

Institute for Public Policy Research



MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**A MANIFESTO
BY YOUNG PEOPLE FROM
YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER**

IPPR and IPPR North

December 2021

ABOUT IPPR AND IPPR NORTH

IPPR North is the dedicated think tank for the north of England, with bases in Manchester and Newcastle.

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the UK's leading progressive think tank. We are an independent charitable organisation with our main office in London.

Our primary purpose is to conduct and promote research into, and the education of the public in, the economic, social and political sciences, science and technology, the voluntary sector and social enterprise, public services, and industry and commerce. Other purposes include to advance physical and mental health, the efficiency of public services and environmental protection or improvement; and to relieve poverty, unemployment, or those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship, or other disadvantage.

E: north@ippr.org
www.ippr.org/north

Registered charity no: 800065 (England and Wales),
SC046557 (Scotland)

This paper was first published in December 2021. © IPPR 2021

The contents and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author only.

The progressive policy think tank

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The recommendations captured in this document were made by a group of ten young people from Yorkshire and the Humber. Additional explanatory content is provided by IPPR's Stephen Frost, Rosie Lockwood and Becca Massey-Chase.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the young people for their insights and engagement with the process. It was a pleasure and a privilege to hear your ideas.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 870996. It is part of 'Reconstructing Democracy in Times of Crisis: A Voter-Centred Perspective', a Horizon 2020 project coordinated by Centre for Political Research at Sciences Po. We are especially grateful to Dan Grecu and Annabelle Lever at Sciences Po for their support and guidance on this project.

IPPR thanks Charlee Bewsher of the Youth Work Unit – Yorkshire and Humber for organising and supporting the participants, and Rebecca Deegan of I Have a Voice for also supporting young people to attend. We're grateful to Alan Smith of Leeds Beckett University for his help and to his youth work students Funmilayo Ayorinde and Kieran Bartley for their excellent support on the day. Many thanks to Leeds Civic Hall and particularly Tom Riordan for hosting us, and to Dr Andy Mycock and Mayor Tracy Brabin for their contributions.

We would also like to thank IPPR colleagues, particularly Aurelia Bergs, Lara Iannelli and Carys Robert. We are grateful to Abi Hynes for her support in designing and publishing this report.



Download

This document is available to download as a free PDF and in other formats at:

<http://www.ippr.org/research/publications/making-democracy-work-for-young-people>

Citation

If you are using this document in your own writing, our preferred citation is:

IPPR and IPPR North (2021) *Making democracy work for young people: A manifesto by young people from Yorkshire and the Humber.*

<http://www.ippr.org/research/publications/making-democracy-work-for-young-people>

Permission to share

This document is published under a creative commons licence:

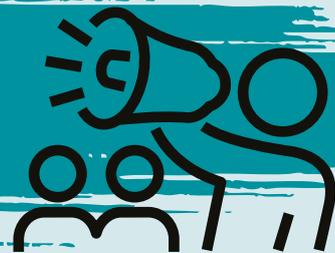
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/>

For commercial use, please contact info@ippr.org



SUMMARY



We brought together 10 young people from across Yorkshire and the Humber to talk about the future of democracy, but what they wanted to talk about most was the action needed by governments today. They wanted to discuss the issues that are important to them – the climate crisis, education, mental health services, housing – and how action on these policy areas can make life better for young people.

From investment in youth services to fairer wages and better housing, they wanted to see things improved for young people. Action on the climate crisis was seen as not only the most pressing issue for their generation, but also as a chance to improve people's lives, through things like better public transport. They saw interconnections between many of the issues they discussed and reacted against what they felt were societal pressures to put things in traditional 'boxes'.

The participants believed that politicians "don't act on what they hear" from young people, and are being taken out of their comfort zone by a tech-savvy generation who want to participate "beyond the ballot box". The young people's message was clear: "We're trying to take part". Empowering them to do so could not only increase the legitimacy of the UK's democracy, it could also have a radical impact on its policy landscape.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

In October 2021, 10 young people aged 13–18 from across Yorkshire and the Humber came together at Leeds Civic Hall to explore their views on democracy, the barriers they face to participating in democracy, and how to boost participation in democracy.

The young people explored what they thought about topics such as votes at 16, compulsory voting, political education, and what difference it would make if more young people were involved in democratic processes and institutions. In groups, they created manifestos for imaginary political parties focused on amplifying the voices of young people in society. They developed their parties' visions, centred on their hopes for the future and the policies and ideas they believe could bring about these visions and increase youth participation in their communities, the North and the UK.

They were supported in their conversations by facilitators from IPPR, the Youth Work Unit – Yorkshire and Humber, and youth work students from Leeds Beckett University. They also heard from and had the opportunity to ask questions of Dr Andy Mycock of the University of Huddersfield, an expert in youth participation, and mayor Tracy Brabin, metro mayor for West Yorkshire.

The following manifesto and policy priorities capture their ideas as faithfully as possible and are accompanied by some additional commentary on the conversations that took place on the day.

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK: A MANIFESTO

A summary of the young people's ideas for increasing youth democratic participation



Significant, long-term investment in youth voice and subsidies for youth participation – to give more young people support in having their voices heard and participating in civic society, for example by providing free transport to enable young people to attend events.



Youth PMQs – regular prime minister's questions should be sourced from young people across the UK, from a wide range of backgrounds.



MPs and councillors to engage with young people, for example it should be mandatory for MPs to visit schools twice a year to share what they've been doing, and the Council should have to meet with their local youth council.



All government departments to engage with young people, for example through youth boards within government departments, whose membership reflects the diversity of young people in the UK.



Youth parliaments and youth combined authorities should have influence in policy making – young people should be provided with opportunities to advise their metro mayor, shape meeting agendas, and deliver projects on behalf of the authority. Youth parliaments should be aligned more closely and have more influence over Westminster.



Regional mayors should be held to account for what they've done for young people, for example through representative youth bodies able to issue a vote of no confidence if they do not see youth interests represented.



Better political education – provide more opportunities for young people to learn about politics and explore and debate ideas, and more opportunities for them to influence the decisions that affect them.



A youth-led curriculum, for example with a national curriculum youth steering group.



Ofsted assess the quality of youth voice in schools – the ideas and knowledge of young people should have a greater role in shaping their education and schools should be held accountable for ensuring this.



UCAS points for voluntary work and participation in democratic processes – encourage young people to get involved in their communities and social issues.



POLICY PRIORITIES

The following policy priorities all came through as particularly important in the young people's discussions.



Tackle the climate crisis and support a Green New Deal.

Reform education and training to better prepare young people to participate in society and develop the skills and knowledge they will need in the future.



Provide long-term guaranteed funding for youth services, and provide more opportunities for young people from different backgrounds.



Improve mental health services and increase investment in early intervention and pastoral care in schools.



Make good housing affordable and available to young people growing up in the region and support green housing bonds.¹

Invest in public transport, as part of reducing carbon emissions and to make it possible for young people to access opportunities.



Create fairer work opportunities and ensure fairer wages for young people. Provide apprenticeships, youth business grants, free training, and more opportunities in poorer areas.



Increase access to green space, especially for people in deprived areas.



Tackle gender-based violence; stop victim-blaming women and focus on the perpetrators.



¹ Green bonds raise funds for projects which deliver environmental benefits.

INSIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

The participants believed that the best way to engage young people and build their confidence in politics is for politicians to show that they care about young people, are tackling the issues that matter to them, and are thinking about how policies will impact upon them. During the workshop, the participants wanted to discuss the issues that were important to them – the climate crisis, mental health services, housing – more than they wanted to discuss the mechanics of democratic reform.

Many participants talked about how tackling the climate crisis should be the most important thing for politicians, not only because it was the most pressing issue for this generation, but because they also saw how action on the climate crisis could create other positive changes.



“When you deal with climate change, you deal with a lot of other issues along the way.”

They wanted to see “investments going into neglected industrial areas, transport and rural areas” and wanted to preserve and create new green spaces as well as reducing carbon emissions.

These young people had many worries about job insecurity and housing insecurity. They also shared significant concerns that politicians were focused on people who vote, to the inevitable exclusion of many young people: “policies are for the adults who vote for them”.

The young people did not feel their priorities were well represented within the current political landscape.

“I could give you a thousand things wrong with most of the parties.”

“Me and my family don’t really vote for a party, we vote against them.”

“Is it worth voting for who I want if they won’t get in?”

“I know what I’d vote for, but not many parties have it on their manifestos.”

In relation to all policy areas, they focused on issues of fairness and talked about wanting to take an “intersectional approach” and bring in different voices. They kept coming back to the idea of resisting putting people or ideas into traditional “boxes”.

“Abolish the societal expectation that puts labels on everything. Humans are complicated, interesting things!”



“You’re left wing or you’re right wing – I’m bored of it... We need to understand each other, listen to peoples’ opinions, try to understand them, and cooperate.”

The group were concerned by poor attitudes towards young people and felt that a light had been shone on this by public and political responses to Covid-19. They felt that the pandemic would have a long-term impact on young peoples’ futures and that “young people have been scapegoated in the pandemic”.

Many felt that they were often forgotten about or dismissed, especially if they presented their views authentically.

“I’m in a residential kids’ home. They won’t listen to us ... A lot of people in care are quite angry and it’s not what politicians want [to hear].”

This group of young people believed politics should be “more valued” and that it is important to be informed. However, they felt that not many people knew very much about politics: “Many people either decide who to vote for at the last minute or before they’ve heard anything”. One participant floated the idea – as a provocation – that voting rights could be capped at 70 years old as “anything they vote for won’t affect them by the time it gets implemented.” Several felt that it was unfair that under-18s were deprived the vote when “loads of adults aren’t politically aware”.

“There are 60-year-olds who don’t have a clue, so why are they listened to when we’re not?”

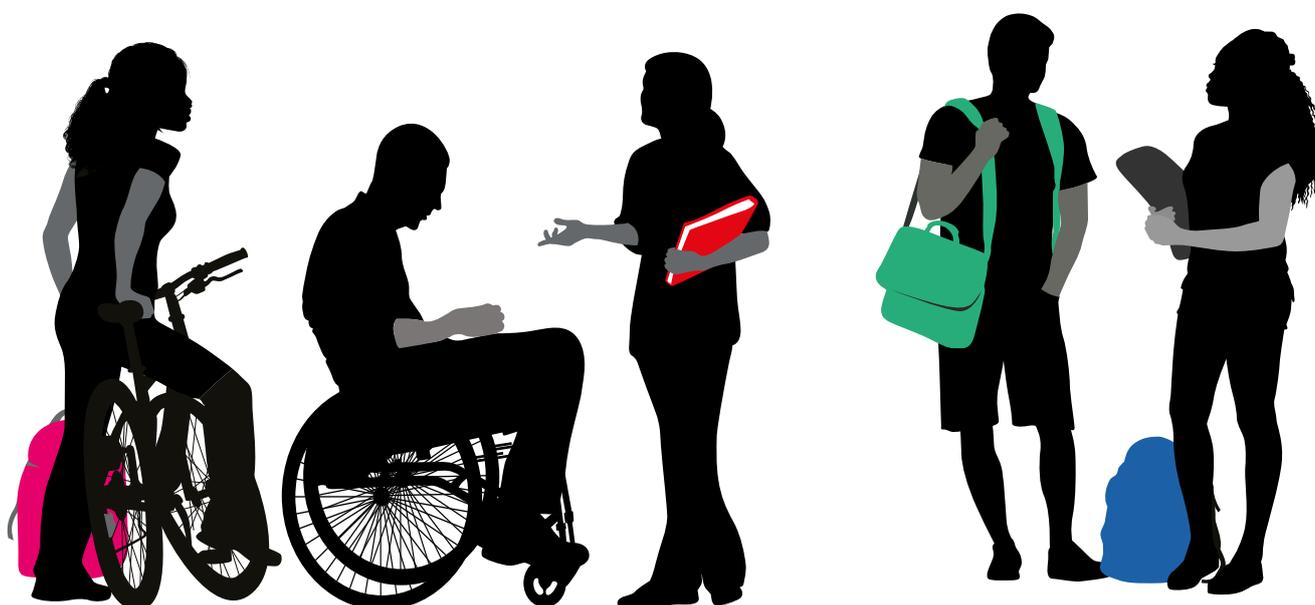


All agreed that everyone should be receiving a better political education and that this was essential to improving democracy. Participants talked about wanting education to focus more on understanding the world and how to make a difference in it, and less on exams. They wanted to see more opportunities for young people to practically engage in civic society and suggested that schools could be reaching out to youth workers to support this. They saw youth services as having a crucial role in providing opportunities for young people from a wide range of backgrounds and felt very strongly that youth work should be more respected and invested in.

They believed that “politicians want to be seen to listen to young people, but they don’t act on what they hear”. They wondered if this was because politicians were not used to how young people want to engage, that they were being taken out of their comfort zone by a generation of young people who want to participate “beyond the ballot box”. The group saw technology as a big part of how young activists communicate and mobilise, and referenced many examples of young people making a difference.

Overall, their message was clear:

“We’re trying to take part.”



GET IN TOUCH

For more information about IPPR North,
please go to www.ippr.org/north

You can also call us on +44 (0)161 694 9680,
e-mail north@ippr.org or tweet us [@ipprnorth](https://twitter.com/ipprnorth)

Institute for Public Policy Research

Registered Charity no. 800065 (England & Wales),
SC046557 (Scotland), Company no, 2292601 (England & Wales)

The progressive policy think tank