

**1.**

**NUS Wales**

1.1.

National Union of Students in Wales is the largest democratic organisation in

Wales, representing learners in a wide variety of settings including higher

education and further education, adult community learning and

apprenticeships.

**2.**

**General Comments**

2.1.

NUS Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to

the

Expert Panel on

Assembly Electoral Reform

’s consultation on lowering the minimum voting age for

Assembly elections. We believe it is morally right to allow 16 and 17

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olds

the right to vote and this move would support the development of active citizens

and a lifetime habit of voting.

2.2.

In the last two years there have been five separate

polls

in Wales,

including

elections to the National Assembly for Wales

,

the rec

ent snap General Election

and the referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union (EU)

. In all

five

polls

the future direction of Wales and the UK have been on the ballot, yet 16

and 17

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year

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olds have been denied the right to

influence that future

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**3.**

**Question 1:**

*Do you have any evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, that young people*

*want, or do not want, to see a reduction in the minimum voting age?*

3.1.

Our membership has made it clear

, by passing

[polic](file://nussl.local/DATA/Cardiff_Corporate/Projects%20and%20Policy/Current%20Policies/2017-18/NUS%20Wales%20Live%20Policy%202015%20-17.pdf)

[y](file://nussl.local/DATA/Cardiff_Corporate/Projects%20and%20Policy/Current%20Policies/2017-18/NUS%20Wales%20Live%20Policy%202015%20-17.pdf)

that

they want to see 16

and 17

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year

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olds given the right to vote in all future elections in Wales

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W

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changes to

youth se

rvices

, housing and education,

our members believe it is

wrong

that 16 and 17

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year

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olds do not have a say in their future.

3.2.

16

and

17

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year

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olds are able to marry, join the armed forces, drive and pay

taxes, yet are not able to vote on who will represent

them

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Our

members believe

this is morally wrong. Furthermore, our members believe that lowering the

minimum voting age in Wales will support efforts to develop more active young

citizens and ensure they are able to influence their future.

3.3.

NUS Wales beli

eves that self

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determination is critical; so many decisions taken at

electoral level impact upon those over the age of 16 and, with the taxation

argument, actively involve them. It is entirely right that those who are affected

by these votes are able to ho

ld those responsible to account at the ballot box.

**4.**

**Question 2**

*Have 16 or 17 year*

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*olds made any comments to you about not being*

*able to vote in recent or upcoming elections?*

4.1.

The Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 demonstrated that 16 and 17

year

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olds were more than capable willing to participate in the political process.

Reported turnout among 16 and 17 year

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olds was 75% and research carried out

following the referendum identified those that 97% of 16 and 17 year

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olds would

vote again in the future and the remaining 3% answered “don’t know.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This evidence supports the argument that extending the franchise to 16 and 17 yearolds would result in more politically engaged citizens and develop a habit of voting.

4.2. In contrast, the EU referendum did not allow 16 and 17-year olds to vote, with many highlighting that they were will be left with the consequences of the result which they had no say in. A poll carried out by NUS found 76% of 16 and 17 year-olds would have voted in the referendum given the opportunity to vote. The same poll also found that 54% of those eligible to vote were intending on voting.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. **Question 3:** *Would a reduction in the voting age have an impact on youth engagement or political participation? Are there other ways in which a similar impact could be achieved?*

* 1. Within the current climate, where many young people feel disconnected from politics and a lack of control over their futures, a move to lower the minimum voting age would be a strong and positive step in improving political participation across Wales.

* 1. However, lowering the minimum voting age to include 16 and 17 year-olds will have a positive impact on youth engagement, we cannot rely on this alone to improve political participation.

* 1. NUS Wales is strongly supportive of the recommendations regarding citizenship education outlined in the Donaldson Review. We believe that citizenship education is essential to equip young people with the knowledge and confidence to become active citizens. To ensure these recommendations are a success, we strongly agree with the [ERS Cymru’s calls](https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/publication/ERS-Cymru-2016-Manifestos_0.pdf) to ensure that this is sufficiently funded and effectively prioritised by the Welsh Government.

* 1. In order to effectively equip young people to engage with democracy, citizenship education must include political education. We believe political education is essential for young people in Wales to gain an understanding how the decisions taken in Westminster, in the National Assembly and in their local councils affect their lives and how they can influence these decisions.

* 1. NUS Wales believes it is vital for citizenship education to be delivered in schools across Wales, however, this should not be the only way young people learn about politics. We are strong advocates of “learn by doing” whereby young people are given the opportunity to practice what they have learned.

* 1. We are encouraged to see the National Assembly’s commitment to creating a Youth Parliament for Wales. Our members have made clear that it is essential for young people across Wales to have the opportunity to have their voices heard by those who make decisions on policies and services that affect their lives. We believe this experience would be hugely beneficial in providing young people with the confidence to be politically active.



5.7.

Additionally, we believe organisations like students’ unions and trade unions, can

play a key role in developing active p

olitical participation. 16 and 17 year olds

currently in college or work based learning should have the opportunity to

participate in representative organisations that influence their education or

employment. This will in turn build their confidence and en

courage them to

participate in the wider political process.

5.8.

To ensure that young people have the opportunities to participate in students’

union whilst in education; NUS Wales believes it is vital to make learner voice

structures a statutory requirement

across the post

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16

education sector. We

believe this can be achieved through the implementation of the Hazelkorn Review

as a means to ensure institutions are able to meet their civic mission.

5.9.

NUS Wales also calls for

automatic registration of students a

cross further and

higher education to be included as part of

the implementation of Hazelkorn.

Alongside this, we believe

local authorities, regional education consortia, further

and higher education instit

utions and training providers should

work together

on

voter registration drives to increase the number of young people on the electoral

register.

1. Electoral Commission (2016) *Scottish Independence Referendum Report* p.68 [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\_file/0010/179812/Scottish-independence-referendumreport.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/179812/Scottish-independence-referendum-report.pdf) [Accessed 9 June 2017] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. National Union of Students (2016) *Three quarters of 16 and 17 year-olds would vote in the EU referendum*, *NUS research shows,* Tuesday 24 May 2016*,* [https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/three-quarters-of-16and-17-year-olds-would-vote-in-the-eu-referendum-nus-research-shows/](https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/three-quarters-of-16-and-17-year-olds-would-vote-in-the-eu-referendum-nus-research-shows/) [Accessed 16 June 2017] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)