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The
Electoral
Commission



Democracy

**Activities for youth groups in
England**

**Co-created with the Northern
Ireland Youth Forum**



electoralcommission.org.uk/learning

**YOUR VOTE MATTERS
DON'T LOSE IT**



01.

Introduction and foreword

The Electoral Commission works with their youth voice network across the UK to create democracy education resources for young people, by young people.

Thank you to the young people at the Northern Ireland Youth Forum for designing this activity booklet for young people in Northern Ireland and for allowing it to be adapted for use in other parts of the UK.

Hi, I'm Aoife. I am a member of the Youth Engagement Panel, a group facilitated by the Northern Ireland Youth Forum in partnership with the Electoral Commission.

14 of us aged between 14 and 18 from all across Northern Ireland have worked hard to create this resource booklet, which has been a long but rewarding process.

We hope young people use this resource booklet and that it creates understanding and awareness of:

- political education
- what democracy is
- voting systems

Our Youth Engagement Panel think political education is really important for young people and we hope that this resource starts a conversation and encourages social change.

**Aoife Murphy, on behalf of the Youth Engagement Panel
at the Northern Ireland Youth Forum.**



02.

Facilitator Guide

Throughout this resource there are a range of activities to facilitate or take part in.

These can be done anywhere there are young people, such as youth clubs and schools. We have provided some instructions and tips on how to do this. At the back of the resource, you will find the answers to the written activities to help ensure you're on the right track.

You will also find reflection prompts for each activity. These are there to help unpack activities and further explore the learning from it. These prompts may encourage conversation around differences of opinions, personal challenges in doing activities and exploring definitions and meanings.

There is also a glossary towards the back of the resource to help

support learning and to explain some of the big and complicated words used when talking about the topic.

Some words or phrases will have acronyms after them as the acronyms may be more commonly used without many people knowing what it means. We have used this as an opportunity to hopefully give more understanding to these terms.

We encourage you to embrace learning, promote sharing your opinions and our Youth Engagement Panel think it is super important to create a safe and non-judgmental space to have these conversations and complete the activities.

Most of all, have fun!



03.

Group Agreement

To create a safe, comfortable and non-judgmental environment we suggest everyone works together to complete a group agreement.

As a full group, come up with words or phrases that will help with everyone's participation throughout this process. It is important that everyone agrees with the topic being discussed and has their views and feelings heard. Write these down around the cloud so that everyone can see. It is sometimes good to go back to your group agreement as a reminder in sessions or activities.

Group Agreement



Reflection prompts:

- Did everyone have a chance to speak?
- Did you explore what challenges could come up?
- Was everyone in agreement?
- Do you feel that this will help with differences of opinions and respecting each other's views?



04.

Walking Debate

With the participants standing in the middle of a space – select one side of the room to stand for agree and the other as disagree.

Use the statements below to encourage conversation and introduce the theme of democracy. When participants have decided on agree or disagree get them to walk to the side of the room that matches their decision, it's ok to be in the middle!

Use these statements in a particular order to create a comfortable and fun environment before using the more thought-provoking statements.

- Pineapple belongs on pizza
- Vanilla is the best ice-cream flavour
- 'Elf' is the best Christmas film
- The book is always better than the film
- McDonald's is overrated
- I care about my community
- I make a difference in my community
- I make a difference to the place I live
- I have the opportunity to create change
- Politics is complicated
- I enjoy knowing more about how society works
- Young people's views, opinions and thoughts on issues that impact them matter
- Young people should be able to elect representatives
- Young people should be able to meet with decision makers
- Politicians and decision makers don't value young people's views



Reflection prompts:

- How did it feel when people disagreed with you?
- Did it get challenging to have different opinions?
- Did you get the opportunity to have your voice heard?
- Did everyone get a chance to speak?



05.

Democracy Word Dump

When you think of the word 'democracy', what thoughts come to mind? Write or draw these around the cloud and then come up with a group definition for the word 'democracy'.

Democracy

Our definition of democracy:

Reflection prompts:

- How did it feel thinking about democracy?
- Was it challenging to think of what it means?
- Has your opinion changed?
- Was it easy to come up with a definition that everyone agrees with?



06.

Democracy Definition

Here's a definition of democracy. How does it compare to yours?

Use the two definitions to help you answer the quiz on the next page

What is democracy?

Democracy means 'rule by the people'. In a democracy, like the United Kingdom, the people vote in politicians at election times. These politicians make up government who make decisions on how the country is run.

There are two main forms of democracy:

Direct Democracy: all voters come together in one place to make laws and decisions. Often there are too many people for a direct democracy to work.

Representative Democracy: the people elect representatives, or other people, to speak for them. The elected representatives make the laws and decisions.



07.

Yes/ No Quiz

- Read the below statements and decide whether they are democratic or not. Use 'yes' for democratic and 'no' for not democratic.
 - See activity answers at the back of this booklet.
1. There is a group vote to decide what type of food to order
 2. Someone is picked for a leadership role within a school with no election
 3. Your youth space is getting painted and all members vote on what colour
 4. The opening times of your local sports centre are changing and regular users haven't been asked for their thoughts
 5. You go to see a film at the cinema with five other friends. Four of your friends wanted to see this film. You and one other friend wanted to see something else
 6. You have a vote in school to ask if pupils want to change the school uniform



Reflection prompts:

- How did you feel about answering the questions?
- How many did you answer correctly?
- Did it make you think about anything else, such as your society or your community?



08.

Democracy Definition 2

In groups, talk about the pros and cons of a democratic society. There's space below to write your thoughts. Sometimes things can be pros as well as cons, there is space to write these too. Think about the impact this could have in different places such as in a school, a sports team or in your community.

Pros

Cons

Both Pros and Cons



Reflection prompts:

- How did you find thinking of pros and cons?
- Did your group agree on everything?
- When something is both a pro and con, can this be a good thing?

We hope you have learnt more about democracy and what it looks like in society. We would love for you to continue the conversation with your friends, in school or with people at home.



09.

How does UK Parliament work?

Different governments around the world make decisions in different ways.

Now let's test your knowledge of UK Parliament by filling in the blanks. Check out how you did with the answers at the back.

1. The two chambers in UK Parliament are the House of _____ and the House of _____.
2. The voting system used to elect Members of Parliament (MPs) is called _____.
3. There are _____ MPs from different political parties who are elected to represent the people.
4. MPs have power to make and change _____ on issues for England and some issues for the whole of the UK.
5. When a law is being created, it's first called a _____ then an _____.
6. People often refer to Parliament buildings as _____.



Top tip

You can find a lot of this information online at:

- electoralcommission.org.uk/learning



10.

Word Connection

Using these words to have a think or discussion with your group:

- Do you see them on social media or the news?
- How many words do you recognise?
- Do you hear them often in conversations?

Westminster
Transport
Defence
Power
Civil rights
Foreign affairs
Council
Minister

MPs
Mandatory
Tax
Agriculture
Environment
Devolution
Public service
Prime Minister

**Reflection prompts:**

- Were you able to fill in the blanks on page 9?
- Do you feel you understand the words in the list?
- Is there a common place where you have heard about or learned these words?



11.

Matchy Matchy: Who makes decisions in England?

Can you match the decision-making role to its responsibilities?

Draw a line to match the answers.

Roles

Ministers

MPs

Councillors

Responsibilities

Make decisions on local issues like when bins get emptied, when parks are open and providing community support.

Lead decision making on policing, housing, education and the environment.

Work in the UK Parliament to represent people across the UK.



Reflection prompts:

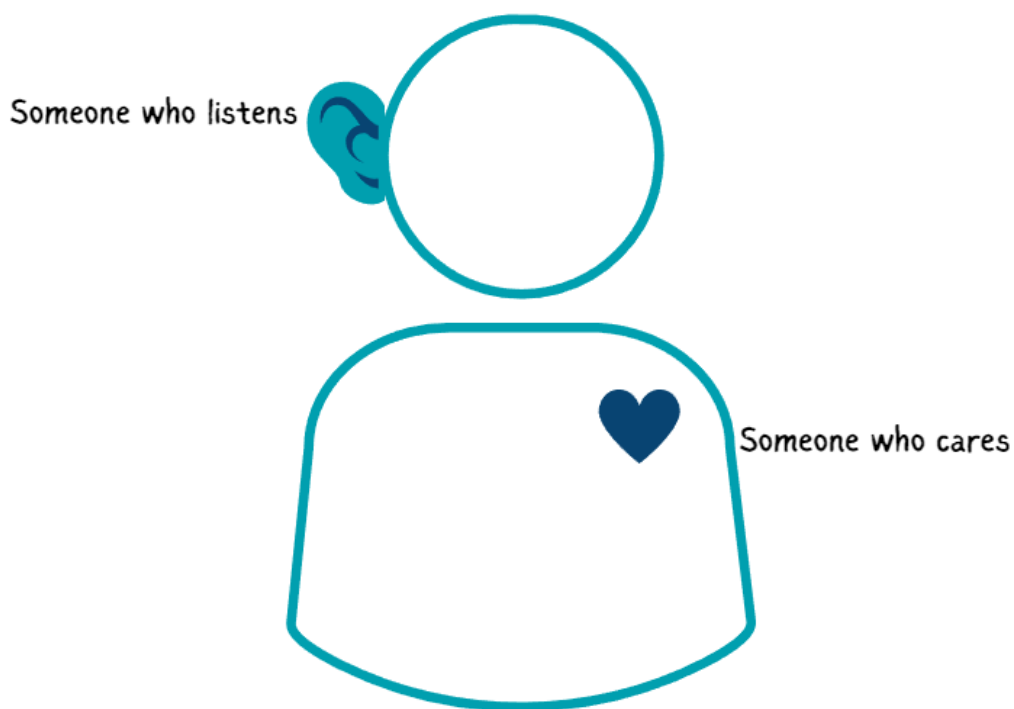
- Were you able to work out what role holds the responsibilities?
- Was it clear what is different in the roles?
- Do you feel more aware of what roles are held?



12.

My Ideal Decision Maker

There may be certain things you hope for in a decision-maker or politician. Use the image below to draw or list qualities or skills you think they should have. We have given you a couple of examples of things that may be important to you. When you finish, share with the group and see how they compare.



Reflection prompts:

- How did you find the activity? Was it easy or hard?
- Was it difficult to think of skills and qualities important to you?
- How did your ideal decision-maker compare to others?



13.

Elections and Voting Systems

In England, we have elections. An election is a public vote for anyone who is 18 or over. Voters choose who will represent them in government and make decisions and laws on their behalf.

Across the UK, different voting methods are used to elect our representative. A system called 'First Past the Post' is used for most elections in England.

When using **First Past the Post**, voters mark their vote by putting an 'X' beside the name of the one candidate they want to represent them. The candidate with the most 'X's wins.

UK Parliament General election is when voters elect a representative to the UK Parliament in Westminster in London. This type of election is usually held every five years. Every constituency in the UK is represented by one Member of Parliament (MP).

Local councillors are usually elected every four years. You can be represented by up to four councilors, depending on where you live. You might also have more than one council covering your area. When you vote, you put an 'X' next to the amount of positions which are available. For example, if your area is represented by four

councillors, you can put an 'X' by four choices on your ballot paper. The four people with the most votes win.

Some areas of England have **elected mayors**. Mayors are usually elected every four years.

If you live in London, you vote for the **London Assembly**. These elections use two systems – First Past the Post and another called 'Additional Member System'. Learn more about these elections at:
electoralcommission.org.uk/voter



YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



14.

Voting Checklist

Here's what you need to do to make sure you can vote.

- ❑ Make sure I am registered to vote
- ❑ Do my own research about who to vote for (Read manifestos and flyers)
- ❑ Check which voting system is being used
- ❑ Reach out to candidates if I have any questions
- ❑ Bring photo ID with me to my local polling station

- "It is important for young people to talk about democracy and politics because they will be able to change society, this effect will allow for greater participation and understanding. It is important for young people to be aware of the impact their voice and vote has on society."

Eoin, Youth Engagement Panel



15.

Who has power?

The people who vote!

How much do you know about voting? Fill in the gaps to test what you know. Answers are at the back of this booklet.

1. You have the right to vote when you turn ____ years old. However, there are some other things that need to be in place.
2. You must be on the _____ register.
3. You can register to vote online at this website _____
4. In England you must bring _____ ID with you to vote. If you don't have it, you can get this for free from the elections team at your local council.
5. People voted to UK Parliament are referred to as _____; those elected to work in my local council are _____.
6. Local councils have responsibility for issues such as: _____ and _____



Top tip

You can find a lot of this information online at:

- electoralcommission.org.uk/learning



16.

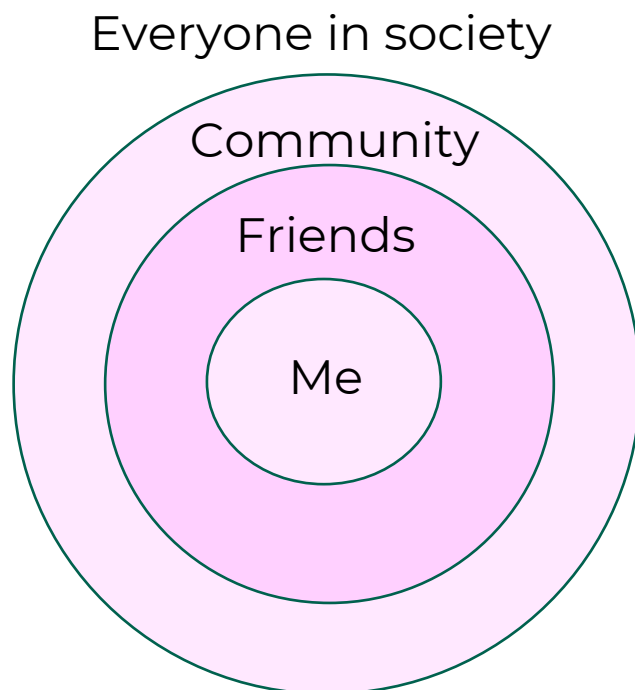
Decision Making and Creating Change

There are many ways to create change and make an impact. This can be through petitions, consultations, policy changes, legislation and law. When creating change, we must look at how it impacts on different people.

In pairs, look at the diagram and draw it on a big sheet of paper. Think of one issue that is important to you, your friends, the people in your community and everyone in society.

When you have an issue in mind, think of how each group can play their part in creating positive change to find a solution. Think about:

- What steps would need to happen?
- Who would need to take action?
- Who needs to listen?
- What is your overall goal?



Reflection prompts:

- Did you find it easy to come up with an issue to change?
- What feelings or emotions did this bring up within you?
- Do you feel more comfortable in how you could approach creating change?
- Do you feel this is something that could be actioned? What support would you need, if any?



17.

How are laws made in the UK?

UK Parliament debates and votes on whether laws should be made. When someone wants a new law, it is called a 'Bill'.

There are a number of steps which are followed to make sure that the law does what it says, including:

- Making policy that includes rules
- Asking members of the public (from different ages and backgrounds) their thoughts
- Finding out what other experts think

What's the point in laws?

- Stop abuse of power
- Fairness and equality
- Rights
- General safety
- Peace



18.

What are the steps in making laws?

A Bill must pass through different stages in UK Parliament to become a law. There are different stages that must happen first.

Below are the different steps Bills must go through before becoming a law.

However, they are jumbled up! Can you put them in the correct order by numbering them 1-5. Check out how you did with the answers at the back of this booklet.



- Research and consultation
- Becomes an Act of UK Parliament
- Pass in House of Lords
- Debate and vote in House of Lords
- Royal approval
- Pass in House of Commons
- Debate and vote in House of Commons

This topic can be really heavy and difficult to understand, but that's ok! There are so many places to get factual and up-to-date information. There's some ideas for this at the back of this resource. In the meantime, have conversations with friends and adults that you trust.



19.

Want to find out more?



Here are some useful links that may help:

- Electoral Commission UK: electoralcommission.org.uk
- UK Parliament Education: learning.parliament.uk
- Find your local council: gov.uk/find-local-council

Top tips for sharing your learning

Many young people highlight the lack of political education they receive. This resource could be one way of tackling this. Here are some other tips.

- **Talk** – to family, friends and supportive adults about your learning in this resource and how you can act on this.
- **Act** – perhaps you could hold a vote to try out voting systems, help build your understanding and to get ready for the real thing!
- **Follow** – the Electoral Commission on social media as they share important learning and reminders about elections and voting.
- **Share** – this resource with friends who may find it useful. Maybe you attend a club or a group who would like to complete this resource.



20.

Glossary

What is a glossary? Why have one?

A glossary is to help you understand words you may not have heard before so that the information you are learning hopefully makes sense.

Council Election

Election for local councillors to councils

First Past the Post

The voting system used for most elections in England. You mark an 'X' next to your choice of candidate. The person or people with the most Xs, win

General Election

Election for MPs to UK Parliament

House of Commons

The chamber in UK Parliament where MPs debate and make laws

House of Lords

The chamber in UK Parliament where Lords debate and make laws. These people are not elected. Most are appointed for being very experienced and knowledgeable of a certain topic

Member of Parliament (MP)

A person who has been elected to represent a constituency in UK Parliament

Minister

An MP or member of the House of Lords with responsibility for a government department

Referendum

An example of direct democracy where a question is put to every voting age citizen



21.

Quiz Answers

Yes or No? Quiz – page 7

1. There is a group vote to decide what food is about to be ordered - Yes
2. Someone is picked for a leadership role within a school with no election - No
3. Your youth space is getting painted and all members vote on what colour. – Yes
4. The opening times of your local sports centre are changing and regular users haven't been asked for their thoughts – No
5. You go to see a film at the cinema with five other friends. Four of your friends wanted to see this film. You and one other friend wanted to see something else – Yes
6. You have a vote in school to ask if pupils want to change the school uniform – Yes

How UK Parliament works – page 9

1. The two chambers in UK Parliament are the House of **Commons** and the House of **Lords**.
2. The voting system used to elect Members of Parliament (MPs) is called **First Past the Post**.
3. There are **650** MPs from different political parties who are elected to represent the people.
4. MPs have power to make and change **laws** on issues for England and some issues for the whole of the UK.
5. When a law is being created, it's first called a **Bill** then an **Act**.
6. People often refer to Parliament buildings as **Westminster**.



22.

Quiz Answers

Matchy Matchy – page 11

- Make decisions on local issues like when bins get emptied, when parks are open and providing community support – **Councillors**
- Lead decision making on policing, housing, education and the environment – **Ministers**
- Work in the UK Parliament to represent people across the UK – **MPs**

Who has Power? – page 15

1. You have the right to vote when you turn **18** years old. However, there are some other things that need to be in place.
2. You must be on the **electoral** register.
3. You can register to vote online at this website **gov.uk/registertovote**
4. In England you must bring **photo** ID with you to vote. If you don't have it, you can get this for free from the elections team at your local council.
5. People voted to UK Parliament are referred to as **Members of Parliament (MPs)** those elected to work in my local council are **councillors**.
6. Local councils have responsibility for issues such as: **rubbish and recycling, local parks, litter** and **communities**.



27.

Quiz Answers

What are the steps in making law? – page 18

Correct order:

1. Research and consultation
2. Debate and vote in House of Commons
3. Pass in House of Commons
4. Debate and vote in House of Lords
5. Pass in House of Lords
6. Becomes an Act of UK Parliament
7. Royal approval

