
4. In the UK, 17-year-olds can drive cars, donate blood, pay taxes and join the army.
5. Lowering the voting age does not affect long-term voting behaviour.
6. In Austria, 16-year-olds can only vote in local elections.
7. According to the writer, the Conservative Party has consistently failed young people over its 14 years in power.
8. Tuition fees have increased in the UK, but fewer students have to repay their student loans.

#### 4 Key language

a. Complete the phrases from the text with the verbs below.

be deemed

be granted

burden

demonise

lower

1. \_\_\_\_\_ mature enough to
2. \_\_\_\_\_ the right to vote
3. \_\_\_\_\_ thresholds
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (someone) with debt
5. \_\_\_\_\_ a generation

b. Complete the statements with some of the phrases from task a.

1. In the UK, the DVLA \_\_\_\_\_ driving \_\_\_\_\_.
2. In most countries, 18-year-olds are \_\_\_\_\_ enough to get married.
3. Sometimes the media \_\_\_\_\_ generation Z for seeking work-life balance.

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#### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Young people should be allowed to vote on what will affect them in the future.
- If you are old enough to pay taxes and join the army, you're old enough to vote.
- Allowing people to vote at an earlier age will increase public engagement, which will be great for any country.

#### 6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find information about the different legal ages 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 answers.