

2 March 2026

About the NYA

The National Youth Agency (NYA) is the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) for youth work in England. The NYA is committed to enabling high quality youth work across a range of settings to benefit the health and outcomes of young people and strengthen local communities. The NYA do this by providing guidance, support, advice, training and staff development opportunities for youth workers and youth work organisations.

Summary

The NYA welcomes the Representation of the People Bill, having advocated for this legislative change as part of the Votes at 16 Coalition since 2003. Lowering the voting age to 16 and enabling pre-registration represents a significant opportunity to strengthen democratic participation among young people. **Around 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds will be eligible to vote at the next general election. However, without investment in formal and, crucially, informal political education – particularly in youth work settings, changes to voting eligibility alone will not deliver meaningful democratic engagement.** Furthermore, through the NYA's role in supporting the [UK Youth Parliament](#) following the closure of the British Youth Council, we work with more than 300 elected Members of Youth Parliament aged 11-18. One of their priority manifesto pledges calls on the Government to invest in high-quality, non-partisan lesson resources for teachers to use, and their current e-petition can be found [here](#).

“The Representation of the People Bill is a welcome step in strengthening democratic participation by extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, but this must be matched with access to high-quality, non-partisan citizenship education so young people understand how our democracy works. Whatever your view of the Bill, young people need rigorous, impartial education to boost turnout, foster meaningful civic engagement, and strengthen our democracy.”

- Alex Nurton MYP, Chair of the Votes at 16 Committee in UK Youth Parliament

Key messages

- **Political socialisation and education** - There is no explicit recognition of the need to improve political socialisation and education among young people. Strengthening the Bill should involve embedding a clear commitment to ensuring that all young people have access to high-quality, non-partisan political education, both within formal education settings and crucially in informal education settings. This would help equip young people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to engage meaningfully in democratic processes.
- **The role and remit of youth services in supporting youth participation** - The Bill currently overlooks the important contribution of youth services, including youth workers in drawing on a wide range of sources, experiences and conversations so that

young people are supported to form their own political ideas. Youth services play a critical role in:

- Providing trusted, accessible spaces where young people can explore political issues
 - Supporting voter registration and turnout among first-time voters
 - Building young people's confidence in navigating democratic processes and forming their own political ideas
 - Ensuring marginalised groups of young people are not excluded from participation
- **Upskilling and training professionals who work with young people** – For those who work with young people, additional training measures should be commissioned and put in place to support schools, colleges and youth services to effectively roll out practical voter and civic education.
 - Aligned to the Government's National Youth Strategy ambition to ensure young people are seen and heard, young people, particularly those furthest from political systems need:
 - Clear, accessible pathways to understanding democratic processes
 - Support from trusted adults, including youth workers, teachers and community practitioners
 - Opportunities to learn about politics outside formal education, where many disengaged young people are reached
 - Research consistently shows that **early engagement in civic activity increases long term democratic participation**, but only when accompanied by sustained political education. Young people should be supported on their civic journey to learn about themselves as citizens as they experience and engage with their communities and social institutions beyond the classroom.
 - New duties on local authorities to raise awareness and support voter registration for eligible young people, including children in care, will help reduce barriers to participation and are welcome but the **Bill must go further to include youth workers, teachers and community practitioners who deliver frontline work with young people**.
 - Without the inclusion of the above, we risk a situation where young people gain rights without the knowledge or confidence needed to use them.

To strengthen the Bill, we recommend including the following:

- Overt reference to political education and clear expectations on the agencies that will deliver this. To do this, the **Bill must recognise the role of youth work (definition below) in democratic engagement.**

Youth Work is an approach that seeks to 'Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential' - National Occupational Standards, 2020

- **Upskilling and training of professionals, namely youth workers on extending the right to vote to 16- and 17-year-olds** so that they can meaningfully equip young people with guidance on how to participate in local and general elections. This could look like publishing an Informal Democratic Education Standards practice guide.
- **Commissioning accessible and fit for purpose resources for youth work settings** so that all young people from all backgrounds are aware of democratic changes and have the opportunity to participate.

How you can help in parliament

- Please attend the Second Reading of the Bill on Monday 2 March 2026
- Consider speaking during the debate about the **need for informal democratic education to be included in the Bill to strengthen youth participation and highlight the role of youth work in democratic engagement.**
- **Put forward suggested parliamentary questions during the debate:**
 - Does the Minister agree that political education is essential to building young people's confidence and knowledge to meaningfully participate in future democratic elections and if yes, will he include this in the Bill?
 - Has the Minister considered the role of informal education such as youth work in connecting with young people who have had no previous engagement with political systems?
 - Does the Minister agree that there is a case for strengthening the Bill by extending the duty of awareness beyond local authorities to include youth workers?
- Consider putting forward an amendment at Committee Stage (NYA can support)

If you would like support in preparing a speech or would prefer an oral briefing, please contact policy@nya.org.uk