I HAVE A VOICE

POLITICS FOR ALL

Political Literacy Survey Report



2023

www.ihaveavoice.org.uk



Contents

1. Executive Summary - 1
2. Introduction - 3
3. Survey responses - 6
4. Policy analysis - 18
5. References - 24
6. Acknowledgments - 27

Executive Summary

Aims

1. Assess our peers' political literacy.

2. Identify patterns between levels of political literacy and factors such as level of education, type of education institution, geographical location, gender and ethnicity.

3. Investigate what knowledge and skills young people want to gain to increase their political literacy and to feel prepared to participate in our democracy as active and informed citizens.

Insights

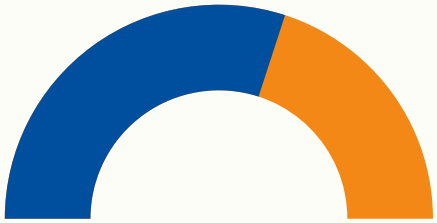


81%

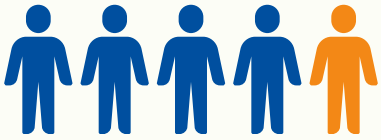
Agreed or strongly agreed they would like to be more politically literate.



Only 1 in 5 (21%) agree with the statement "I have been equipped with the tools and knowledge to be politically literate at school."



2 in 3 respondents agree with the statement, 'I am politically literate'



4/5 of respondents agree with the statement, 'I would like to have been/to be taught the skills and knowledge I need to be politically literate whilst in formal education, before turning 18 '



of respondents think that "there should be student representation on the School's Board of Governors to provide the student voice." '



72%

of students in Further Education said social media was their main source of information.



44%

but only 44% said they knew how to evaluate the source



Respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I am politically literate' were also more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I want to be more politically literate'.

This means that the more politically literate respondents already were, the more politically literate they wanted to be.

Recommendations

1. Breakdown barriers between politics and young people

Every young person should have the opportunity to have a Q&A with their local councillor and MP before they turn 18.

2. Give political education the focus it deserves

Citizenship should be inspected by Ofsted to the same framework as other national curriculum subjects.

We need an increased focus on media and digital literacy to ensure that young people have the skills to evaluate the information they read online.

3. Promote social action

All students should undertake at least one active citizenship project before they leave formal education. This would benefit their community and give them valuable life skills and a sense of agency.

To achieve this the government should utilise youth and community engagement organisations.



Introduction

Politics For All is a youth-led campaign calling on policymakers and the education sector to guarantee that all young people are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in our democracy no matter what their background.

Young people are consistently less likely to vote than older age groups (British Election Study, 2021). It is important to understand and address what is preventing them from voting and taking action. For example, we know that political literacy is important for participation (Weinberg, 2020). Yet in our earlier research (IHAV, 2019), we found that 4 out of 5 (81%) respondents aged 16-19 said voting is important, but 3 out of 5 (60%) said they don't know enough to go and vote. This finding spurred us to conduct further research to look deeper into the relationship between political literacy and engagement.

Therefore to make sure our voices are not lost in conversations about our education, we have surveyed 124 of our peers in schools, universities, and colleges.

This report details our findings. We have surveyed our peers' current levels of political literacy, their desire to increase their political literacy, the quality of political education they have received, where they get their information about political affairs, and differences based on ethnicity, gender, education and location.

We know that our sample size is small, but we hope that our report will attract support to extend our research so that young people like us have a say in their curriculum and how it prepares them to be active citizens for life.

Why does political literacy matter?

Political literacy is the cumulation of knowledge, skills and values necessary for citizens to understand our political system and be able to participate in democratic processes.

These include, but are not limited to:

- An understanding of how government works;
- Adequate knowledge of the key issues affecting society and the role of politics in tackling those challenges;
- How to critically evaluate political decisions made by those in local and national government; and
- The mindset and skills to evaluate different points of view and be able to discern fact from opinion and falsehoods.

We are concerned that we are not being equipped with these basic skills and levels of knowledge and that this is contributing to low participation and trust amongst our peers. Onward's 2022 survey of 8,000 young people found that we are less favourable of democracy and more favourable of putting someone strong in charge who can ignore the system more than any other age group. We don't blame our peers for wanting to turn their back on democracy when the system has created several barriers to them from participating. But we do think that politics is for everyone and those barriers should be addressed.

Barriers between politics and young people:

- The introduction of photo ID.
- The loss of the right to protest through the introduction of The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, 2022.
- Policies that disproportionately affect young people. For example, rising tuition fees, housing prices, unemployment and climate change.

Respondents

124

We surveyed 124 young people. We promoted the survey on social media, in our education institutes and by in-person canvassing.



Respondents ranged from from Y7 to university.



We surveyed people across the country. Of those who disclosed their location, 49% were from outside London and 34% from London.



50% respondents identify as female, 9% male, 3% non-binary, 2% other. The remainder preferred not to disclose their gender.



52% respondents identified as White, 15% as Black, 9% as Asian, 6% as Mixed-ethnicity, and 3% as Other. The remainder did not disclose their ethnicity.



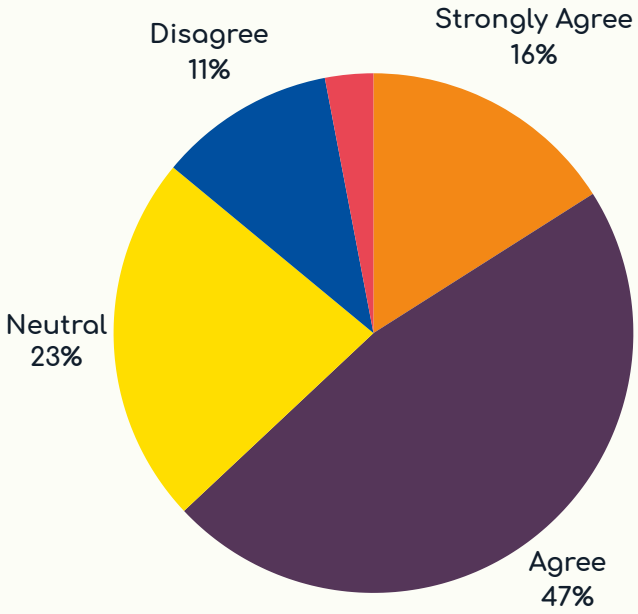
73% of respondents came from a state-educated background compared to 6% of respondents that were from private schools



Political Literacy Survey Results

Question 1

To what extent do you agree with this statement "I am politically literate."



Overall 2 in 3 (64%) of respondents stated that they are politically literate. 1 in 4 (23%) felt neutral, 14% do not feel politically literate.

Results by Demographic:



Male respondents were 16% more likely to 'strongly' agree they were politically literate than female respondents.



We had a small non-binary sample size, but 100% of respondents agreed they were politically literate.



Mixed ethnicity students were most likely to strongly agree, White students were mostly likely to agree, and Black and Asian students were most likely to be neutral.



Privately educated students reported a 15% higher subjective rate of political literacy than state-educated students.

Question 2

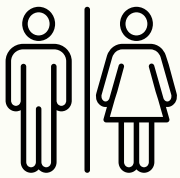
To what extent do you agree with this statement "I would like to be more politically literate."



81%

Overall, 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' they would like to be more politically literate.

Results by Demographic:



Female respondents were marginally more likely to agree with the statement than male respondents by 4%.



63% of respondents in Years 7-9 agreed with the statement. As the youngest cohort of respondents, this could reflect that they've had the least political education - we think this is the case given responses to question three below. This is compared to 20% of respondents in FE and 8% in HE.



Twice as many respondents in London (18) strongly agreed with the statement compared to respondents outside the 'London Bubble' (9).



Across all ethnic groups, there was a strong desire to increase political literacy. Mixed-ethnicity students were the most likely to strongly agree with the statement with over 50%. White and Asian students were closely behind with 46% and 45% strongly agreeing with the statement.



State school respondents showed a stronger desire to be more politically literate, over 82% of state school respondents agreed with the statement compared to 50% of privately educated respondents.

Question 3

To what extent do you agree with this statement "I have been equipped with the tools and knowledge to be politically literate at school."



Only 1 in 5 (21%) said yes.

Results by Demographic:



Levels of disagreement were equal between male and female respondents- 60% of both male and female respondents either disagreed with the statement.



0% of respondents in Years 7-9 and 10-11 strongly agreed with the statement and only 18% of respondents in Years 10-11 agreed. This increases slightly in sixth-form students to 20% and decreases in university-aged students (13%). Across all age groups there is a lack of agreement with the statement.



74% of Black students and 64% of Asian students disagreed or strongly disagreed compared to 55% of White Students.



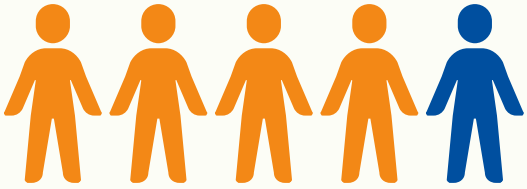
Only 22% of respondents outside of the London bubble agreed with the statement compared to 38% that strongly disagreed. This was only marginally better amongst respondents inside the London bubble with 17% agreeing with the statement and 35% disagreeing.



65% of those from state schools surveyed disagreed that they weren't given tools to be politically literate at school, compared to 25% of respondents from private schools.

Question 4

To what extent do you agree with the following statement "I would like to have been / to be taught the skills and knowledge I need to be politically literate whilst in formal education, before turning 18."

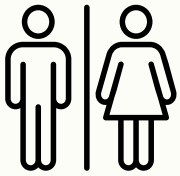


4/5 of respondents agreed.

Results by Demographic:



60% of respondents in both sixth-form and university agreed with the statement suggesting a clear desire for more political education.



This is also reflected in gender. 43% of female respondents agreed with the statement, a higher rate compared to 25% of male respondents. Only 4% of female respondents and only 5% of male respondents disagreed with the statement



State-educated students expressed a greater desire to have been taught the skills needed to be politically educated in school before turning 18. 82% of state-educated respondents agreed with statement compared to 63% of privately-educated respondents.



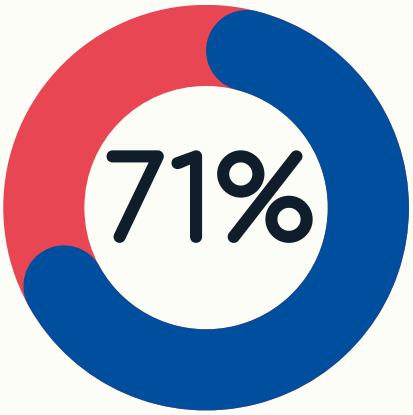
91% of Asian students agreed with the statement, the highest proportion of respondents in terms of ethnicity. This is followed by 88% of White respondents, 69% of Black respondents, 63% of Mixed students and 50% of Other.



Respondents outside of the London (89%) were 13% more likely to agree with the statement compared to those within the London bubble.

Question 5

Do you think there should be student representation on the School's Board of Governors to provide the student voice?



Overall 71% of respondents agreed with the statement

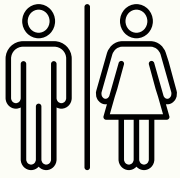
Results by Demographic:



Sixth form students were the most likely to agree (68%). This is closely followed by students in Years 7-9 (63%).



There was a strong indication that respondents from ethnic minorities didn't feel that there was adequate student representation. 84% of Black students agreed with the statement the highest response rate amongst all ethnic groups surveyed. 82% of Asian students agreed, 63% amongst Mixed students and 75% of those that identified as Other. This was compared to 42% of white respondents that agreed with the statement.



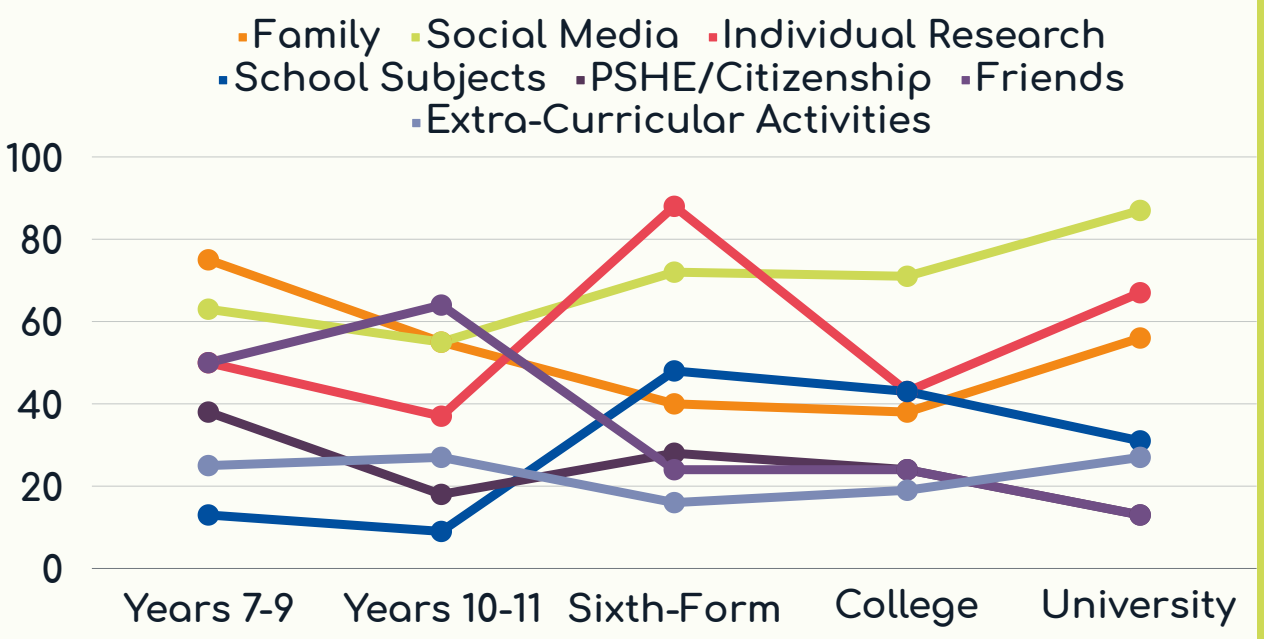
There was little difference in response rate between genders. Male students reported a marginally higher rate of 73% compared to 72% of female respondents and 75% of non-binary respondents.



86% of respondents outside the 'London Bubble' either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement compared to 74% of those inside.

Question 6

Where do you get information about politics / political affairs?



Results by Demographic

The use of social media increases for older respondents - reaching 87% for university students.

Once young people leave secondary education, social media and individual research become the most popular sources of information. This suggests that as respondents increase their level of education, they look outside of the curriculum for sources of political information.

Over 75% of respondents in secondary education list family as a source of information. This drops dramatically to around 40% for those in Further Education before increasing slightly to 56% of those in Higher Education.



Friends remain a fairly consistent source of information for around 1 in 4 young people across all age groups.

Question 7

Could you explain these terms, or how to do these tasks to someone doesn't know anything about politics?

We provided respondents with a list of terms and asked them to select which they would be able to explain to someone else.

Most Popular Responses Included:



67% felt they could explain how to form their own opinion and debate it.



61% of all respondents felt they could explain the role of UK political parties.



44% felt they could explain the role of an MP and local council.



29% felt that they could explain the role of the devolved governments.

Results by Demographic



Overall, as the age of respondents increases so does the number of terms they are able to explain.



There is little variation between male and female respondents. On average, both were able to explain at least 6 terms.



Overall, white respondents were able to explain more terms than any other ethnic group surveyed.



Asian students were the least likely to explain how to register to vote. Only 9% of Asian students could explain how to register to vote, compared to 71% of White students, 52% of Black students, and 63% of mixed-ethnicity students.

Question 8

What would you like to know more about to increase your political literacy?

We provided respondents with a list of political concepts and asked them to select those they would like to know more about to increase their political literacy.

Most Popular Responses Included:



The role of the devolved governments: 43%



The UK voting system and alternative voting systems: 33%



How to critically evaluate a source: 31%



The role of an MP and local council: 30%

Overall trends



Overall, as the age of respondents increases, the number of concepts they wish to know more about genrally remains the same. Respondents in univeristy listed the most terms they wished to know more about.



In terms of the most popular responses, Asian respondents were the most likely to choose these options (62%) followed by Mixed respondents (44%), White respondents (36%) Black (31%) and Other (6%)



Overall, as the age of respondents increases so does the number of terms they are able to explain.



Overall, there was little difference 38% of respondents within London chose these options compared to 39% of those outisde of london

Question 7 and 8

	% of respondents state the can explain these terms	of respondents who want to know more about these terms
How to register to vote	55	23
How to find accurate and credible information	42	31
How to form your own opinion and debate it	59	23
How to critically evaluate a source	40	31
The role of an MP and local council	40	31
How to contact your MP and local council	44	29
Who your local MP is	52	17
The role of parliament	51	28
The role of the Prime Minister and cabinet members	45	25
The UK voting system and alternative voting systems	41	34
The role of the devolved governments	18	44
UK political parties	52	24

Insights

Overall only 50-60% of young people said that they could explain the terms we included in our survey with 20-30% of respondents wanting to know more. This suggests there is an appetite for more political education and a decent foundation to build on

This reduced to 1 in 5 who could explain devolved governments. This is likely reflective of the majority of respondents being from England. Again, there is the appetite to know more.

These results show that young people are more likely to say that they have some of the core skills associated with political literacy, such as forming and debating their opinion and knowing how to register to vote, compared with having knowledge of political processes.

Question 9

Which of the following do you think would be a good way to increase political literacy?



66% - A basic level of compulsory political education, through PSHE or Citizenship

55% - Integration of political literacy in related subjects

54% - Optional Politics GCSE

44% - Extra-curricular activities

Demographic Insights



An optional Politics GCSE is the most popular option chosen by respondents in Years 7-9 and Years 10-11, where most secondary school pupils will be considering their subjects for upcoming exams. More than 88% of respondents in Years 7-9 and 63% in Years 10-11 chose this option.

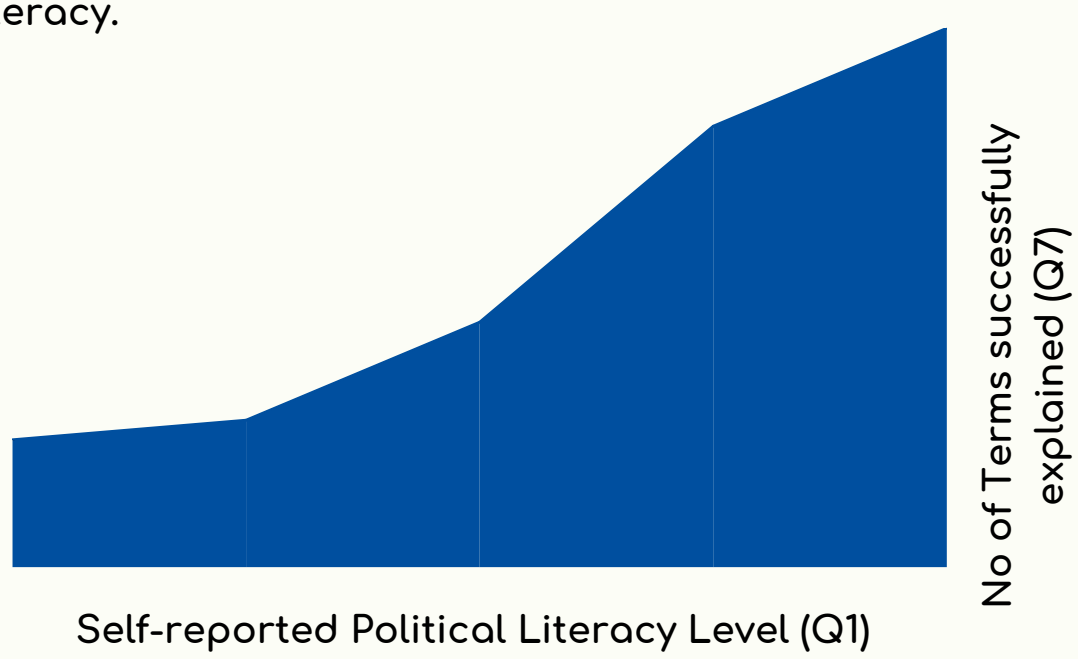
A basic level of compulsory education is more popular among students in Further (84%) and Higher Education (82%).

These suggest that students about to start their GCSEs would like to have politics as an option, but those who have left secondary education are more likely to place importance on everyone having a basic level of political education.

Additional Trends

1. Determing Subjective Political Literacy

The following results used Q1 & Q7 to determine whether respondents who described themselves as politically literate could explain several political terms and processes when asked as a means of determining levels of political literacy.



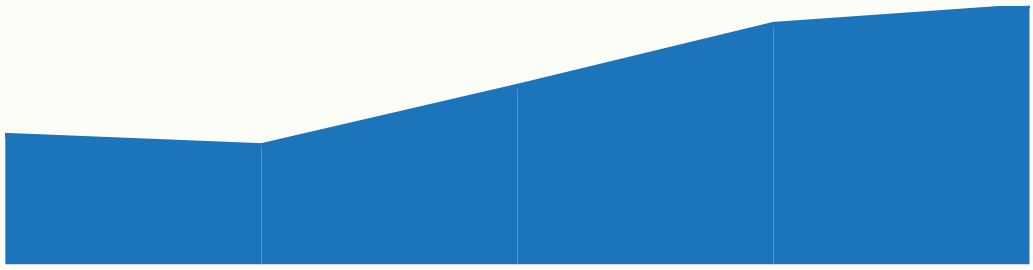
Respondent's subjective political literacy levels positively correlated with the number of terms they said that they could explain. We did not test this, and so these results are reliant on trust.

Demographic Insights

Despite reporting similar rates of self-assessed political literacy, male respondents could explain an average of one term less than female respondents, at 5.6 compared to 6.4.

2. Existing and Desired Political Literacy

In order to investigate if there was any correlation between levels of existing and desired political literacy amongst respondents, we combined responses to Q1 and Q2.



Desire to Increase Literacy (Q2)

Described Level of Political Literacy Level (Q1)

We found that respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I am politically literate' were also more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I want to be more politically literate'. This means that the more politically literate respondents already were, the more politically literate they wanted to be.

Whereas respondents that did not describe themselves as politically literate expressed a greater hesitancy in wanting to be more politically literate.

This suggests that:

1.) There are clear barriers that prevent those who do not desribe themselves as political literate to want to become more politically literate. These need to be confronted in order to increase levels of political literacy amongst young people

2.) Better political literacy fosters more enthusiasm for the political process. Once young people are engaged in political literacy they are keen to know more about politics.

I HAVE A VOICE



Political Literacy Survey Analysis

Policy Analysis

This survey does not sit in isolation, there are a number of initiatives seeking to improve political education and promote political literacy. We have analysed our findings within this wider context.

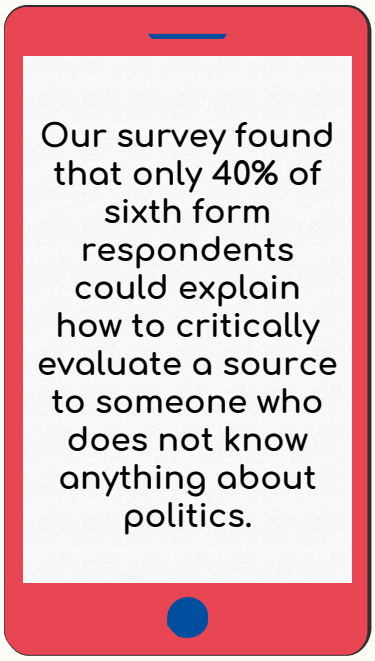
Improve digital literacy

We believe that digital literacy is essential to young people's engagement with politics.

Current government policy towards digital literacy is outlined in the Online Media Strategy issued by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS).

The strategy's 22/23 Action Plan outlines that there is little consensus on the most effective ways to tackle misinformation. The Action Plan also expresses concerns over the resilience in audiences to question information presented to them on social media .

Digital literacy is integral to ensuring young people are able to critically analyse the sources of information they consume on politics and political affairs.



While 80% of our respondents at university said that social media was a source of information on politics and political affairs only 67% said that they knew how to critically evaluate a source of information and 72% of students in Further Education said social media was their main source of information, but only 44% said they knew how to evaluate the source. This raises questions surrounding whether young people are being provided with adequate digital literacy skills.

We need an increased focus on digital literacy to ensure that young people have the skills to evaluate the information they read online.

Increase the importance of teaching Citizenship

There are lots of dedicated Citizenship Teachers, but too few students have access to quality political education (Weinberg, 2021). Citizenship is one of the only subjects that does not attract a teacher training bursary despite there being a very real shortage of subject specialists in schools; and there is no investment in support for existing teachers to develop Citizenship subject specialist knowledge through CPD as it is not currently included in any of the DFE subject knowledge enhancement programmes that invest in building subject expertise.

In 2018, an inquiry by the House of Lords Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement examined citizenship and civic engagement in the UK, considering issues including citizenship teaching in England, democratic engagement and participation in civic society. The Committee made several recommendations including that there should be at least one trained citizenship specialist within every secondary school (House of Lords, 2018)

The Committee also called on the government to address discrepancies in the way Ofsted inspects citizenship teaching in schools. The Association of Citizenship Teachers reports that "Ofsted have rarely commented on Citizenship in school inspection reports and fail to report on non-compliance with the statutory National Curriculum in maintained schools" (Association of Citizenship Teachers, 2021).

To improve the teaching/provision of Citizenship, we support calls for Citizenship to be inspected to the same framework as other national curriculum subjects. The differences between the Quality of Education inspection criteria and the Personal Development criteria are stark. As Citizenship falls under the Personal Development framework, it fails to assess knowledge. This creates challenges when determining levels of political literacy.



Involve the community and take social action

In order for young people to engage with politics and to boost civic engagement politicians need to play their part and be a visible part of their community. That's why we're calling for MPs and councilors to commit to regular school visits in their constituency and ward so that everyone has the opportunity to have a Q&A with their local councillor and MP before they turn 18.

The GCSE in Citizenship has an 'Active Citizenship component. It requires students to take citizenship action in a real out-of-classroom context. This allows students to apply citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills, as well as gaining insights and appreciation of different perspectives on how we live together and make decisions in society. It requires students to practise a range of skills including research and critical analysis, interpretation of evidence, collaboration, problem-solving, advocacy, campaigning and evaluation.

This experience should not be limited to those who opt to take a GCSE in Citizenship. All students should undertake at least one active citizenship project before they leave formal education. This would benefit their community and they would benefit from having these life skills and the resulting sense of agency.

The National Citizen Service (NCS) is proving successful in its aim to help 16-17 year-olds develop 'the skills needed to be active and engaged citizens, mix with people from different backgrounds and start getting involved in their communities'. We welcome the Select Committee's calls for the expansion of the scheme to cover key stages 3 and 4 (11-18 year olds). Our survey reflects that this age group is keen to improve their political literacy and increase their civic engagement.

The NCS is one of many organisations working hard to provide political education and community involvement opportunities to young people. We are calling on the government to utilise youth and community engagement organisations to ensure that all students are able to take part in at least one active citizenship project before they leave formal education.

Conclusion

This report aims to build on our understanding of young people's political literacy levels and how well their educational institutions provide the tools and knowledge needed to be politically literate.

Our findings demonstrate that regardless of age, type of institution, gender, ethnicity and level of education, there is a strong desire to be more politically literate among young people.

A large proportion of respondents reported not being equipped with political literacy tools in schools, being more likely to rely on social media, family, or individual research for information. Differences by ethnicity and institute type suggest experiences of political education vary, and young people are e

We are calling on the government to take political education seriously. The disparities in this report highlight the need for more robust measures for political literacy education to address political inequality. All young people should have the opportunity to participate in democracy and political literacy should not be a barrier to do so.

References

British Election Study (2021), 'Age and voting behaviour at the 2019 General Election'. Available online: https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/age-and-voting-behaviour-at-the-2019-general-election/ [accessed 4th May 2023]

DCMS (2022), 'Year 2 Online Media Literacy Action Plan (2022/23)', Policy Paper'. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/year-2-online-media-literacy-action-plan-202223 [accessed 5th May 2023]

IHAV and 89 Initiative (2022) 'Capturing Political Literacy? Towards a nationwide measure in the UK' Available online: https://www.ihaveavoice.org.uk/_files/ugd/477712_237e24d724b14216976a2fbc975a3ac1.pdf [accessed 5th May 2023]

Jerome, L. et.al, (2022) 'Citizenship education in the United Kingdon: Comparing England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales', Journal of Social Science Education 21 (4)

Khullar, I. (2022) Combatting the privilege of attending elite institutions, LSE Business Review, Available online: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2022/04/07/combatting-the-privilege-of-attending-elite-institutions/> [accessed 4th May 2023]

NCS (2023), 'The NCS Delivery Network', Available online: https://wearencs.com/what-is-ncs [accessed 5th September 2023]

Ofsted, (2022). Education Inspection Framework, GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework> [accessed 29th April 2023]

Onward (2022). https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/kids-arent-alright-democracy.pdf [accessed 4th May 2023]

References (cont.)

Onward (2022). https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/kids-arent-alright-democracy.pdf [accessed 4th May 2023]

Sutton Trust (2019). Elitist Britain 2019: The educational backgrounds of Britain's leading people, Social Mobility Commission, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/811045/Elitist_Britain_2019.pdf> [accessed 4th May 2023]

UK Parliamentary Bills (2023) Online Safety Bill. Available at: https:// bills.parliament.uk/ bills/3137 [accessed 4th May 2023]

UK Parliament Citizenship Civic Engagement Select Committee (2018) 'Citizenship and Civic Engagement Select Com- mittee Report of Session 2017-2019. The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century' Volume 1. Report, p. 118.

Weinberg, J. (2019). Who's listening to whom? The UK House of Lords and evidence-based policy-making on Citizenship education, Journal of Education Policy.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Politics for All campaign group for creating and distributing the survey and everyone who took the time to respond.

Findings of the report were analysed and summarised by Charlotte Burchill and Maya Carter.



I have a voice (IHAV) is a social enterprise that equips people with the tools and confidence to engage with politics on the issues that matter to them and their community. We are non-partisan and our political literacy programmes show young people how they can engage with parliamentary mechanisms and democratic processes to get their voices heard.

By making democratic processes accessible we enthuse young people to become active citizens and to pursue careers related to the policy-making process. Careers that develop and inform public policy will remain important in our future economy - policymakers, informers, and influencers are pivotal for preparing the UK to thrive in a future digital and green economy.

www.ihaveavoice.org
rebecca@ihaveavoice.org.uk