

A-Level Politics Bridging Task 3: Should the Voting age be lowered to 16?

Student Booklet

This task aims to introduce you to the sorts of contemporary debates that we cover and the types of skills you will develop over the whole course.

At the end of the two years, you will have worked hard on building up your analysis and evaluation skills so you can effectively form arguments and make judgements about the big, contemporary political issues.

Pre-reading: Votes at 16

In the UK, turnout, which measures the percentage of eligible people who voted, has fallen in elections since 1997 in contrast to the post war period, with the turnout among 18-25 years olds lower than all other age groups. One solution that is debated is to lower the voting age to 16 so around another 1.5 million people would be able to vote. In 2003, the *Votes at 16 Coalition* was established by young people, organisations and politicians that believe the voting age should be reduced to 16. Their hope is that by engaging at a young age, voting will become a habit that lasts a life time whilst the fear is that turnout amongst this age group will be even lower than 18 to 24 year olds.

The situation in the UK regarding the age at which you can vote is also complex and inconsistent. In the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, the voting age was set at 16. In the EU Referendum, it was set at 18 for the whole of the UK. In the 2019 General Election, the voting age was set at 18 however in local elections in Scotland and elections to the Scottish parliament, the voting age is 16. During the 2019 election, the Labour party supported votes for 16 and 17 year olds, whilst the Conservative party opposed it.

This question explores the debate on voting at 16, asking you to think about which argument is stronger and why? This should help you form an informed judgement about whether 16 and 17 year olds should be allowed to vote.

Question:

Using the source provided in the source booklet, **evaluate the view that the voting age should be lowered to 16 in the UK.**

In your response you must:

- *compare and contrast different opinions in the source*
- *examine and debate these views in a balanced way.*

Task One

1. You have 20 minutes to complete this task; if you take longer, don't worry. Just make sure you put the time you took at the bottom of your answer.
2. **Read the source in full.**
3. Then highlight or underline the **first** main argument used by Ebba Ferguson, then highlight or underline the **counter** to this argument used by Julia Hartley-Brewer.
4. Continue to do this for further points from the source linking together arguments from the YES side to the No side to create paired arguments.
5. Create a table (see below), writing short notes on the paired arguments and resolving which argument is stronger. The table provides you with an essay structure.
 - a. Each argument should be drawn from the source.
 - b. Each argument should then be built upon, using further evidence and ideas of your own, to test the strength of the argument.
 - c. Each pair of arguments should be compared to reach a conclusion about which argument is stronger.
6. Based on the arguments, you can now decide what you think the answer is based on the evidence in front of you. Once you have completed this, move onto Task Two.

YES	NO	Conclude

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Task Two

1. Write out your answer to the question. You have **forty minutes** for this task; if you take longer, don't worry. Just make sure you put the time you took at the bottom of your answer.
2. **Your answer should include:**
 - a. **An introduction**, where you lay out what is being debated and what you are going to argue.
 - b. **Paragraphs**; each paragraph should be a debate between two paired arguments, reaching a judgement about which view is stronger. Use only short quotes from the source to show you are linking to it.
 - c. **A conclusion**: this should be a clear answer to the questions based on the judgements made throughout the essay.
3. Check back over your work and make any amendments if needed.

Julia Hartley-Brewer says No

If we want to encourage 16 and 17 year olds to engage with the political process, then we need to do more than give them new rights; they need to start understanding about their responsibilities too. Decision making does empower people but it is too soon at this age.

Wouldn't our democracy be better served if we spent more time, effort and resources on engaging the people who already have the right to vote. It is vital for democracy to get all citizens participating in politics.

In actual fact, we don't allow our 16 and 17 year olds to do very much at all. They can't legally drink alcohol or smoke. 16 year olds are allowed to get married, but only with the permission of their parents so that doesn't really count either. They can join the army at 16 but they aren't allowed to risk life and limb fighting on the front line until they are 18.

They can get a job and pay income tax but the law now requires them to be in full-time education or training until they're 18. Voting is, after all, not a privilege like getting pocket money or being allowed to stay out past your usual curfew on a Saturday night. It's a right and a hard-won right at that. There is absolutely nothing wrong in making people wait until they're 18 to vote.

Julia Hartley-Brewer is a columnist in The Daily Telegraph.

Should 16 and 17 year olds have been allowed to vote in the EU referendum?

Ebbi Ferguson says Yes

Living in a democracy is a balance between appreciating both rights and responsibilities. The right to vote has been a hard won battle for citizens of the UK. Being allowed to vote in the referendum would have inspired 16 and 17 year olds to be more politically active; instead they are being excluded completely. All citizens using their political voice is vital to make democracy work. Participation matters.

At age 16 people can work, pay taxes, leave home, get married, join the armed forces and make other crucial decisions about their futures – but they do not get a say in how our country is run.

I am beyond disappointed that 16 and 17 year olds have been denied the right to vote in the European referendum. What is more, the outcome of the referendum matters more to this age range than any other age group; their input is vital and important in shaping the outcome. As young people, we are often told we need to take responsibility for our futures. How are we supposed to do so if our decision-making powers are stripped from us? How are we to develop as engaged citizens if we are continually sidelined when faced with the biggest political decisions of our age? It is only by being involved and participating that we create the active citizens which a democracy needs.

Ebbi Ferguson is the NUS Wales Deputy President.

You should do some additional research on this question to help inform your writing. Here are some useful sites to get you started:

<https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/voting-age-2/>

<https://politicsteaching.com/2023/02/18/what-are-the-arguments-for-and-against-lowering-the-voting-age-to-16/>

<https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/voting-age/>

<https://www.byc.org.uk/campaigns/votes-at-16>