Kingsteignton Youth Centre – written evidence (CCE0084)

“If they knew how much we knew, if they knew our vote could help them in their job, then maybe they’d listen to us.”

A. Executive Summary

- Current laws do not encourage political engagement from young people and we should be given our right to vote.

- We believe that being unable to vote signifies to political leaders that we are less deserving of attention, and that our opinions are less important.

- Schools can and should do more, by teaching life skills integrated with political engagement.

- Without change, it will continue to feel as if politics is about us but not for us.

B. Introduction: The Young People of Kingsteignton Youth Centre (KYC)

1. This evidence has been collected from young people, aged 8 to 18, who are members of a community youth group in Devon. Kingsteignton Youth Centre is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Reg. no. 1171416) which runs KYC, a youth club for young people aged from 8 to eighteen years. One of the principal objects of the charity is to provide support and activities for young people, in order to develop their skills, capacities, and capabilities and enable them to participate in society as mature and responsible adults.

2. The young people who make up KYC welcome this opportunity to share their experiences with the House of Lords and highlight their hopes for better engagement between young people and the state.

3. The following evidence focuses on three key issues taken from the Call for Evidence, relating to questions 4, 5 and 9. It was collected and reviewed in August 2017 by the young people with the help of staff and volunteers.

C. Enfranchise Young People (Question 4)

4. Current laws do not encourage political engagement from young people and we should be given our right to vote.

5. Our future is affected by votes from which we are excluded. The recent referendum on membership of the European Union is an excellent illustration of a political decision that affects us all, and which will determine our future but which was made without us. We will deal with the consequences of Brexit, and we were not given a voice.
6. In 2017, YouGov reported that when it comes to voting, “age is the new class”. We believe we are deliberately disenfranchised from the vote in order to affect the result of national and local elections. The vote should be given to people aged 16 and above.

7. We believe that being unable to vote signifies to political leaders that we are less deserving of attention, and that our opinions are less important. More energy would be spent engaging with young people if the voting age is lowered, and young people in turn would feel more invested in civic engagement.

8. We reject the argument that 16 and 17 year olds do not possess the maturity to vote in an informed way.

9. We question whether age signifies maturity, and point to the many significant responsibilities held by people under 18. For instance, young people are allowed and encouraged to join the armed forces, where we train to defend the country. If we can be trusted to defend the country, we should be trusted to have a voice in our elections.

D. The Role of Schools and Education (Question 5)

10. Schools can and should do more, by teaching life skills integrated with political engagement.

11. We want to be taught more of the hard skills we need for adulthood, we want to be taught how to pay our taxes, and where those taxes are spent. We know that our taxes and our parent’s taxes fund politician’s salaries, but we want to learn about how these funds are spent on services that affect us, and how we can influence those spending decisions.

12. We believe that to be better engaged with society, young people need a better understanding of the legal and justice systems that affect us. We should be aware of our rights as well as our responsibilities.

13. We want to learn the know-how we need to be successful adults, including political engagement. Government should invest in educating parents, so they can benefit from these skills and pass them on to us too.

14. “Politics should be part of life skills and all life skills should be compulsory in schools.”

15. We want a better understanding of global politics at an earlier age. We hear a lot about war and conflict between and within countries. We want to know how our defence system works, and what the implications of political choices are on the international stage. We want to better understand the decisions that are being made by adults that will affect our future.

E. Young People are Not Included or Represented (Question 9)

16. It feels like politics is not for us. Although the diversity of Parliament seems to be getting better, it does not mirror society. We feel disconnected from our MP who works with her constituency but not with us, because we can’t vote as young people.
17. “If [MPs] knew how much we knew, if they knew our vote could help them in their job, then maybe they’d listen to us.”

18. There is still a lack of diversity in parliament and we don’t feel represented. To us, being represented means having more women, more young people, and more BAME leaders in Government.

F. References

i “The demographics dividing Britain” 25 April 2017, [Available at: https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/04/25/demographics-dividing-britain]

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