



Literature Review

Prepared for COI, on behalf of the Youth Citizenship Commission

Prepared by EdComs

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Summary

The Problem

Young and old people think differently about many aspects of politics. In the past, people used to think that politics affected the country, their community and their families. These days, however, many people are unsure of what politics is. Some people today even say they feel powerless – that they have no control over political decisions.

What is participation?

There is no single definition of political ‘participation’, but a range of meanings and explanations. For example, Whiteley says that there are three forms of participation. The first is something that can be done by just one person, such as donating money to a cause. The second form of participation involves contacting a decision-maker. This could be writing to a Member of Parliament (MP) or speaking to someone from the local council. The third form of participation involves people joining together in groups, such as pressure or lobby groups, to try to influence decisions.

Others have disagreed with this explanation of participation. Some, such as O’Toole, go so far as to say that academics should not try to define it at all. Instead, when investigating ‘participation’, researchers should allow individuals to define it themselves. O’Toole believes that this approach would give us a better understanding of ‘participation’ from young people’s viewpoints.

Are young people disengaged?

In recent years, young people have been voting less and less in general elections. While nearly three quarters of young people voted in the 1995 election, less than half voted in 2001. Some teenagers think voting is ‘a waste of time’ and that the results of elections make no difference to them. Others do not know which party they would vote for, while only 12 per cent are absolutely certain they would vote if there was a general election tomorrow.

Fewer young people today than in the past say they support a political party, such as Labour or the Conservative party. This could be because young people do not know very much about parties and their leaders. Research has found that young people’s understanding of smaller parties, like the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party, is especially low.

What do young people care about?

Although young people may be voting less and are less likely to support a political party, they do care about a number of issues. Issues which young people are concerned about range from traditional issues (for example, healthcare and education) to more individual concerns (like drugs). These

concerns can affect just the young person alone, can be based in a young person's local community, or they could be issues which affect the whole country or the world.

Young people also want to get involved. Over 80 per cent of young people in a Government survey said there should be a way to give young people a voice in politics.

Why are young people not engaging?

Young people's perceptions

Many young people do not engage or participate in politics because their own perceptions and attitudes put them off. Young people say that politics is a complex subject which is difficult to understand. Some say they do not know enough about politics and political parties to vote in a general election, partly because they are not given enough information to help them make decisions.

Some young people say they do not know how to vote, for example, they do not know what to do at a polling station or how to cast their vote. Evidence also shows that young people do not know who to speak to at their local council or how to contact them.

Over a third of young people say they have no interest in politics. Many think politics is boring or are too preoccupied with other things, such as getting qualifications and planning for the future, to get involved. Young people only tend to be interested when politics directly concerns them.

Some young people think that their votes and voices do not count. They believe that politicians think their views are childish and unrealistic, that they are incapable of making intelligent or serious decisions. As a result, there is little point getting involved or engaging in politics.

Young people are suspicious of politicians. They do not trust them to tell the truth or keep their promises. Some accuse politicians of being self-interested hypocrites who do not represent young people or their views.

One study of young people and local government found that some teenagers said they did not get involved as they believe that the system works well without them. Other young people feel that it is not their place to get involved when others are paid to do so.

Peer pressure is often mentioned by young people as a barrier to participation. If their friends or peers do not participate, young people say they will be seen as weird if they take part or engage. Young people are also put off by the images they have of those young people who do participate. Survey findings show that teenagers who are engaged in politics are believed to be upper or middle class people, particularly swots or nerds. Many young people also lack the confidence to participate and are afraid to express their views and opinions in front of a group.

Life stage explanations

One theory explains lack of participation among young people by looking at their life-stage. In this case, young people's non-participation is not a new phenomenon but has always happened. As young people get older they have a bigger stake in society through marrying, having children and paying taxes. As a result, their interest in politics and Government grows.

Generation effects

Another theory believes that young people have their own attitudes which are distinct and different to those of other generations. These attitudes are shaped by a number of factors, such as the changing relationship between the individual and the state and the disconnection between young people and politicians and the political culture.

The heart of the problem

Young people are interested in issues and want to have a say in politics but, traditional ways of getting involved, such as voting or joining a party, do not appeal to them. Young people need engaging ways to get involved in politics and decision-making.

Initiatives to increase participation

In recent years, the Government has launched a number of initiatives designed to increase participation. However, as in other countries, these initiatives have had limited success. Many have simply focused on changing the old, traditional ways of making decisions rather than changing the way Government works. They have not taken into account changes in people's behaviours and expectations or acknowledged that people want new ways to engage in politics.

Few of these initiatives have engaged those young people who are uninterested in becoming involved. Current programmes also tend to focus on those people already engaged or who are keen to get involved in politics.

Avenues for Addressing the Problem

Initiatives to increase orthodox participation

Many of the Government's initiatives have focused on adjusting, or developing, traditional forms of participation for example, through postal or e-voting. Such initiatives are aimed at those young people who are keen to engage. They are less successful at encouraging young people who are likely to be uninterested in getting involved. Participatory approaches designed to engage with hard to reach groups, including young people, are lacking.

Providing 'participatory' initiatives

Providing young people with opportunities to get involved in more participatory initiatives could improve engagement. A participatory initiative is one where young people are offered real power and responsibility over decisions. This could be by giving young people more influence over the design, implementation and evaluation of policies. These types of initiatives could help to attract a wider cross-section of young people including those who are hard to reach or are not motivated to get involved.

More education

As mentioned above, young people's perceptions and their levels of knowledge are major barriers to their engagement. Citizenship education was introduced into schools in England in 2002 partly to help overcome the gaps in young people's knowledge and to raise their awareness of politics and engagement. Although the revised National Curriculum for 2008 in England has improved the syllabus, some academics think that the subject should be more integrated into the wider curriculum. This, they argue, would free up space in the school timetable and enable more teacher specialists to be created. More importantly, it would make citizenship more relevant for young people. Others, however, argue that citizenship education should be mainstreamed within the National Curriculum rather than delivered discretely.

Drivers and Enablers of Engagement

Young people do participate

Young people define participation in many different ways. Those who are already engaged in politics tend to identify more activities as 'participation' than those who are not engaged. Some young people think that simply being part of a community counts as participation, while others believe that voting is the only way to express their views.

A Government survey showed that nearly half of the young people questioned had taken part in a civic activity in the past year. More than half were involved in groups, clubs and organisations. Over two thirds had helped a group, club or organisation by raising money, doing a sponsored activity, organising an event or being a member of a committee. Research has also shown that young people volunteer, with many helping out more than once a month.

Few studies have segmented, or grouped, young people according to their political participation. Three are highlighted in the report. The first by White et al., (2001) classifies young people into five broad groups. The groups represent a scale of political engagement with the first group containing young people who do not care about politics and the last those who are very interested and involved in politics. The second segmentation by Lister et al., (2005) explores young people's attitudes towards citizenship. The third and final segmentation by Livingstone et al., (2004) looks specifically at civic engagement on the internet and divides young people into three groups – the interactors, the civic-minded and the disengaged.

Supporting young people

Parental influences

Parents are a significant influence on their children's participation and engagement. Research has also shown that young people from more affluent homes with parents/carers who are interested in politics are more likely to be interested in politics and have positive attitudes towards voting. Parents also affect the extent to which a young person supports a political party: young people who support a political party are likely to have parents/carers who are interested in politics and who have high levels of education.

Previous behaviour

Research conducted in America shows that people are more likely to vote in the future if they have voted in the past. Based on this evidence, we can say that as fewer young people vote now, it is likely that they will not vote in the future. We can also suppose that, if young people are encouraged to take an interest in politics and political engagement from a young age, they are likely to grow into interested and engaged adults.

Cross-generation initiatives

Schemes which involve young and older people working together have been shown to have valuable contributions to make in achieving sustainable

communities. They can develop a number of skills as well as challenge assumptions and stereotypes about age

Initiatives which involve both young and older people tend to be small, intensive projects which aim to have a positive impact for individuals and their communities. The impacts are, however, difficult to measure. Their goals are often unclear and they can sometimes fail to include young and older people who are hard to reach.

A range of mechanisms

Work by the National Youth Agency into young people's engagement in local authorities found that their participation can be supported through a number of different kinds of groups. These include elected forums, youth councils, youth conferences, groups for disabled people, young carers or care leavers. The NYA says that these groups should have links to the decisions made by councillors.

It emphasised that young people need to feel that they are able to get involved. To encourage participation, the NYA also suggested that youth engagement is truly youth-led with young people participating as of right alongside adults, deciding the topics to be discussed and being treated seriously. The report also recommended, among other things, regular youth conferences, monthly meetings, good communication between councillors and young people, and that members have the chance to move on to other areas of decision-making to make space for new members.

Information gaps

No shared definition of 'participation'

The first section of the report focuses on the definition of the 'political'. People interpret politics in many different ways and, as a result, there is not one, simple definition of political 'participation' or 'engagement'.

This means that there are difficulties involved in measuring outcomes. Often researchers are unsure of the exact dimension of participation to be measured or evaluated. Furthermore, the lack of a universal definition means that researchers can be talking about different things when they refer to 'participation'. This makes any comparison of initiatives to increase participation extremely difficult.

Lack of evaluations

Work by the Carnegie Young People Initiative found that there are very few evaluations of initiatives which aim to increase young people's participation. Research by Pain also found that there has been little investigation into projects involving younger and older people. Those that do exist tend to focus on smaller projects in local areas. There are few evaluations which look at bigger projects across the country over a long period of time. Most evaluations also study people's attitudes and opinions towards participation activities.

The CYPI says that there is little evidence on the benefits these projects bring to the wider community. They also criticise existing evaluations for not asking young people who do not participate their views on activities. It suggests that all organisations involving young people should evaluate their work themselves. There is, therefore, a need for evaluations and research which use a mixed method approach involving qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal and control studies where appropriate.

No overarching segmentation of young people

This literature review has found that there is no in-depth segmentation of young people, within the Commission's target age group, which classifies young people according to their engagement in political activities.

Although the three segmentations highlighted in the report divide young people into relevant types, minimal detail is provided about their characteristics, such as their socio-economic backgrounds, their levels of education, their age and gender.

Recommendations

There are many definitions of 'political participation'. Mainstream studies tend to take a narrow view of participation, seeing it in terms of voting or party memberships. Such definitions have been criticised for interpreting non-participation as apathy. Alternatively, less orthodox qualitative studies have explored young people's attitudes and experiences of participation and have left definitions of 'political participation' to be interpreted by young people themselves.

A more traditional interpretation of 'political participation' suggests many young people are not engaging. However, broadening the concept to include the views of young people reveals a more complex situation. Although young people may be retreating from formal politics, they are not apathetic but are participating in other forms of engagement which they define as 'political'.

- 1) *We recommend that the Youth Citizenship Commission produces a definition of 'participation'. This definition should be sufficiently broad in order to capture both formal and informal types of participation. Defining participation within a spectrum of formal and informal participation would eradicate the promotion of one form of participation over another. For example, activities such as membership of a club, organisation or committee, signing a petition, and taking part in a demonstration would be recognised alongside party membership and voting. Such a spectrum would allow many different forms of participation to be acknowledged and valued.*

Different pieces of evidence presented in this report show that participation is characterised by a number of different factors. Survey findings highlight that socio-demographic characteristics are associated with political and civic participation and interest. Household type, for example, has a significant association with young people's views on voting, their levels of political interest, the extent to which they identify with a political party, and the frequency of participation.

However, few studies have produced segmentations of young people according to their wider participation in politics. The three explored in this report focus on distinct issues regarding political participation and, as a result, are incomparable. They also provide limited evidence on young people's socio-demographic backgrounds.

- 2) *We recommend that the Youth Citizenship Commission produce an attitudinal and demographic segmentation of young people according to their political participation. To ensure a robust and reliable segmentation is produced, the segmentation could be created through longitudinal tracking of participants' attitudes and behaviour in relation to formal and informal participation.*

The sample for the segmentation would include young people who receive statutory citizenship education as well as a booster sample of those who opt to take GCSE citizenship. The participants' views of participation would be explored at the beginning of the study and measured again six months and a year later.

The tracking would allow any changes in attitudes and behaviours to be recorded and analysed. A profile of young people would then be built which considers the influences on their attitudes and behaviours, such as class, ethnicity, and teaching. This would enable the segmentation to be used to judge if a particular cohort is more likely to participate or engage in a political activity more than others.

A number of options are available to take this recommendation forward. First, a bespoke survey of young people could be developed either for a one-off analysis or for on-going tracking purposes. The strength of a bespoke approach would be the focus on sampling and focus of enquiry. Ideally, this kind of study would sample a nationally representative group of young people, with the aim of collecting both demographic data and data on attitudes, behaviour and would be longitudinal in nature. Additional value related to a YCC branded survey should be considered via a bespoke model. The disadvantage to this approach could be the time and cost related to setting up a representative sample.

A second consideration could include using existing datasets which either offer access to young people or offer a longitudinal view of demographics and engagement behaviour, for example, looking into the option of conducting further analyses of cohort studies like the Millennium Cohort, or children of BCS70 cohort members. This option could yield rapid analysis on segmentation effects. As the cohort studies are longitudinal studies, they offer the chance to track issues like socio demographics, social mobility and aspects of participation and formal voting over time.

A third option would be to consider partnering with a youth-focused organisation to explore the potential of running a large scale youth focused survey on the impact on engagement, from which questions of interest to YCC could be incorporated. An example of such an organisation could be v.

Measurement and evaluation of initiatives designed to raise levels of participation is significantly challenging. At present, there are no evaluations available to this report that purport to measure the wide societal outcomes of a particular programme. Many rely on input and output measurements. Those that do attempt to measure outcomes tend to rely on the perceptions of outputs of those involved rather than on quantifiable data that measures real outcomes.

- 3) *We recommend that the Youth Citizenship Commission develop a toolkit which enables organisations to measure the extent to which initiatives help and support a young person to participate. Such a toolkit relies on an agreed definition of 'participation' as outlined in the first recommendation. In the development of a toolkit, research is required to explore the different forms of participation, and the extent to which they are able to change or influence outcomes.*

1.0 Research Objectives

The Youth Citizenship Commission was launched in February 2008 in response to the Governance of Britain Green Paper published last year. It highlighted the importance of engaging young people as citizens, so they are able to take an active part in society.

The Youth Citizenship Commission will focus on young people aged 11 to 19. It will:

- Examine what citizenship means to young people
- Consider how to increase young people's participation in politics; the development of citizenship among disadvantaged groups; how active citizenship can be promoted through volunteering and community engagement
- Lead a consultation on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16

As part of its work, the Commission identified a need for desk research to inform their work on youth engagement in our democracy. There has been, and continues to be, a great deal of research conducted on Youth Engagement which lends itself to a desk research exercise. The work in this report will feed into the Commission's report and recommendations to be produced in the spring of 2009.

1.2 Objectives

The overarching objective of this piece of desk research is to understand why young people have become detached and distant from formal politics and to begin to evaluate the tools and means to re-engage the disaffected. The research is designed to help with the task of identifying and prioritising certain groups of young people in terms of their current political attitudes and behaviours.

This research will be evidence-led, meaning that findings from existing research will form the basis of the investigation and conclusions of the report. The specific objectives are to identify and examine evidenced to give in sight in the following areas:

- To review the evidence to explain why young people have become disengaged from the formal political process:
 - Informal and formal political engagement/disengagement.
 - Personal barriers/enablers/incentives to engagement/disengagement.
 - Institutional barriers/enablers to engagement/disengagement.
 - Patterns of disengagement.
- To identify segments of the youth audience on the issue of engagement with the political process:

- Youth segmentation and their engagement/disengagement in formal and informal politics among those between 11 and 25.
- Barriers/enablers/incentives facing key segments.
- The possible need for new segmentations.

- To evaluate current Government initiatives:
 - Initiatives which are most effective in motivating different groups of young people.
 - Insight into the scope and reach of initiatives.
 - Positives and drawbacks of each in terms of influencing behaviour and motivating participation among young people.
 - Initiatives that focus specifically on cross-generational groups.
 - Insight into the scope and reach of initiatives.

- To provide guidance on effective indicators/measures of the success of initiatives that aim to boost and increase political engagement:
 - Measurement of outcomes compared to measurement of outputs.
 - Recommendations/suggestions for government investment.
 - Good practice guidance.

2.0 Methodology

This section focuses on the methodology used to fulfil the objectives of the research that took place between July and August 2008. To ensure that the objectives were fully addressed, the research went through four phases which together guaranteed an extensive process of information gathering and analysis. The four phases are outlined below:

2.1 Desk Scoping and Expert Contact

Identifying evidence included searching the following sources:

- Searches of journal articles, books and conference proceedings using specialist online databases. This involved using the following resources
 - SAG Journals Online
 - British Library collection of bibliographic databases (including ERIC and Education-line)
 - Google Scholar
 - Google web search

- Enquiries with relevant individuals
 - Telephone interview with experts
 - Detailed search of COI's research archive

During the commissioning of the research, it became apparent that the input of experts designed to help identify the most valuable research would be beneficial. YCC constructed a list of key contacts for EdComs to contact with a specific set of questions. It was expected that EdComs would have in-depth conversations with at least eight contacts EdComs. This would be in addition to garnering the input of the academic members of the Commission.

To facilitate this process, EdComs constructed a letter to be distributed to all contacts as well as topic guides to be used in conversations. Both were agreed by YCC and are included in the appendices to this report. This approach allowed us to speak with all of the contacts in the time allowed. This expert contact facilitated a process of 'snowballing'¹, which identified the likely sources of pertinent information and contacts them. We conducted interviews with individuals from the following organisations in no particular order:

- University of Essex
- Carnegie Trust UK
- University of East Anglia

¹ Snowballing is a common practice in social science research where research subjects are recruited through existing research subjects. For desk research, this means having possible future interviewees identify further potential interviewees with expertise in certain areas. In this study, this extended to identifying not only individuals but also institutions and organisations that might provide useful research evidence.

- Royal Holloway
- Liverpool University
- Birkbeck College
- University of Sheffield
- Independent Academic Research Studies
- Institute for Citizenship
- NACRO

In total, 13 in-depth conversations were conducted with experts including consultation with academic Commissioners on the construction of the bibliography. YCC also distributed a call for evidence to all members of the Commission.

2.2 Review Point

A review point meeting to be held approximately half-way through the research was agreed at the commissioning stage. The purpose was to check progress of the project, outline early research findings, and confirm a way forward. At this meeting, EdComs gave a presentation to YCC which outlined finding, the balance of evidence and ways forward for reporting.

2.3 Assessment

The desk scoping and stakeholder contact phases were successful in uncovering a wealth of relevant and reliable information on the engagement of young people with politics. A vital next step was to consider in detail the reliability and relevance of each source to make a judgement on whether each was suitable for inclusion in the final reporting stage. Each piece of research was assessed for the following qualities:

- Robustness of qualitative data (scored 3*, 2*, or 1*), including comments
- Robustness of quantitative data (scored 3*, 2*, or 1*), including comments
- Relevance of research (scored from 5, high to 1, low)

Literature reviews were included in this assessment as far as possible, although appraisal of the quality of either the qualitative or quantitative research process is not possible when considering reports that synthesise many sources. Therefore, we did not assess literature reviews for robustness in the same way as we did for primary research. Instead, we made a subjective judgement on the robustness of each literature review based on the scope of the research, the quality of the sources used and the likely degree of probity required by the commissioner.

This assessment was outlined in a scoping table discussed with YCC at the Review Point. This final report takes includes relevant and robust research that has emerged since the review point meeting.

3.0 Disengagement?

Qualitative research from the BBC (2002) revealed that the modern young people involved in the research had different conceptions of politics when compared to older participants. The older cohort described a time 20 to 30 years in the past where they saw three clear and distinct connection points with politics at three levels; the national, the community and the family. The latter was seen as the most important. They felt that their existences were physically more local, which in turn gave a sense of identity and reassurance.

The national level was the second connection point. MPs were generally perceived as pillars of the community who knew the needs of their areas and had local vested interests in caring for their roots. The third level was community politics, which consisted of a combination of local government implementing laws and community spirit. The participants felt that these connection points worked simply and cyclically together to move the country on and 'develop our nation, community and belonging.'

For all participants, contemporary connection points were more distant. What was perceived as a once simple process by the older generation had transformed into a collection of more distant connection points that conspired to produce feelings of powerlessness.² Something had changed. This chapter examines the literature on the participation of young people and attempts to shed light on the question of what participation is, the extent of young people's disengagement from formal politics, young people's issues of concern when it comes to politics, barriers to participation and look at some theories of participation.

3.1 Defining participation

Participation in politics in the UK has become an area of increasing academic interest since the dramatic fall in electoral turnout among young people in the 1992 election. Researchers have undertaken both quantitative and qualitative studies to explain the decline in participation and, within these studies, have employed various definitions of 'participation'.

Whiteley (2005) states that 'participation can be seen as being specifically political in which case the aim is to influence the policies and agents of the state, or it can be seen as voluntary activity which is not aimed at the state, but which nonetheless influences the state via civil society'. In his literature review for the longitudinal study of citizenship education, He sets out the definition of political participation as employed by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley

² BBC (2002), *Beyond the soundbite: BBC research into public disillusion with politics*, p 12

(2004). This definition classifies participation into three broad dimensions. First, there is an individualistic dimension which entails forms of participation that can be undertaken independently of others, such as boycotting or boycotting and donating money. This form of participation, claims Whiteley, is the most dominant in modern Britain³.

The second dimension of participation is contact – contacting an MP, local councillor or public officials. Participation in this sense can be both for public and private gain and is therefore more collective than individualistic⁴. The third factor is collective action where citizens join together with others in formal or informal organisations. This type of action can aim to influence the policies of personnel of the state. Recent research into social capital and civic engagement show that collective action can also involve participation in a voluntary activity, such as a sports club or religious group, since these activities are important for sustaining civic societies⁵.

O'Toole *et al.*, in their 2003 article on participation and non-participation among young people, accuse mainstream quantitative studies of focusing on a too narrow definition of 'politics' and 'the political'⁶. They argue that research such as the Citizen Audit by Seyd, Whiteley and Pattie (2002), impose a narrow conception of politics and political participation on their respondents. Although the Citizen Audit expands the definition of participation to include activities such as organisational membership and serving the community, political participation remains defined in orthodox, state-centric terms and is independent of civic/social participation⁷.

Within these 'top-down' approaches to participation, non-participation in these 'political' activities is interpreted as apathy. According to O'Toole *et al.*, this is an outcome of quantitative research methods which, 'in striving for parsimonious explanatory models, can make crude simplifications'. As result, an individual who does not vote, or engage in other conventional activities, but

³ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, p 7

⁴ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, pp 7-8

⁵ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, p 8

⁶ O'Toole, T., *et al.*, (2003) *Tuning out or left out? Participation and non-participation among young people*, *Contemporary Politics* (9), 1, p 46

⁷ O'Toole, T., *et al.*, (2003) *Tuning out or left out? Participation and non-participation among young people*, *Contemporary Politics* (9), 1, pp 47-48

who is active informally in a local anti-racism campaign, might be labelled as politically apathetic⁸.

Neither does such mainstream literature argue O'Toole *et al.*, take into account the particular circumstances and issues affecting young people and the way they view politics. This omission leads to a failure to consider generation effects – distinctive attitudes developed by the young which they share over time, and life-cycle effects, which arise from the similar circumstances shared by young people, which are different from other age groups and change as they grow older⁹.

To move away from the political participation/political apathy dichotomy created by such studies, O'Toole *et al.*, propose an expansion of the definition of 'the political'. Recognition of how individuals conceive politics and how they relate to it would allow 'the political' to be seen as a 'lived experience', which reflects their circumstances and experiences, as opposed to a narrow arena:

*'... It is wholly inappropriate research design to impose a conception of 'the political' that is focused on one or more arenas. Instead, the conception of 'the political' must be broadened out by focusing on how individuals themselves conceive of politics.'*¹⁰

Phelps (2006), however, defends such quantitative analyses. He argues that understanding why young people are not as involved in conventional politics as previous generations were remains important. According to Phelps, the assertion that alternative modes of participation discussed in qualitative research are unique to the current generation of young people could be false. To him, it is quite possible that previous generations of young people took part in similar activities. To argue otherwise signifies a 'reluctance to address whether youth involvement in unconventional political activity is a function of their stage of the political life-cycle'¹¹. Furthermore, to assume that involvement in these activities stems from mainstream politics' failure to connect with young people puts the blame for non-participation 'too squarely on the shoulders of politicians, political processes and institutions without sufficient evidence.'¹²

⁸ O'Toole, T., *et al.*, (2003) *Tuning out or left out? Participation and non-participation among young people*, *Contemporary Politics* (9), 1, p 48

⁹ O'Toole, T., *et al.*, (2003) *Tuning out or left out? Participation and non-participation among young people*, *Contemporary Politics* (9), 1, p 48

¹⁰ O'Toole, T., *et al.*, (2003) *Tuning out or left out? Participation and non-participation among young people*, *Contemporary Politics* (9), 1, p 53

¹¹ Phelps, E., (2006), *Young citizens and declining electoral turnout: trends and explanations*, Paper prepared for delivery at The Elections, Public Opinion and Parties annual conference, Nottingham University, 2006, p 3

¹² Phelps, E., (2006), *Young citizens and declining electoral turnout: trends and explanations*, Paper prepared for delivery at The Elections, Public Opinion and Parties annual conference, Nottingham University, 2006, p 3

Taking into consideration the debate over the definition of 'political participation', the first section of the chapter examines the more orthodox forms of participation, voting and party membership. A discussion of the barriers to participation faced by young people then follows. Finally, young people's participation, as defined in their own terms, is explored.

3.2 Young people's disengagement from formal politics

3.2.1 Voting

Decline in voter turnout among the general population is well documented. In 2001, just over half (59.1 per cent) of the electorate went to the polling stations - 12 per cent less than the number who voted in the 1997 election and 25 per cent less than in 1950 (Phelps, 2004)¹³. Although turnout recovered slightly in 2005 by rising 2.1 per cent to 61.2 per cent, this was still well below the average figure for British general elections (Phelps, 2006)¹⁴.

Analysis by Phelps shows that the disinclination to vote began in 1992 and continued and increased between 1997 and 2001. Figures show that turnout among younger voters has fallen most dramatically with differences between the youngest and oldest age groupings increasing sharply between 1992 and 2001. While turnout of under-25s in 1992 stood at 75 per cent, this fell to just under 50 per cent in 2001. In comparison, turnout of those aged 64 and over remained well above 80 per cent in both elections¹⁵.

In their quantitative analysis of the attitudes and experiences of 12-19 year olds, Park *et al.*, (2004) found that a sizeable minority of teenagers – nearly 20 per cent – see voting as 'a waste of time'¹⁶. This finding is supported by research from MORI (2003) which found that half of young people do not believe that election outcomes are very important to them personally¹⁷. In their study of 11 to 18 year olds, three in ten say they do not know which party they would vote for if there were a general election tomorrow, while just one in eight (12 per cent) say they are absolutely certain that they would vote¹⁸.

3.2.2 Political parties

The studies by Park *et al.*, (2004) and MORI (2003) confirm that young people's knowledge of and affiliation with Britain's political parties has declined in recent years. The survey by Park *et al.*, reveals that there has

¹³ Phelps, E., (2004), *Young Citizens and Changing Electoral Turnout, 1964-2001*, *Political Science Quarterly* (75) 3, p 238

¹⁴ Phelps, E., (2006), *Young citizens and declining electoral turnout: trends and explanations*, Paper prepared for delivery at The Elections, Public Opinion and Parties annual conference, Nottingham University, 2006, p 2

¹⁵ Phelps, E., (2004), *Young Citizens and Changing Electoral Turnout, 1964-2001*, *Political Science Quarterly* (75) 3, pp 241-242

¹⁶ Park, A., *et al.*, *Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, p 20

¹⁷ MORI (for Nestle Family Monitor), (2003), *Young People's Attitudes towards Politics*, p 32

¹⁸ MORI (for Nestle Family Monitor), (2003), *Young People's Attitudes towards Politics*, pp 33-34

been a significant increase in the number of young people who said they were neither a supporter of a particular party nor felt closer to one party than they did to another. Between 1994 and 2003, this group had grown from 56 per cent to 78 per cent¹⁹.

Figures from the MORI survey show that young people have, at best, a limited knowledge of political parties and their leaders. Just over half of respondents said they know 'a lot' or at least 'a little' about the Labour party, while only two in five said the same for the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats. Knowledge of minority parties is even lower: just under a quarter claimed to know a little about the British National Party (24 per cent) and the Green Party (22 per cent), while knowledge levels about Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party and the UK Independence Party hovered at around 10 per cent²⁰.

3.2.3 Implications of non-participation

The decline in levels of turnout and political party affiliation in recent years could have a serious impact on Britain's democracy in the future as there is evidence to suggest that casting a vote in one election affects the probability of voting in subsequent elections. For example, research by Gerber, Green and Shachar (2003) found that the influence of past voting exceeds the effects of age and education reported in previous studies.

Gerber, Green and Shachar's 1998 experiment in New Haven, Connecticut, randomly divided 25,200 registered voters into two groups. One group was assigned treatment conditions in which they were urged to vote through direct mail or face-to-face canvassing. The remaining registered voters were put into a control group and were contacted neither by mail nor in person. Compared to the control group, the treatment groups were significantly more likely to vote in 1998. The treatment groups were also significantly more likely to vote in local elections held in November 1999. After deriving a statistical estimator to isolate the effect of habit, the researchers found that voting in one election substantially increases the likelihood of voting in future²¹.

Gerber, Green and Shachar suggest four hypotheses to explain this finding. The first asserts that the political environment reinforces levels of political participation. When a registered voter does not vote, they are less likely to attract the attention of future campaigning. Voting, therefore, is self-reinforcing

¹⁹ Park, A., *et al.*, *Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, p 21

²⁰ MORI (for Nestle Family Monitor), (2003), *Young People's Attitudes towards Politics*, p 38

²¹ Gerber, A., Green, D., Shachar, R., (2003), *Voting May Be Habit-Forming: Evidence from a Randomised Field Experiment*, *American Journal of Political Science* (47) 3, p 540

as parties and interest groups have an incentive to focus attention on active voters²².

A second explanation argues that feelings of civic obligation, levels of partisanship or interest in politics influence turnout – that political participation alters one’s sense of personal efficacy. The third hypothesis focuses on the act of voting itself and ‘conative’ attitudes toward voting - positive and negative feelings about engaging in the act of voting itself. Registered non-voters might be apprehensive about the mechanics of voting and could, therefore, associate voting with negative images. For those who do vote, the act of voting becomes associated with more positive images²³.

The fourth hypothesis explains the finding by examining the impact of participation on citizens themselves. Voting confirms and reinforces one’s self-image as a civic-minded, politically involved citizen. The more one votes, the more one interprets voting as ‘what people like me do on election day’. On the other hand, abstention weakens this self-conception and the feelings of obligation which emanate from it²⁴.

²² Gerber, A., Green, D., Shachar, R., (2003), *Voting May Be Habit-Forming: Evidence from a Randomised Field Experiment*, *American Journal of Political Science* (47) 3, p 548

²³ Gerber, A., Green, D., Shachar, R., (2003), *Voting May Be Habit-Forming: Evidence from a Randomised Field Experiment*, *American Journal of Political Science* (47) 3, p 548

²⁴ Gerber, A., Green, D., Shachar, R., (2003), *Voting May Be Habit-Forming: Evidence from a Randomised Field Experiment*, *American Journal of Political Science* (47) 3, p 548

3.3 Young people and politics

3.3.1 Issues of concern

Research into disengagement has found that as a group, young people are interested in politics when defined broadly and that their views and priorities differ from those of older generations. Sloam (2007) classifies these explanations as 'alternative values' theories which argue that young people's participation has reflected a general trend away from electoral participation towards non-electoral participation²⁵. Alternative values are discussed further in the chapter.

Sloam argues that although young people are still interested in 'traditional concerns', such as healthcare and education, issues of individual interest (for example, better facilities) and issues of generation concern (such as drugs) are of more importance. Post-materialist and international issues, like the environment and fair-trade, also resonate with today's young people²⁶. Recent research by YouthNet (2008) supports this point. It found that 'places to socialise' and 'global warming and climate change' topped the list of their respondents' local and global concerns²⁷.

In their qualitative survey of youth participation in local Government, Molly *et al.*, (2002) asked respondents, aged 16 to 25, to generate a list of issues which were of interest or concern to them. The survey showed that young people have diverse and wide-ranging concerns, including those of individual and traditional interest, as well as post-materialist and traditional issues. Although respondents rarely mentioned national or local politics explicitly as a concern, a number of the issues fall under the jurisdiction of local authorities and/or national government²⁸. Issues of concern to young people were:

- provision of social and leisure facilities;
- drugs and alcohol;
- crime and personal safety;
- education;
- employment;
- money;
- racism;
- policing strategies;
- housing;
- transport;
- international issues; and,

²⁵ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 553

²⁶ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 553

²⁷ YouthNet (2008), *Citizen X: Young people and citizenship*, pp 15-16

²⁸ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 31

- ‘exceptional concerns’ such as the environment and the criminal justice system²⁹.

The majority of these issues were connected to the young person’s personal and local circumstances as well as their life stage. Others, however, had more national relevance and were shared by young people regardless of their age or locality. Concern over such issues often arose out of personal experience. For example, a bad experience in hospital caused concern about the National Health Service, or working in a local benefits office had led to a more generic view about asylum seekers and benefit fraud. The media also played a key role in raising young people’s awareness of issues which did not affect them directly, although these concerns were less likely to be widespread³⁰.

Research by White *et al.*, (2000) into political interest among 14 to 24 year olds also found that young people are interested in a wide range of ‘single’ and more political issues. Similar to the Molloy *et al.*, study, the results showed that that concerns, in terms of their nature and breadth, were closely related to a respondent’s life stage. Yet unlike Molloy *et al.*, the White survey discerns four levels of concerns – personal, local national and global – which are listed in the table below³¹.

²⁹ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), pp 31-37

³⁰ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 38

³¹ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people’s politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, pp 6-7

Personal	Local	National	Global
School/college experience	Labour market	Education	Relations with other countries
Acquiring qualifications	Lack of social facilities	Employment	Wars
Job availability and security	Drug use and pushers	Economy	Conditions in other countries
Lack of money	Crime and violence	Discrimination	Nationalism and devolution
Social life	Policing strategies	Drug laws and education	Protection of the environment
Discrimination	Family planning advice	Crime and justice	Preservation of wildlife
Drug and alcohol use	Unreliable transport	Age limits	
Personal safety		Housing	
Relationships		Environment	
Treatment of young people		Animal cruelty	
Keeping fit and healthy		Transport policy	
Self image/identity		Government and politics	
Under-age sex		Media	
Invasion of privacy			

3.3.2 Desire to get involved

Despite evidence documenting the non-participation of young people, there is research to suggest that young people would like to have more of a voice in formal politics. The 2005 Home Office Citizenship Survey, for example, found that more than four in five (81 per cent) of young people aged 12 to 15 agreed that there should be a way to give young people a voice in politics. Only 12 per cent of respondents disagreed with giving young people a voice³².

YouthNet's 2008 Citizenship survey also documents an enthusiasm among young people aged 16 to 24 to participate. The survey found that over 80 per cent of respondents who thought they could do more to improve their local community, said they would like to: almost half (48 per cent) wanted to do a little more, and more than a third (36 per cent) a lot more³³. The results also found that half of respondents said they would be more involved if the results of their actions were more visible, while four in ten (41 per cent) said they

³² Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children and Young People's Survey*, pp 94-95

³³ YouthNet (2008), *Citizen X: Young people and citizenship*, p 21

would get involved if others did too. The same proportion (39 per cent) said they would do more if there were opportunities to do so online, through social networks or via mobile phones³⁴.

3.4 Barriers to participation

3.4.1 Young people's perceptions

3.4.1.1 Low levels of knowledge, awareness and understanding

Studies have shown that there is a lack of understanding and interest in politics. Around half of respondents in the 2003 MORI survey agreed that they 'don't know enough about the people you vote for at General Elections', a similar number said that they 'don't know enough about the political parties you vote for at General Elections'. When asked why they might not vote, nearly half of those who are certain not to vote say they might not because they are 'just not interested in politics'³⁵.

A lack of knowledge was also identified as a barrier to participation by the 2000 White *et al.*, study. The study uncovered a perception of politics as a 'complex and alien' subject which young people found hard to grasp and understand. In particular, the study found that young people were uncertain about who to vote for partly because they did not have enough information at their disposal to make an informed choice. It was noted that an unwillingness to vote for an unknown candidate was exceptionally underpinned by a concern that their lack of knowledge could lead to an unfavourable candidate or party being elected³⁶. One respondent (female, 19 years) commented:

*'It's just that young people don't seem to [know], nobody goes up to them and says 'Ere you go, politics. If you've got anything you wanna know go and phone them or go and see them', or whatever. It's like at school, if somebody says. If you've got questions about your career, that's who you can reach to see about it. And they're given that information but there isn't anybody that does the same for politics so they're not going to know.'*³⁷

Another respondent (male 18 years) said:

³⁴ YouthNet (2008), *Citizen X: Young people and citizenship*, p 23

³⁵ MORI (for Nestle Family Monitor), (2003), *Young People's Attitudes towards Politics*, pp 33-35

³⁶ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 39

³⁷ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 35

*'Say I wanted to... do something, like complain about something, I wouldn't know what to do – I think there's very little education about how the system actually is organised.'*³⁸

A perceived lack of basic information about local government was felt to have led to a lack of awareness and understanding of local government. Respondents in the 2002 Molloy study said that they had never been provided with an understanding of what the local authority did and what its responsibilities were. Neither were they aware of what their local authority was doing. Local councils were criticised by young people for not circulating information about their activities, policies or plans. Compared to central government, which had a much higher profile and about which information is constantly available in the media, local government was perceived as being very 'quiet'³⁹.

3.4.1.2 Low awareness of how to participate

A number of studies have suggested that one barrier to engagement among young people is a low awareness of *how* to participate at both the local and national level. The 2003 MORI survey, for example, found that one in five (19 per cent) say they are certain they would not vote because they 'wouldn't know how to vote'⁴⁰.

The Molloy *et al.*, report on local government showed that there is a lack of knowledge about local government. Some young people reported having no idea of who to contact at the council about their views. They also said that the local authority never publicised events or initiatives that allowed young people to take part. More publicity by the council to raise awareness was suggested by some as a means of encouraging young people to take part⁴¹.

3.4.1.3 Low levels of interest/salience

Lack of interest in politics has also been highlighted as a barrier to participation. The 2004 Park *et al.*, records a decline in political interest among 12 to 19 year olds between 1994 and 2003. In these years, the proportion of young people who said they have no political interest at all increased from nearly a quarter (27 per cent) to over a third (36 per cent), while the proportion saying they had a great deal or quite a lot of interest fell,

³⁸ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 35

³⁹ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 51

⁴⁰ MORI (for Nestle Family Monitor), (2003), *Young People's Attitudes towards Politics*, pp 33-35

⁴¹ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 64

from 12 per cent in 1994 to 8 per cent in 2003⁴². Based on their qualitative evidence, White *et al.*, suggest that a key reason why uninterested young people did not vote was because politics was of no relevance to them. Boredom with politics as a subject and a preoccupation with other issues was a major driver of apathy⁴³.

The Molloy *et al.*, research into young people's participation in local government also identified a lack of salience of local policies in young people's lives. In comparison to national government, local government work was perceived as mundane and localised and, as a result, uninteresting. This perception was often caused by a narrow conception of local government which equates it with local service provision. Other young people were not interested in local government as they had other priorities, such as getting qualifications and planning for the future. The research findings, as well as earlier literature, suggest that being interested in local government depends on a perception of something as being relevant or relating to one's own life and a young person's level of attachment or interest in their local area⁴⁴.

3.4.1.4 Empowerment

Young people's lack of empowerment has been emphasised in a number of studies of participation. White *et al.*, for example state that a feeling of powerlessness was repeatedly emphasised in their research. The belief that they were unable to affect the outcome of an election put some young people off voting. Young people also reported a lack of opportunity to get involved⁴⁵. Survey evidence by Henn, Weinstein and Forrest (2005) into young people eligible to vote, indicate that young people do not feel there exist 'meaningful' opportunities to influence politics. Over 80 per cent of respondents thought that they had little or no influence on politics and political affairs. According to Henn *et al.*, 's external efficacy index, only 11 per cent believed it was possible for young people like themselves to influence the political decision-making world. Seven times as many young people (81 per cent) claimed to lack such influence⁴⁶.

Even when there are opportunities to participate, young people are often reluctant to take them up as they believe politicians and government representatives are not interested in their views. The survey by White *et al.*,

⁴² Park, A., *et al.*, *Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, p 16

⁴³ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 39

⁴⁴ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 52

⁴⁵ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 39

⁴⁶ Henn, M., Weinstein, M., Forrest, S., (2005), *Uninterested Youth? Young People's Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain*, *Political Studies* 2005 (53), p 566

found that young people believe their views are ignored by politicians who dismiss their ideas and opinions as ‘childish and unrealistic’. Instead, young people thought politicians only listen to those with money and status. This feeling of powerlessness put young people off voting and getting involved since they felt it would require a considerable amount of effort before they would begin to be heard⁴⁷. This perception was echoed at local government level: young people in the Molloy study believed that local authorities treat adults and young people differently. This was because young people thought older people did not trust them to make intelligent or serious decisions – their lack of life experience meant they were immature and unstable⁴⁸.

3.4.1.5 Disillusionment with the democratic process

A lack of trust and faith in politicians to tell the truth and keep their promises was reported in the White *et al.*, survey as being a disincentive to vote⁴⁹. Sloam (2007) also highlights a distinct lack of trust in, suspicion of, and frustration with the political process among young people who do not participate in politics⁵⁰. Sloam points out that this declining trust in traditional political institutions has been mirrored by a greater faith in non-government organisations. While only 17 per cent of young people have a lot of trust in the UK Parliament, 11 per cent in the government, 10 per cent in politicians, and 6 per cent in political parties, around a third have a lot of trust in Amnesty International and Greenpeace⁵¹.

Negative feelings toward national government were found by Molloy’s study to have significant repercussions for young people’s attitudes towards local government. A lack of trust in politicians to tell the truth, keep their promises and be accountable appeared to be instrumental in turning some young people off local government⁵².

In contrast, the survey by Henn *et al.*, found that young people do appear to have faith in the democratic process itself and are generally supportive of the notion of elections. However, the data revealed that young people would only vote if they cared who won indicating that levels of youth political engagement

⁴⁷ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people’s politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 35

⁴⁸ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 65

⁴⁹ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people’s politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 39

⁵⁰ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, pp 556-557

⁵¹ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 553

⁵² Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 53

are largely conditional on their perceptions of the process and the resulting outcomes⁵³.

3.4.1.6 No perceived need

Closely related to the finding that young people have faith in the democratic process, was that of the Molloy *et al.*, study whose data revealed that some young people said they were not interested in local government as the existing system appears to work well. This was sometimes linked to the low profile of local government and lack of information from the local authority which seemed to suggest that the system was working⁵⁴. That 'things were running smoothly' was also given as a reason for non-participation in local government. Young people believed that local government would have conducted research before making any decisions and so would not think to question this. Others felt they should not have to get involved because other people were paid to take this responsibility⁵⁵.

3.4.1.7 Images of politicians and political parties

Young people appear to hold sceptical views of elected politicians and government personnel. Perceptions of politicians are often expressed using negative language. Findings from the White *et al.*, survey discerned four main criticisms levelled at politicians by young people. The first was that they are untrustworthy, sometimes even hypocritical. The second accusation made by young people against politicians was that they are self interested, purely concerned with being elected and are only involved in politics to benefit from the system by, for example, changing laws to suite themselves or to secure public money. Young people also thought politicians are ineffective, that they do nothing but 'sit on their backsides' and talk 'waffle' and argue 'round in circles' over pointless matters. Finally, young people believed politicians to be remote and unrepresentative owing to the perceived age gap and different social backgrounds. They also said they are hard to understand because of their use of jargon, big words, facts and figures⁵⁶.

These perceptions of politicians are again mirrored at the local level. Molloy *et al.*, found that young people had extremely poor images of their local council. Like their national counterparts, council personnel were believed to be remote and inaccessible, inert and ineffective, incompetent, out of touch, and self-

⁵³ Henn, M., Weinstein, M., Forrest, S., (2005), *Uninterested Youth? Young People's Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain*, *Political Studies* 2005 (53), p 568

⁵⁴ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 53

⁵⁵ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 65

⁵⁶ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, pp 26-30

interested⁵⁷. Evidence from the Comparative Youth Survey and the European Social Survey also show that young people in Belgium and Canada have a negative view of politics which is characterised by low levels of political participation, interest and trust⁵⁸.

3.4.1.8 Contributory factors

The survey into young people's participation in local government by Molloy *et al.*, found that an additional group of factors are also important in explaining non-participation. However, these are less central than the factors discussed above.

3.4.1.8.1 Peer pressure

Peer group pressure was mentioned by non-participating and participating young people as a barrier preventing involvement. If politics was not included in the interest and hobbies of their peer group, young people claimed they would be perceived as 'weird' if they took part in local government and politics⁵⁹.

3.4.1.8.2 Images of those who do participate

The image of the people who run and participate in activities such as council meetings or youth groups can be alienating for some young people. Evidence in the studies by Molloy *et al.*, and White *et al.*, show that some young people believe that only 'upper' and 'middle class' people get involved in politics and those who are well spoken, well educated – the 'swots' or 'nerds'⁶⁰. These types of barriers were particularly mentioned by young people who felt they were from a very different background and that they would not feel comfortable in this type of environment⁶¹.

3.4.1.8.3 Confidence

A lack of confidence was a related reason for not participating in local government. Some people feared expressing their opinions in a group environment and being challenged by others. The perception of those involved as more educated and from a higher social class also affected levels of confidence⁶².

⁵⁷ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), pp 42 -44

⁵⁸ Quintelier, E., (2007), *Differences in political participation between young and old people*, *Contemporary Politics* (13), 2, p 176

⁵⁹ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 65

⁶⁰ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 31

⁶¹ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 66

⁶² Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 66

3.5 Theories of non-participation

3.5.1 Life-cycle effects

Theories which explain non-participation in terms of life-cycle effects focus on chronological differences rather than generational ones. The theory, represented by David Denver, asserts that disengagement of young people is not a new phenomenon and as young people age and develop a greater stake in society (for example, as they marry, procreate, accumulate debt, own houses and mortgages, and pay taxes) they will become more interested in politics. Accordingly, 2001 was not an aberrant election but simply a low turnout election that reinforced the existing pattern of voter engagement⁶³.

Goerres (2006), in his article on ageing and voting, analyses the reasons for higher turnout among older people in Europe supports life-cycle arguments. He argues that non-political factors are most important in explaining the higher turnout of older voters. The most significant factor comes from individual ageing through which voters habituate the socially conformist behaviour of voting. This is supported by the findings of Gerber *et al.*, (2003), discussed above, which show that voters are influenced by their own past political behaviour⁶⁴.

Alternative explanations argue that material interest could increase turnout with age: the older we are, the more we have at stake in the political system as we possess more and are more dependent on public provision. However, if this were true, the differences between countries would not be how they are and the fact that age differences are largest in low turnout countries would remain unexplained. A second hypothesis could link the rise in turnout with age to a generational difference in acknowledging voting as an important function of democracy. Yet, Gorres questions why should the elderly in Ireland share the same sense of usefulness in voting as older Poles. Both groups have experienced very different forms of democracy which makes finding an overriding generational effect in so many countries improbable.

Phelps (2004), in his longitudinal investigation into young citizens' political participation from 1964 to 2001, questions the existence of a life-cycle effect in British elections⁶⁵. In his analysis, ten age cohorts were identified who reached the age of 18 between the elections of 1964 and 2001. By calculating their age at their first opportunity to vote and then recalculating their age at

⁶³ Russell, A., (2005), *Political Parties as Vehicles of Political Engagement*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (58),3, p 556

⁶⁴ Gorres, A., (2006), *Why are Older People More Likely to Vote? The Impact of Ageing on Electoral Turnout in Europe*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (30), pp 109-111

⁶⁵ Phelps, E., (2004), *Young Citizens and Changing Electoral Turnout, 1964-2001*, *Political Science Quarterly* (75),3, p242-244

each subsequent general election, it is possible to map their turnout characteristics as they age.

From the analysis, it is possible to see that the mean levels of turnout are similar up to 1992, but the deviation from the mean turnout is much greater among the two youngest cohorts for which it is possible to calculate a mean. Deviation from the 1992 turnout figures is more pronounced as the cohorts get younger. Thus, it appears that the 1992-2001 period has had a much greater impact on the youngest section of voters than older groups. The analysis shows that a higher proportion from the cohorts voted as they age. There are differences, however. While turnout increased at each election among those who first voted in 1970, turnout of first-time voters in 1974 declined with each election until 1987. At the next election in 1992, Phelps argues that it is difficult to separate out the effect of the period 1992-2001, which significantly affected all cohorts. Thus, the existence of a life-cycle effect is open to question.

3.5.2 Generational effects

A generational effect refers to a set of profound changes that may affect young people in a way that does not affect other age groups. It is an affect which adheres to this group as they age and, over time, as one cohort replaces another, their values and attitudinal and participatory characteristics are likely to become the norm rather than the exception⁶⁶.

Phelps argues that longitudinal data show considerable evidence of a generational effect occurring between 1992 and 2001. The levels of turnout show a downturn in this period but, importantly, these are more marked in the younger cohorts than in the older cohorts. Sharp declines occur at a more advanced stage of the life-cycle within cohorts six and seven (first-time voters in 1983 and 1987). According to the life-cycle argument, this is where turnout would be expected to rise, not fall. Although it is not possible to say with any confidence that there has been a generational effect until the youngest cohorts have progressed further through the life-cycle, the data shows that the level of decline in turnout is unprecedented when compared to other cohorts⁶⁷.

A generational shift, if proven, may represent an inability of young people to relate to conventional politics. Research to explain this shift has focused on a range of issues, including the changing relationship between the individual and the state, socio-economic change, political factors, and a change in people's values. Each of these factors is discussed below.

⁶⁶ Phelps, E., (2004), *Young Citizens and Changing Electoral Turnout, 1964-2001*, *Political Science Quarterly* (75),3 , p 239

⁶⁷ Phelps, E., (2004), *Young Citizens and Changing Electoral Turnout, 1964-2001*, *Political Science Quarterly* (75),3 , pp 244-245

3.5.2.1 The individual and the state

There are studies, such as those by Inglehart and Giddens, which claim that the process of individualisation has led to a generation of young people who see themselves as distanced from the state and politics. As young people come to view the provision of housing, jobs and pensions as their own responsibility, they expect less from the state and, consequently, have a weaker sense of solidarity along the traditional industrial cleavages of British politics. This is evidenced by the decline in trade union membership since the 1970s and disillusionment with the political process among younger cohorts⁶⁸.

Pirie and Worcester, for example, have identified an apolitical 'Millennial Generation' (1998). This generation have, as a result of the state's increasing withdrawal from people's lives, become less and less involved in civic and political activities. They argue that young people do not vote because politics is no longer relevant to them, it neither meets their needs nor addresses their concerns⁶⁹.

Marsh *et al.*, (2007) believe that arguments regarding the state's withdrawal from people's lives, especially young people, may have been overplayed. They draw attention to the fact that, owing to their age, the state still plays a substantial role in young people's lives. Young people, they argue, have limited economic autonomy, do not enjoy full political, legal or social rights and experience compulsory vocational, education or training schemes and therefore are closely linked to the state⁷⁰.

3.5.2.2 Socio-economic change

Sloam (2007), in his article on youth participation in the UK, discusses the importance of socio-economic conditions in relation to political participation. He outlines the work of MacDonald who emphasises social exclusion and the importance of 'social inequities and institutions in shaping youth transitions'⁷¹.

MacDonald argues that social exclusion from the labour market and the welfare state has weakened in recent years affecting people's responsibility towards the state. Social change has also led to more complex and less structured youth transitions to adulthood. Hall *et al.*, believe that this has led to an increase in an individual's capacity for self-determination which has

⁶⁸ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 550

⁶⁹ Marsh, D., O'Toole, T., Jones, S., (2007), *Young People and Politics in the UK*, pp 100-101

⁷⁰ Marsh, D., O'Toole, T., Jones, S., (2007), *Young People and Politics in the UK*, p 101

⁷¹ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, pp 551-522

weakened any sense of common purpose and ownership in the political system⁷².

3.5.2.3 Political factors

3.5.2.3.1 Registration

Levels of voter turnout cannot be fully understood without considering electoral registration. In their report of voter engagement and young people, The Electoral Commission (2002), state that non-registration remains one of the key features behind low levels of turnout among young voters despite initiatives to increase registration. MORI data show that over 10 per cent of non-voters aged between 18 and 24 in 2001 were not registered on the electoral roll or they at least blamed non-registration for not voting⁷³.

Respondents in the study by White *et al.*, registration issues were also cited by some young people as a reason for not voting. Some had decided not to register, while others had registered but, owing to their transient lifestyle, had not been able to vote on the day. The survey also reported some reticence about joining the electoral roll because it would result in payment of council tax⁷⁴.

3.5.2.3.2 Failure to engage

According to Russell (2005), contemporary political parties have, in recent years, failed to engage the public, in particular voters beyond their core constituents. The increasing managerialism in parties, giving greater central party control over candidates, has meant that local campaigning has lost its relevance for national success. Voter fatigue with politics, argues Russell, is evidenced by the increasing success of minority parties and the collapse of voting in geographical and ideological heartlands⁷⁵.

Sloam (2007) also argues that negative campaigning and a narrow focus on 'key voters' in marginal constituencies has led to a failure to engage young people. Furthermore, Sloam highlights that the non-participation of young people in electoral politics can become self-reinforcing: when turnout among this cohort are so low, political parties are tempted to ignore the youth vote altogether⁷⁶.

⁷² Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 552

⁷³ The Electoral Commission (2002), *Voter engagement and young people*, p 20

⁷⁴ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 39

⁷⁵ Russell, A., (2005), *Political Parties as Vehicles of Political Engagement*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (58) 3, pp 558-559

⁷⁶ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 565

Russell cites the 2001 general election campaign as an example where parties failed to ignite public interest. Rather than acting as the 'drivers of engagement', the main political parties did not address the public's agenda 'because of their electoral obsession with effective votes'. During the campaign, the Labour government's main aim was to seek a further term in office, while the Conservatives focused on their core vote as opposed to new voters, and the Liberal Democrat's priority was gaining seats from the Conservatives⁷⁷. As the former Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, commented on the Conservatives strategy to bolster their natural support rather than set an expansive agenda: 'The focus on hard faced Little Englander rhetoric created a disastrous image at odds with the real nature of Conservatism...It created a party as unelectable in 2001 as Labour was in the 1980s.'⁷⁸

Despite their determination not to repeat the mistakes of 2001, there is little evidence to suggest that the 2005 Conservative campaign was significantly better at engaging the public. Russell argues that their use of 'dog-whistle' politics – sending discrete signals to be received by only selected segments of the electorate – was a mixed-blessing. For example, using the issue of immigration as an as an election theme secured the backing of traditional supporters but may have also persuaded the anti-Conservative vote to solidify⁷⁹.

3.5.2.3.3 Youth sections of parties

Russell's analysis of the main political parties' youth bodies shows that they, too, have not been successful at encouraging participation. Rather than bridging social capital and reaching out to the unengaged, such attempts have bonded or brought together young people already engaged in politics.

Furthermore, the parties have had mixed success in encouraging their own youth sections to influence their policies. While *Conservative Future* seems to lack any formal power, *Young Labour* does have a place in the policy-making structure of the main party with a youth representative on the National Executive Council and a number of representatives on the National Policy Forum. On the other hand, the *Liberal Democrat Youth and Students*, as a Specified Associated Organisation within the party, have significant representation within the party structure. However, Russell highlights that it is probably easier for groups within a small political party, such as the Liberal Democrats, to have influence than those in one of the larger ones⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ Russell, A., (2005), *Political Parties as Vehicles of Political Engagement*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (58) 3, p 559

⁷⁸ Russell, A., (2005), *Political Parties as Vehicles of Political Engagement*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (58) 3, p 563

⁷⁹ Russell, A., (2005), *Political Parties as Vehicles of Political Engagement*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (58) 3, p 564

⁸⁰ Russell, A., (2005), *Political Parties as Vehicles of Political Engagement*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (58) 3, pp 564-568

3.5.2.3.4 Political culture

Contemporary political culture has been identified as a key reason behind the disengagement of young people from politics and democracy. Coleman (2007), states that current political citizenship has become disconnected from the cultural citizenship of young people. In his article exploring the emerging participatory models shaped around the reality game show Big Brother, he draws out differences between the programme's contestants and politicians. While Big Brother's format allows viewers to see 'an impression of unrehearsed authenticity', politicians, on the other hand, have disengaged their young audiences because of their 'one way conversation' which is removed from 'daily experience, [is] over complicated, demographically exclusive and excessively solemn'⁸¹.

Politicians have always had a difficult relationship with personal intimacy, argues Coleman. The contrast between everyday talk and political speech is considerable: while the former tends to be spontaneous and conversational, the latter is scripted, rehearsed, impersonal and abstract. It is this impersonal abstraction of political talk that disengaged citizens find disingenuous and alienating⁸². As Coleman comments:

*'There is widespread contemporary distrust of staged appeals to the public: the mock sincerity of the eye-to-camera politician; the scripted eloquence of political speech-making; the chatty blog which was clearly written by an enthusiastic research assistant; the posed portraits of politicians and their stage extra families.'*⁸³

3.5.2.4 Value change

As discussed earlier, some authors argue that young people's non-participation is a consequence of a dislocation between their values and those of political parties. Engagement has reflected a general trend away from electoral participation towards non-electoral participation and single issue politics⁸⁴.

According to alternative values theories, young people's participation cannot be explained by reference to the traditional left-right divisions in party politics. Research by Inglehart and Welzel, for example, suggests that since the 1970s

⁸¹ Coleman, S., (2007), *How democracies have disengaged from young people* in B., Loader (ed.) *Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*, p 167

⁸² Coleman, S., (2007), *How democracies have disengaged from young people* in B., Loader (ed.) *Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*, p 178

⁸³ Coleman, S., (2007), *How democracies have disengaged from young people* in B., Loader (ed.) *Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*, p 177

⁸⁴ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 552

there has been a considerable increase in emphasis on individual autonomy, self-expression and choice which has led to single issues politics and new social movements⁸⁵. Inglehart argues that this shift in political orientations has resulted from a breakdown in the collectivist values in a postmaterialist era. A generation characterised by increasing affluence, consumerism and individualism is more inclined to participate in issue-led, rather than ideological politics, and are more concerned with animal rights and the environment than industrial relations⁸⁶.

3.6 Young people and participation

Mainstream, or orthodox, studies have been criticised for employing a too narrow definition of 'politics' and 'the political'. As discussed above, O'Toole *et al.*, (2003) argue that the failure of such studies to perceive politics as a 'lived experience' has led to a participation/political apathy dichotomy where a young person who is active in a local community campaign is labelled as politically apathetic⁸⁷. To move away from such 'crude simplifications', O'Toole suggests an exploration of how individuals conceive and relate to politics. This approach would allow a broadening of the 'political arena' to reflect individuals' circumstances and experiences.

This chimes with Russell's (2007) specific criticism of the remit of the Youth Citizenship Commission before its recent redefinition. He found its then focus on voting and levels of trust in politicians to be in tension with the extensive literature on youth disengagement. This had 'repeatedly demonstrated that young people in the UK have a complex pattern of civic engagement engaging in a wide repertoire of participatory activities.' He went on to suggest that the new generations of citizens were particularly inclined to engage in politics as individuals rather than as part of large organisations.⁸⁸

Studies which have investigated young people's perceptions of participation have shown that there are many different definitions of political activity. For example, the White *et al.*, (2000) study of political interest and engagement among 14 to 24 year olds revealed that, for some, voting was seen as the only legitimate way in which young people could express their views or participate in politics. Others thought that political activity had to involve the government in some way. For these people, a political action could be signing a petition, demonstrating about government policy, political party membership, and lobbying an MP. Other respondents defined political action more broadly and

⁸⁵ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, pp 552-553

⁸⁶ Marsh, D., O'Toole, T., Jones, S., (2007), *Young People and Politics in the UK*, p 100

⁸⁷ O'Toole, T., *et al.*, (2003) *Tuning out or left out? Participation and non-participation among young people*, *Contemporary Politics* (9), 1, p 48

⁸⁸ Russell, A., (2007), *Youth and Political Engagement from Failing Politics? A response to the Governance of Britain Green Paper*, p 22

included activities which might directly or indirectly be related to politics such as joining a union or pressure group, writing to the Press, protesting to the local council⁸⁹.

Among the respondents, young people in the politically interested groups perceived a wider range of methods for engagement in politics than those in the uninterested groups. This finding was mirrored in Sloam's (2007) qualitative analysis of young people's perceptions and experiences of the political. His study found that non-activists had conventional views of politics, while activists had more reflective definitions of politics which included 'changing things through policies and laws' about 'decisions which affect us directly'⁹⁰.

Molly *et al.*, (2002), in their study of engagement in local government, found that definitions of participation varied. Some young people took a very broad view and believed that it could include passive action such as simply taking an interest or 'being part of the community'. Others thought it involved more proactive action or some degree of conscious effort to change something such as influencing the behaviour or attitudes of others, or raising awareness. In these terms, participation could include being involved in a protest or organising a petition⁹¹.

Some young people were unsure if engagement with a 'single issue' through a petition, for example, was participation. Others related participation to something on-going rather than a one-off activity such as signing a petition, protesting, and voting. The findings showed that there was some uncertainty over the difference between participation in local government and participation in the local community. Some young people saw some types of activity as voluntary work or worked which aimed to improve the local community as participation in local government. Others, however, were less sure and felt that these activities were 'more about improving the area than about politics'⁹².

Research by Lister *et al.*, (2005) examining young people's understandings and meanings of citizenship found that, in real life, distinctions between formal voluntary work, neighbourliness, informal political action, and other forms of social participation tend to break down. This led the authors to develop the notion of 'constructive social participation', a fluid and inclusive concept which is an expression of citizenship responsibility. It also embraces activities which

⁸⁹ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 34

⁹⁰ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 558

⁹¹ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 59

⁹² Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 59

are not a direct expression of citizenship but which indirectly strengthen citizenship through strengthening social capital⁹³.

Constructive social participation includes:

- voluntary work (informal and formal);
- informal political action (activities explicitly focused on bringing about or preventing change, for example campaigns or demonstrations);
- activities with political implications (actions with a political quality but which are not explicitly focused on change, for example, involvement in a society to promote inter-cultural relations);
- awareness raising;
- altruistic acts;
- and general social participation (building social capital, for example membership of sports or community organisations)⁹⁴.

A constructive social participation approach to citizenship, therefore, helps to bridge the non-participation-apathy divide which occurs when citizenship and participation are defined too narrowly. Such a broad approach allows politics to be seen as more of a 'lived experience' as opposed to a narrow arena.

Evidence from other countries also shows that young people participate in less traditional forms of engagement. Although they are restricted from participating by their age, young people in Belgium and Canada believe they can exert influence on society by belonging to an organisation, contacting people, or protesting. The European Social Survey, which includes 24 European countries, shows that new forms of participation are popular among young people with badge-wearing and demonstrating the most practised⁹⁵.

3.6.1 Forms of participation

Young people's non-participation in politics defined as voting and party membership was explored at the beginning of the chapter. Their engagement in a broader concept of politics will now be analysed taking into consideration their own definitions of participation outlined above.

3.6.1.1 Political and civic participation

The White *et al.*, study showed that even those young people classified as 'politically uninterested' seem to engage in some form of political activity. They tend to do so when issues have direct personal relevance to them or to their local community, for example the protection of leisure facilities or funding for further or higher education. A few respondents signed petitions in support of

⁹³ Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., Cox, L., (2005), *Negotiating Transitions to Citizenship: Report of Findings*, p 10

⁹⁴ Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., Cox, L., (2005), *Negotiating Transitions to Citizenship: Report of Findings*, pp 10-11

⁹⁵ Quintelier, E., (2007), *Differences in political participation between young and old people*, *Contemporary Politics* (13),2, pp 174-175

broader moral concerns, such as animal rights. When young 'politically uninterested' young people vote, they are more likely to vote in national rather than local or European elections. Respondents who were classified as 'politically interested' tended to be involved in a wider range of activities, including signing petitions, writing to politicians and demonstrating⁹⁶.

Respondents mentioned a number of different ways of getting involved in the Molloy *et al.*, (2002) study into participation in local government. The most common ways in which young people had got involved was through signing a petition or taking part in a survey. Some young people had attended protest marches or demonstrations about specific local issues. A small number of respondents had been involved in school councils or youth groups, contacted their local authority or attended council meetings. An exceptional number of respondents, who were purposively included in the sample, had participated in a local authority youth initiative⁹⁷.

The Home Office's Children and Young People's Survey on Citizenship (Farmer, 2005) asked respondents aged 12 to 15 about their formal and informal participation in civic and community activities. Overall, nearly half (49 per cent) claimed to have engaged in one of the specified civic activities in the past year. The majority (71 per cent) of those who had engaged had been involved in a school or club committee. Thirty-seven per cent had signed a petition, 12 per cent had attended a public meeting or rally, and 10 per cent had taken part in a demonstration or protested or contacted a local councillor or MP⁹⁸.

The survey found that a higher proportion of children and young people are involved in groups, clubs and organisations than adults. While 63 per cent of children and young people had given help to groups, clubs or organisations in the last year, the proportions among older age groups ranged from 39 per cent (20 to 24 year olds) and 44 per cent (16 to 19 year olds)⁹⁹. Among the children and young people who had given help, two thirds had collected or raised money and the same proportion had taken part in a sponsored activity. Just under a third (26 per cent) had helped to organise or run an event and 13 per cent had been a member of a committee¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁶ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 36

⁹⁷ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, pp 60-61

⁹⁸ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, pp 79-80

⁹⁹ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 123

¹⁰⁰ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 83

3.6.1.2 Volunteering

As a group, young people aged 16 to 24 are neither the most nor the least likely to volunteer. Figures from a survey by Low *et al.*, (2007) show that 43 per cent of respondents were regular volunteers, helping out more than once a month, while 13 per cent were occasional volunteers, helping out less than once a month¹⁰¹. The majority (73 per cent) volunteered in the voluntary and community sector, followed by the public sector (20 per cent) and the private sector (7 per cent)¹⁰².

The survey found that voluntary work in education organisations was the most popular among young volunteers followed by sport and religious organisations (43 per cent, 26 per cent and 25 per cent of respondents were involved in each of the organisations respectively)¹⁰³. The majority of respondents were involved in raising or handling money (61 per cent) and organising or helping to run an event (54 per cent)¹⁰⁴.

3.6.2 Facilitators of participation

To provide a comparison to their discussion of non-participation Molloy *et al.*, considered the experiences of young people active in local authority youth participation initiatives. Their study found that the reasons given by these young people for their involvement represent the opposite end of the spectrum to the reasons given for not participating.

3.6.2.1 Belief in the importance of young people's views being expressed

Belief in the importance of expressing their views was one of the clearest characteristics shared by those involved. This was especially true of younger participants who were not old enough to vote. Other young people were motivated by the wish to represent others¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰¹ Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A., Davis Smith, J., (2007), *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*, p 19

¹⁰² Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A., Davis Smith, J., (2007), *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*, p 24

¹⁰³ Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A., Davis Smith, J., (2007), *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*, p 26

¹⁰⁴ Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A., Davis Smith, J., (2007), *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*, p 30

¹⁰⁵ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, pp 71-72

3.6.2.2 Belief in the possibility of expressing views and influencing local government decisions

Feeling empowered was also an important motivator for young people who participated in local government¹⁰⁶. This finding is underscored by Sloam's (2007) study where one respondent commented, 'I do like putting my ideas forward and arguing for my rights... Yeah, in school definitely, but because I don't do it out of school I don't know. Yeah, in school I'm definitely listened to'¹⁰⁷.

3.6.2.3 Commitment to changes things

A third characteristic shared by young people participating was a commitment to try and change things. The focus of this desired change varied, however. Again, this point is echoed in Sloam's research and by one respondent: 'Me and my friends... we were transport leaders and we've brought the transport prices down for the young people. Yeah, we can change things'¹⁰⁸.

3.6.2.4 Knowing how to get involved

Young people who participate also have more awareness of how to get involved. Some of the young people had become involved after seeing advertisements or had been told about them. Both Molloy and Sloam note that much information is acquired by young people through their participation, as one respondent in Sloam's study said, 'Politics is changing me, the last six months I've gained so much knowledge, so much self-confidence, so much expertise, and a wide range of views... I think politics can change everybody's lives'¹⁰⁹.

3.6.2.5 Parental influence

Having parents who were interested in politics and who talked about politics at home was cited by some participating young people in explanation of their involvement¹¹⁰.

This finding is supported by research carried out by Andolina *et al.*, (2003). In their study to demonstrate how families play key roles in encouraging participation of 15 to 25 year olds, Andolina *et al.*, found that 38 per cent of young adults who grew up in homes with political discussions say they always vote, compared to 20 per cent without such dialogue. More than a third (35

¹⁰⁶ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 73

¹⁰⁷ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 561

¹⁰⁸ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 561

¹⁰⁹ Sloam, J., (2007), *Rebooting Democracy: Youth Participation in Politics in the UK*, *Parliamentary Affairs* (60) 4, p 563

¹¹⁰ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 74

per cent) of those who often heard political talk when they were growing up are regular voters, compared to 13 per cent of those who grew up in homes where political talk never occurred. Their data also revealed the importance of role models. Young people with engaged role models are more attentive to news of politics and government and more likely to participate in boycotts or buycotts. Young people who grew up in homes where someone volunteered are also likely to be involved in volunteering themselves. Both of these influences were found to be significant even when demographic and other factors are taken into account¹¹¹.

3.6.2.6 Self confidence

Evidence from the Molloy *et al.*, research also showed that young people who had become involved were more confident in their views and opinions and their own ability to express these than those who cited lack of confidence as a reason for not participating¹¹².

3.6.3 Theories of participation and engagement

In his 2005 literature review for the Citizenship Longitudinal Study, Whiteley reviews five different theoretical models used to explain engagement and participation across individuals. The theories are: cognitive engagement, rational choice, civic voluntarism, equity fairness, and social capital.

3.6.3.1 Cognitive engagement

Theories of cognitive engagement hold that a process of cognitive mobilisation has been occurring in advanced industrial societies over the past fifty years owing to education, media exposure and political awareness. Cognitive mobilisation is characterised by two separate trends – the declining cost of political information and a growth in the public's ability to process political information. Consequently, more citizens have the political resources and skills to allow them to deal with the complexities of politics and to understand how decisions are made in a democratic society. As a result, levels of engagement and activity are affected

Such theories predict that engagement and voluntary activity will be a choice – people will not always engage. Furthermore, people may engage more in certain activities since their decision to participate is influenced by their sense of efficacy: if some types of activity are perceived as unproductive then cognitively engaged individuals will be less likely to participate in them as a

¹¹¹ Andolina, M., Jenkins, K., Zukin, C., Keeter, S., (2007) *Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement*, pp 275-280

¹¹² Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government* (prepared for DTLR), p 74

consequence. They may, for example, engage more in activities such as protesting while becoming less engaged in other activities such as voting¹¹³.

3.6.3.2 Rational choice

Rational choice theories of participation focus entirely on the individual and the choices they make, the influence of wider society on such choices is minimal. Instead, choices of political action are based on a calculation of costs and benefits.

When used to explain participation, rational choice theories produce a paradox. As participation is designed to produce collective benefits, rational individuals are unlikely to participate since once collective benefits are achieved, their use cannot be restricted to those people who originally campaigned for them. Free-riders can also benefit. Thus, theories of rational choice would predict that very few people are likely to vote, something which is at odds with evidence.

'Soft rational choice' theories, such as the general incentives theory of participation, take into account a wider set of incentives other than just the policy benefits of voting to explain participation. These wider incentives include those derived from the process of participation itself such as the opportunity to meet similar-minded people and the possible career benefits which might ensue from those interested in pursuing a political career.

3.6.3.3 Civic voluntarism

The civic voluntarism model is the most widely researched model in the empirical analysis of political participation. Whiteley states that it is essentially a structural theory of participation in that it gives an account of participation in terms of the individual's social characteristics, rather than in terms of the choices which they make about involvement.

Proponents of the theory argue that people get involved if they have the resources (education, social class, family income and leisure time), the motivation (the individual's level of interest in politics which is often derivative of resources), and are mobilised (the extent to which they can be induced to participate by others) to do so. The theory asserts that if people are embedded in their communities with many social ties they are more likely to get involved, when asked by others, than individuals with few social ties¹¹⁴.

¹¹³ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, pp 8-9

¹¹⁴ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, pp 11-12

3.6.3.4 Equity fairness

Like civic voluntarism models, equity fairness theories are also structural theories since they emphasise the role of social structure in motivating people to engage. This type of theory suggests that individuals evaluate how equitably they are treated in relation to members of reference groups – groups who they feel a sense of affinity or rivalry towards. The bigger the gap between expectations of treatment and actual treatment, the more relatively deprived individuals will feel, and this in turn can produce protest behaviour. With regard to voting, individuals may be motivated to vote for opposition parties if they feel the government is treating them unfairly¹¹⁵.

3.6.3.5 Social capital

Social capital is the third and final structural model of engagement. The core idea of the theory is that if individuals can be persuaded to trust each other and to work together to solve common problems, society would be much better off as a consequence.

Trust is a key indicator of social capital. It allows individuals to move beyond their own immediate family or communities and engage in cooperative activities with others they do not know. It also gives people an incentive to participate since they will expect their involvement will bring rewards. In short, communities in which the majority of individuals engage actively and frequently in social and voluntary activities are more likely to be trusting, well-governed, affluent and successful¹¹⁶.

3.7 Conclusions

There exists much discussion and debate over the definition of ‘political participation’. On the one hand, mainstream, or ‘orthodox’, studies have been criticised for imposing definitions of participation on respondents and thus not accounting for young people’s experiences and the contexts within which they perceive ‘the political’. On the other hand, qualitative studies, which have explored young people’s attitudes and experiences and placed these within the context of life-cycle theories, have been accused of over-playing the role of politicians, political processes and institutions in disengaging young people.

Evidence presented in this chapter shows that young people define ‘participation’ in many different ways. For some, voting is the only legitimate way to express their views, while for others participation could be voluntary work to improve their community. Evidence has also highlighted a number of barriers to participation ranging from young people’s own negative perception

¹¹⁵ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, pp 12-13

¹¹⁶ Whiteley, P., (2005), *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Second Literature Review – Citizenship Education: The Political Science Perspective*, pp 13-14

of politics, to more structural factors such as the state's withdrawal from individuals' lives.

However, research also suggests that some young people are participating. They may do so for several different reasons. Perhaps they have a desire to change things and have the self-confidence to talk about their ideas. Others would argue that young people choose to participate since they are more mobilised to do so, or because participating benefits them or society in general.

That some young people are participating suggests that studies which make presumptions as to what constitute politics and participation are not capturing the bigger picture. This is not to say that focusing on more formal forms of participation, such as voting and party membership, is not useful. Phelps clearly demonstrates the relevance of electoral analysis.

However, broadening of the concept of 'political participation' to include the views of young people reveals a more complex situation. While young people may be retreating from conventional politics, this is not to say they are apathetic. Rather, they are participating in other forms of engagement which they themselves perceive to be 'political'.

4.0 Evaluating initiatives

The previous chapter explores what is meant by political participation and the differing activities that can be considered 'political'. It presents arguments for defining the concept along narrow terms, such as voting (Phelps), and arguments criticising this view, which assert that studies examining 'participation' must allow young people to define participation themselves (O'Toole).

It goes on to conclude that young people do participate en masse in activities they define as 'political', despite the marked decline in voting, voter registration and respect for politicians among that demographic in recent years. It is against this backdrop that this section examines state's initiatives which have aimed to increase levels of engagement among young people in politics in recent years and among the population at large. This chapter looks at the background to participation, views of the state's overall approach, levels of participation, specific initiatives, examples of inter-generational projects and measurements of success.

4.1 Background to participation

Before embarking on a review of the literature evaluating past and present initiatives, it is important to put this work in the context of past actions. It is within this context that the Commission is required to operate.

The advent of the Youth Citizenship Commission comes on the heels of a wide-ranging package of constitutional reforms in the past decade. New assemblies have been created in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, London has a directly elected mayor and regional assembly, the House of Lords has undergone extensive reform, and some parts of England outside London have voted for directly elected mayors.

In this raft of change, young people have not been ignored. The Government has introduced a number of policies to bolster political and civic engagement in this demographic. It has also commissioned independent inquiries that have made recommendations for enhancing the roles of young people in politics and civic society. This section looks at some of the more recent and prominent policy documents in this area and outlines the recommendations made by inquiries.

4.1.1 Policies and Strategies

One of the dominant policy agendas in recent years concerning young people has been Every Child Matters. This seminal policy drive, borne of the 'shameful failings in [the state's] ability to protect the most vulnerable children'

that led to the tragic death of Victoria Climbié,¹¹⁷ has reshaped the provision of Children's Services across the UK.

The process following the publication of the green paper led to the establishment of a new set of aims for young people. The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background, to have the support they need to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being¹¹⁸

Every Child Matters also led to the Children Act 2004 that, among its many provisions, established the new post of Children's Commissioner, a role currently fulfilled in England by Sir Al Aynsley-Green. This position gave children and young people a voice at the national level in England. For the first time, children across the UK have a senior official charged with making sure that adults in authority listen to their views.

11 Million, the organisation created to support the Commissioner's role, has the vision of ensuring that 'children and young people will actively be involved in shaping all decisions that affect their lives, are supported to achieve their full potential through the provision of appropriate services, and will live in homes and communities where their rights are respected and they are loved, safe and enjoy life.'¹¹⁹ Similar roles exist in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Another strategy designed to heighten the engagement of young people in civic society is Aiming High for Young People. This drive has created a 10 year strategy for engaging young people in positive activities. Published in July 2007, it is designed to 'transform leisure-time opportunities, activities and support services for young people in England.'¹²⁰ Legislation designed to take funds from dormant bank accounts to invest in youth services is currently being debated in Parliament as the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Bill. The £100 million Youth Sector Development Fund is designed to build the capacity and sustainability of the third sector. Referred to in Aiming High is another Government report on the role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration. This official report identifies the need to

¹¹⁷ HM Treasury (2003), *Every child matters*, Section 1, p 5

¹¹⁸ From www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims, accessed 22 August

¹¹⁹ 11 Million, *About 11 MILLION and the Children's Commissioner* from www.11million.org.uk, accessed 22 August

¹²⁰ HM Treasury (2007), *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities*, p 3

boost participation among socially excluded groups and commits new funding to build capacity for intergenerational volunteering to this end.¹²¹

In the Children's Plan, the Government has set itself the ambitious goal of making England the 'best place in the world for children and young people to grow up.'¹²² This plan establishes five principles that underpin this effort.

These are:

- Government does not bring up children – parents do – so government needs to do more to back parents and families.
- All children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them.
- Children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life.
- Services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries.
- It is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.¹²³

The Department for Children, Schools and Families has recently launched its ten year vision for youth leadership. The objective is that, by 2018, 'more young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, will be leading action to address the problems faced by other young people and be recognised as leaders of change for the benefit of wider society.'¹²⁴ This aim will be pursued in part by the creation of a new youth leadership body to be a critical friend of Government. It will have a budget of £2 million annually until at least 2011. This will be complemented by £6 million of funding for a new national institute for youth leadership which will develop internships with councillors for young people¹²⁵.

Communities in Control is the most recent White Paper from the Department for Communities and Local Government. Its aim is to pass power into the hands of local communities. It commits the Government to creating opportunities for direct contact between young people and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government as well as establishing a programme of shadowing Government ministers.

4.1.2 Inquiries

The recent past has also seen a number of independent inquiries into political and civic engagement that have at least in part addressed the political and civic participation of young people.

¹²¹ HM Treasury and Cabinet Office (2007) *The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: final report*, p 46

¹²² DCSF (2007), *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures*, Section 1 p 15

¹²³ DCSF (2007), *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures*, pps 5-6

¹²⁴ DCSF (2008), *Young People: Leading Change* p 16

¹²⁵ DCLG (2008), *Communities in control: real people, real power* p 86

The report of the Russell Commission has had a significant impact on youth action and engagement, this time in volunteering. Its remit was to develop a new national framework for youth action and engagement across the UK. In 2005, it published its national framework that aimed to 'deliver a step change in the diversity, quality, and quantity of young people's volunteering.'¹²⁶ The Commission's vision was of a society 'in which young people feel connected to their communities, seek to exercise influence over what is done and the way it is done, and are able to make a difference by having meaningful and exciting opportunities to volunteer.'¹²⁷

This commission led to the establishment of a new National Volunteering Portal, a role played by the new organisation v, which is an independent charity championing youth volunteering in England. It has launched numerous innovative approaches to achieving its mission, such as viral campaigns, challenges to MPs to become involved in volunteering and schemes designed to have young people participate in volunteering.

Another of the high-profile reports came from the wide-ranging Power Inquiry, which had the ambitious aim of presenting a series of recommendations designed to give people real influence over the 'bread and butter' issues which affect their lives¹²⁸. Among numerous conclusions, it made the following recommendations specific to young people:

- The Electoral Commission should take a more active role in promoting candidacy so that more women, people from black and minority ethnic communities, people on lower incomes, young people and independents are encouraged to stand.
- The voting and candidacy age should be reduced to sixteen (with the exception of candidacy for the House of Lords).
- The introduction of automatic, individual voter registration at age 16.
- The citizenship curriculum should be shorter, more practical and result in a qualification¹²⁹.

A recent review of citizenship by Lord Goldsmith was based on the premise that the current system was falling short as it did not adequately demonstrate the tie between person and country. It made a number of recommendations aimed at young people, including:

- The extension of citizenship ceremonies to all young people.

¹²⁶ Russell Commission (2005), *A national framework for youth action and engagement* p 3

¹²⁷ Russell Commission (2005), *A national framework for youth action and engagement* p 5

¹²⁸ The Power Inquiry (2006), *Power to the people – The report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy*, p 9

¹²⁹ The Power Inquiry (2006), *Power to the people – The report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy*, throughout

- A reduction in tuition fees for young people that volunteer prior to going to university as well as help with the repayment of student loans, if they volunteer afterwards.
- A clear policy that states that those on Job Seeker's Allowance will not lose their entitlement if they volunteer.
- The use of volunteering as a way of developing skills and leading young people who are unemployed into work.

This brief run-down of a selection of Government actions and independent inquiries serves to show that the work of the Youth Citizenship Commission does not take place in isolation.

4.1.3 State initiatives

Efforts to raise levels of youth engagement with formal politics and civic society have not been restricted to strategies and inquiries. Recent work from the former Department of Constitutional Affairs identified a large number of initiatives and schemes from both central and local government with the promotion of 'participation', in its broadest sense, at their hearts¹³⁰.

This section takes a broad overview of the state's approach in the recent past and draws on evidence that interprets this approach.

4.1.3.1 Themes

Work from Greg Power (2006) suggests that it is possible to see four common themes in the evolution of the role of the state's approach to public engagement at large in recent years. The first theme is the evolving role of the state. It has moved from one of paternalistic statism to one desirous of working in partnership with the public. The idea of the 'enabling state' has become prominent under the current Government, meaning a state that gives citizens the power to take control of their own lives.

The second theme is social justice. The Government has made the argument that there is a link between social and political exclusion. Democratic institutions need to make the process of engagement easier through both constitutional reform and enhancing the credibility of public institutions. New forms of engagement have also been created, such as public engagement with the boards of Foundation Hospitals and New Deals for Communities¹³¹.

The third theme is the decentralisation of power, which has two dimensions. The first is the creation of the new assemblies in Scotland and Wales. In both cases, promoting active participation is an explicit aim. The second is the

¹³⁰ Department of Constitutional Affairs (2007), *Youth Engagement: Case Studies*, throughout

¹³¹ Carnegie UK Trust: *Democracy and Civil Society Programme* (by Greg Power, 2006), *Personal Politics: Democracy, Participation and Collective Action*, p 18

devolution of power to local government and neighbourhoods. Central government has consistently sought to strengthen the role of local authorities and invigorate local leadership, while concurrently requiring councils to pass on power to communities and individuals¹³².

The fourth theme is the use of new techniques for public engagement, a theme that can cut across the previous three. New techniques employed by the present administration have tended to be 'deliberation' or 'co-governance'. Citizen's juries and citizen's panels, which allow a small number of people to investigate a policy area, have been favoured. Such activities tend to give an additional dimension to policy-making without presenting Ministers with binding decisions¹³³.

4.1.3.2 Scale and change models

Power also has insights for the scale of the state's actions in recent years. He concludes that progress in introducing new methods of engagement has been slow. Most tiers of Government have been relying on traditional consultation mechanisms. Where innovative approaches have been used, they have proven popular. Yet, they have not become so widespread as to indicate a fundamental change in the nature of public engagement with the political process.

The Power Inquiry also offers insights on the scale and nature of the state's response to the broad challenge of disengagement, as well as that of political parties. It identifies interventions at three levels:

- The state has pursued an agenda of greater choice in public services designed to drive efficiency and raise performance.
- The state has also made greater use of formal consultation mechanisms to discover the needs and expectations of citizens and apply them to service delivery.
- The main political parties have responded to the decline of their traditional class bases by developing a process of 'triangulation' that seeks to occupy the political centre-ground.

However, the Power Inquiry concludes that this approach has not been effective in rising to the challenges presented by the decline in 'old methods of democratic decision-making'. There has been no significant rethink of how citizens might engage with political decision-making. For the inquiry, none of more choice in public service, greater efficiency or more public consultation have led to re-engagement among the general population. Further, the

¹³² Carnegie UK Trust: *Democracy and Civil Society Programme* (by Greg Power, 2006), *Personal Politics: Democracy, Participation and Collective Action*, p 19

¹³³ Carnegie UK Trust: *Democracy and Civil Society Programme* (by Greg Power, 2006), *Personal Politics: Democracy, Participation and Collective Action*, p 19

'triangulation' tactics employed by political parties has led to greater marginalisation¹³⁴.

The Inquiry also makes judgments on specific attempts at re-engagement. It found that alternative voting procedures, more consultation, citizenship education and greater regulation did not lead to democratic revival. None of these responses have been 'fundamentally democratic in their inspiration'. Instead, they have been 'primarily technocratic or self-interested electoral responses.'¹³⁵ The key problem then is that the British political system, like many systems across the world, has failed to adapt to the change from an industrial to a post-industrial society. The dominant issue is the rise of a population that wants and requires a more 'regular, meaningful and detailed degree of influence over the policies and decisions that concern them and affect their lives, whilst a political system continues to exist that has neither the structures, processes or culture to offer that level of influence.'¹³⁶ The primary focus, therefore, should be the 're-engagement of citizens with formal democracy.'¹³⁷

4.1.3.3 Demographics

Power (2006) also concluded that the state is still failing to reach socially excluded groups as engagement initiatives have tended to focus on those already engaged. There are few genuine examples of delegation of power from the state to citizens. New opportunities for influence exist for those who are prepared and able to seek them¹³⁸. This suggests that, for those unprepared or unable, no such new opportunities exist. The former chapter on disengagement in this report suggests that some young people will fall into this category. The chapter subsequent to this highlights research that investigates evidence on specific groups of young people that might be unprepared or unable.

For the Power Inquiry, it follows from the finding that efforts to date to provoke higher levels of engagement have been largely ineffective and it is those from the most marginalised groups that remain most in need of a new approach. Participatory methods offer the greatest scope for the most marginalised groups to wield genuine influence. More power over the design, implementation and evaluation of policies would have a major impact on some

¹³⁴ *The Power Inquiry (2006), Power to the people – The Report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy, p 108-9*

¹³⁵ *The Power Inquiry (2006), Power to the people – The Report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy, p 112*

¹³⁶ *The Power Inquiry (2006), Power to the people – The Report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy, p 120*

¹³⁷ *The Power Inquiry (2006), Power to the people – The Report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy, p 128*

¹³⁸ *Carnegie UK Trust: Democracy and Civil Society Programme (by Greg Power, 2006), Personal Politics: Democracy, Participation and Collective Action, p 24*

of the most severe political disengagement¹³⁹. Many young people are likely to fall into this category.

4.2 Levels of participation

As established in the previous chapter, no shared definition of 'participation' currently exists. However, what is clear is that a narrow definition of participation that focuses on voting and engagement with politicians does not cover the full gamut of what might be considered 'political' activity among young people and observers. Writing to politicians, signing petitions, participating in school councils, volunteering, demonstrating and raising money for charities can all be construed as political acts and often are by young people.

The state, as well as third sector organisations, has been involved issuing guidance and advice on how to approach schemes and campaigns designed to raise levels of participation in its broadest sense. The Local Government Association runs the Local Democracy Campaign designed to 'create a new politics where citizens positively engage with an exciting, relevant and vibrant local democracy.'¹⁴⁰ The Ministry of Justice has recently published the National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement which outlines approaches to such activities as deliberative forums, citizens' juries and petitions¹⁴¹. The Government has also published a code of practice on consultation designed to give advice on the 'the ongoing dialogue between Government and stakeholders' as an 'important part of policymaking.'¹⁴² Guidelines have also been published by Involve, which make recommendations on how public participation can 'radically improve our quality of life.

Before embarking on an investigation of the evidence from evaluations of past and current initiatives, it is necessary to establish a broad framework for describing participation. Such a framework needs to have sufficient scope to encompass all those initiatives that can be construed as participation. Many frameworks take the political process as their starting point. Graham Smith (2005), for example divided innovative democratic initiatives into electoral, consultative, deliberative, co-governing, direct and e-democratic categories in his work for the Power Inquiry.¹⁴³ The former Department of Constitutional Affairs collection of case studies focusing on youth engagement divides schemes into two broad groups, 'engagement in the democratic and political

¹³⁹ *The Power Inquiry (2006), Power to the people – The Report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy, p 231*

¹⁴⁰ From <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=462884>, accessed 10th September

¹⁴¹ *Ministry of Justice (July 2008), A national framework for greater citizen engagement. A discussion paper*

¹⁴² *HM Government (July 2008), Code of practice on consultation*

¹⁴³ *Graham Smith (2005), Beyond the Ballot: 57 democratic innovations from around the world (for the Power Inquiry), throughout*

process' and 'empowerment of service users'. It goes onto sub-divide them according to the sponsoring public institution¹⁴⁴.

These categorisations tend to place initiatives at the centre. Further, they were not developed against the background of the broad narrative of disengagement and engagement forwarded in the previous chapter. This report therefore takes a different approach to categorisation. Research from Kirby *et al.* (2003) offers a framework designed for young people. As this work is concerned specifically with young people, it takes as its central measurement levels of impact achieved by them.

Work conducted for the then Department for Education and Skills aimed to produce a handbook to enable interested parties to focus effectively on 'how to listen to children and young people so that their views bring about change.'¹⁴⁵ The handbook presents four different levels of engagement with young people. These are, in order of least to most influence exercised by young people:

- Level 1 – Children/young people's views are taken into account by adults.
- Level 2 – Children/young people are involved in decision-making together with adults.
- Level 3 – Children/young people share power and responsibility for decision-making with adults.
- Level 4 – Children and young people make autonomous decisions.

The research identified three different modes of engagement according to which combination of the above levels was used. A combination of all four was construed as a 'child-focused' approach. Taking into account the views of young people while either involving young people in decision-making, or young people making autonomous decisions, or sharing power for decisions was called a 'participation-focused' approach. Simply taking into account the views of young people was considered to be 'consultation-focused'.¹⁴⁶ In summary, this means:

- Child-focused (Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4)
- Participation-focused (Levels 1 and at least one of Levels 2, 3 or 4)
- Consultation-focused (Level 1)

Here is a hierarchy of engagement specifically constructed from research involving young people that specifies three types of engagement. 'Child-

¹⁴⁴ Department of Constitutional Affairs (2007), *Youth Engagement: Case Studies*

¹⁴⁵ Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin K., & Sinclair, R., (2003) *Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation – Handbook*, p 3

¹⁴⁶ Kirby, P., Lanyon, C., Cronin K., & Sinclair, R., (2003) *Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation – Handbook*, p 61

focused' approaches offer the most potential for young people to bring about change. 'Participation-focused' approaches give some potential to bring about change. 'Consultation-focused' approaches have the least potential for bringing about change. It is these three types that will be used to categorise initiatives.

4.2.1 'Child-focused'

This section examines evidence from initiatives designed to give young people the highest level of direct influence over the outcomes of the initiative. For the purposes of this report, this includes evaluation evidence from school councils and the UK Youth Parliament.

4.2.1.1 School councils and youth forums

A 2007 study from the DCSF was designed to assess the operation of schools councils to that date with a view to updating Government guidance on the operation of schools councils. It had five main objectives:

- To review what is currently known about school councils through existing research evidence.
- To outline then current practices of school councils.
- To examine the role that school councils played in supporting contemporary policies such as Every Child Matters.
- To consider how barriers in setting-up and maintaining councils can be overcome.
- To identify good practice in terms of school improvement and whole-school engagement.

It found that there are a number of potential benefits to be gained from harnessing 'pupil voice', which is a mechanism for pupils to have a say in decisions in school that affect them. These might be facilitating recognition of children's rights or promoting active citizenship, school improvement or personalisation¹⁴⁷. Schools councils should be considered as a compliment to pupil voice rather than a single route for providing a conduit for pupil voice¹⁴⁸.

The case studies included in the report found that practice varies between schools, as does the nature and scale of leadership from the senior management team. Taken together with the findings of quantitative surveys of pupils and teachers, the report concluded that there were a number of considerations for schools. They should have a clear understanding of why they are introducing a school council. There should also be willingness among schools to change their ethos and structures where necessary to establish and maintain the credibility of school councils and ensure that pupil voice mechanisms are given sufficient credibility. Giving the council some responsibility over spending decisions can be powerful.

¹⁴⁷ DCSF, *Real Decision Making? (2007) School councils in action*, p21

¹⁴⁸ DCSF, *Real Decision Making? (2007) School councils in action*, p5

Earlier academic study from Matthews (2007) looked at the operation of youth forums, generally run by local authorities. It found that the then emerging evidence suggested that many youth forums were flawed and inappropriate participatory devices. They often obfuscated the voices of young people. Despite this, positive local outcomes were discernable from the examined initiatives but these could be undermined by their perceived weaknesses, such as the disempowerment of young people, tokenism, lack of ownership, adults steering agenda and lack of a sustainable membership.

The work went on to make a number of recommendations, including that participatory mechanisms need to be carefully constructed to avoid tokenism. Memberships also need to be representative and young people need training to ensure that they are equipped to fully participate. The physical setting also needs to be appropriate, as using adult venues can be intimidating. Agendas must also be set carefully and adults must be involved in thoughtful ways. Enabling young people's participation also involves adults relinquishing some power and allowing existing systems to be challenged. These would not necessarily be easy moves. The success of youth involvement of this type will be judged by the outcomes achieved. Giving feedback to young people on their impact is part of this¹⁴⁹.

4.2.1.2 UK Youth Parliament

A report commissioned by DfES conducted by the Office of Public Management in 2004 found that the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) had achieved much in three years. However, the review also found that UKYP was not meeting the expectations of many of its stakeholders, which felt that UKYP had tried to 'run before it can walk'. This involved making claims for itself that it is not able to substantiate, given its level of funding and isolation from much potential support.

Stakeholders and Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) from the devolved nations raise concerns about the 'Englishness' of UKYP. None of the young people (other than MYPs) taking part in the consultation had heard of UKYP. Also, the research concluded that the effects of the UKYP on social and policy outcomes needed to be better recognised¹⁵⁰. The evaluation also recommended developing more uniform involvement and support across the country with specific recommendations on building diversity across the country. Despite the lack of evaluation data, there was a wide-ranging perception among those taking part in the review that the level of socio-economic diversity among the young people was low. The perception was that 'normal' young people, as perceived by stakeholders involved in the research, did not tend to become involved. The report went on to suggest improvements

¹⁴⁹ Matthews (2001), *Citizenship, Youth Councils and Young People's Participation*

¹⁵⁰ Office of Public Management for Department for Education and Skills (2004), *Review of the UK Youth Parliament Final Report*

to the communication activities of the scheme, including linking with charities, voluntary groups and hostels¹⁵¹.

4.2.1.3 Participatory budgeting

The recently published evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Fund and the Youth Capital Fund found that both approaches have been successful in achieving the aim of empowering young people by giving them active roles as decision-makers. The young people involved in the panel felt that they had made a difference to young people and that their decisions were respected by adults. Staff from local authorities involved with the scheme felt that there was further scope for development of the approach¹⁵².

4.2.2 'Participation-focused'

This section examines evidence from initiatives designed to give young people a high level of direct influence over the outcomes of the initiative, although at a lower level than the previous section. For the purposes of this report, this includes the involvement of young people in Children's Trusts and voting.

4.2.2.1 Children's Trusts

Work for the National Youth Agency was designed to investigate the operation of measures to involve young people Children's Trusts. The research found that there was a high level of commitment to developing effective arrangements for participation in the studied Trusts. Participation workers were seen as crucial to developing participation along with the 'champions', such as lead member for Children's Services. The studied Trusts showed significant progress in participation by embedding opportunities for engagement in Young People's Parliaments and Shadow Scrutiny Committees, for example.

Despite these successes, challenges were apparent. A need was found to widen opportunities and networks for participation beyond centralised decision-making structures and to work to change organisational cultures so that participation becomes routine. Some partner agencies had not become significantly involved. Also, some sectors were found to be more advanced in understanding than others. Youth Offending, Schools and Police were not perceived as heavily involved. The research also found a need to embed a

¹⁵¹ Office of Public Management for Department for Education and Skills (2004), *Review of the UK Youth Parliament Final Report*, pps 13-15

¹⁵² Golden, S., Bielby, G., O'Donnell, L., Morris, M., Walker, M., Maguire, S., for DCSF (August 2008), *Outcomes of the Youth Opportunity Fund/Youth Capital Fund*

common set of values, standards, structures and practices across all agencies¹⁵³.

4.2.2.2 Voting and political engagement

The cross-generational communications campaign Vote Scotland was designed to raise turn-out in Scottish elections in 2007 across the age ranges. It had a particular focus on those aged 18 to 24.

As defined in terms of intention to vote, the scheme was successful. Across the three waves of publicity, the proportion of those that reported their probability to vote increased. By wave three, the scheme saw significant improvements in public understanding of the voting systems. However, awareness of the election process remained lower among 18 to 24s when compared to the general population. The research also found consistently more positive attitudes towards the elections among those touched by the campaign, suggesting that the campaign was successful in changing attitudes¹⁵⁴.

Academic from 2003 work based on experiments by the Electoral Commission in e-voting is also revealing. The research aimed to test the contention that technology could be used to boost voting among a young generation used to the online banking and e-shopping.

It concluded that the impact of e-voting on turnout is mixed when compared to postal voting. Two-thirds of areas experimenting with electronic voting registered a modest fall in turnout rather than a rise. The study suggested that, even if technical and social equality issues could be overcome, there were few grounds to believe that adopting remote e-voting from home or work on a wide scale basis would radically improve turnout. E-voting, however, would probably have a modest effect on young people¹⁵⁵.

The Hansard Society has also conducted work examining the impact of the HeadsUp initiative, designed to give young people a new way to engage with the political process. The research revealed that HeadsUp had a positive impact on likelihood to vote in the future. When the involved young people were asked that if, when old enough, they were more likely to vote, 60% were and 24% were less likely. It also showed that young people were more likely to take part in political discussions as a result of their participation. Teachers also saw it as beneficial in building political awareness among students, with none seeing it as no use¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵³ National Youth Agency (2007), *Children's Trusts: Evaluating the development of young people's participation plans in two Children's Trusts – Interim Report Year 1*

¹⁵⁴ Scottish Government (2007), *Vote Scotland Campaign Evaluation*

¹⁵⁵ Norris, P. (2003), *Will New Technology Boost Turnout?*

¹⁵⁶ Hansard Society (2007), *Headsup Evaluation September 2006 to August 2007*

4.2.3 'Consultation-focused'

This section examines evidence from initiatives designed to give young people a consultation role aimed at provoking some form of change. For the purposes of this report, this includes the involvement of young people in national consultations with politicians and government departments.

4.2.3.1 Consultation

The Government published Learning to Listen Nov 2001, setting-out 'core principles' for involving children and young people in shaping Government policy design and delivery. Learning to Listen was designed to make Government departments think about how their services affected children and young people, and give guidance on how involving children and young people could improve them. Ten departments published action plans July 2003.

The study identified many challenges in this kind of involvement. These included resourcing, involvement in policies not directly connected with children and young people, getting hard to reach groups more involved, monitoring success and developing participation standards¹⁵⁷.

Citizen Calling initiative attempted to engage 16 to 24 year old demographic by finding ways allowing them to contribute to the Select Committee inquiry process using familiar technologies. The pilot tested the scope and capacity of mobile telecommunications in a demographic engagement context, determined the value offered to select committee inquiries by mobile telecoms and investigated the extent to which the public was served. The initiative invited young people to respond to one or more of five core questions. Response sent via dedicated project mobile phone number in audio, text or composite message.

The study concluded that MPs need to be active contributors to promotion and facilitation for the scheme to be successful. However, take-up was low despite the efforts of youth workers and other facilitators. Awareness of inquiry and the select committee process was broadened to unconventional audiences and outlets, particularly new communities that coalesced around burgeoning social networking sites. Despite this, the research found a poor user experience and general scepticism about the point of contributing. Technology was also cumbersome and the cost discouraging. Despite these weaknesses, it concluded that there was a facilitation role to be played by ICT¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁷ ODPM (2005) *Learning to Listen Engagement of Children and Young People Progress Report and 2nd Action Plan*

¹⁵⁸ Hansard Society by Ferguson, R., Miller, L. (2005), *Citizen Calling: Using mobile phones to promote engagement in select committee inquiries*

4.3 Views of participation

Alongside the literature evaluating specific initiatives, there exists another body of work that looks in general at youth participation. These reports tend to look broadly across a number of measures designed to engage young people.

4.3.1 Youth influence

The evidence base contains a number of research reports that seek to generalise across a number of engagement initiatives. This section gives an overview of a selection of these reports and attempts to draw-out the lessons they offer for future initiatives.

Work from the National Youth Agency focused on assessing the involvement with local authorities. The participation of young people can be facilitated by local authorities by supporting a number of different kinds of groups; elected, forums, youth councils, youth conferences, YOF groups, effective Schools Councils, groups for disabled people, young carers or care leavers. All these groups should have clear links to decisions by councillors.

It is important that, whatever the mechanism for engagement, that all young people feel able to be involved. Some young people felt that more needed to be done to encourage participation. Using a mobile bus helped to engage young people in outlying areas. The benefits of participation were discerned to be increased confidence, better communication skills, improved listening skills, more teamwork, leadership and group-work skills, public speaking, meeting and talking to new people, planning, negotiating, running events, and dealing with the media. To achieve participation, young people wanted structures for youth engagement to be truly youth-led with young people participating as of right alongside adults, setting the agenda and being treated seriously.

The report recommends regular youth conferences, monthly meetings among all local participation groups, clear lines of communication between councillors and young people, budgets for publicity to ensure that all young people know that a group exists and measures to ensure the participation of disadvantaged groups. It also recommends that the organisers create a churn in membership so that young people have opportunities to move on to free-up space for new members. Also, it recommends ensuring that all group members and councillors have a chance to meet regularly with each other to ensure greater accountability of councillors to young people, and provide more opportunities for young people to influence top-level decision making¹⁵⁹.

An academic study conducted for DfES looked at which children are involved in decision-making. It found that those aged 14 to 19 were most likely to be involved in both statutory and voluntary sectors. There was found to be relatively low involvement of children under eight and an almost equal balance

¹⁵⁹ National Youth Agency (2007), *Influence through participation: A critical review of structures for youth engagement* (September 2007)

between male and female involvement. Six in 10 statutory and voluntary respondents said their organisation involved children and young people from BME communities. Statutory organisations report much greater involvement of children and young people from urban than rural areas (83% and 53% respectively). Over 50% of statutory organisations involved disabled young people. Other significant groups were those in care, NEETs and young offenders. Further, 68% of statutory organisations involved in the research had problems involving hard-to-reach groups, in particular BMEs, disaffected, NEETs and travellers¹⁶⁰.

4.5 Cross-generational initiatives

Research conducted for the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister into how inter-generational engagement can help develop sustainable communities gives insights into the benefits and practice such approaches. One finding is that inter-generational relations are not 'natural' in origin. Rather, they are the products of a complex range of factors, including individual, family, community and societal influences. Stereotypes are significant factors in influence relations, specifically ageism. Further, as promoting inter-generational relations becomes more popular, it needs to be remembered that their natures vary widely across different places and cultural settings. It would be dangerous to assume that the problem everywhere takes the same form¹⁶¹.

Interventions usually consist of small-scale, intensive projects where young and older people are brought together around planned activities. These activities aim to have a range of positive outcomes for individuals and communities. However, there has been little critique of the principles or practice of inter-generational practice. Schemes can suffer from loose concepts and definitions and a lack of clarity in their goals. They also need to widen to include hard to reach older and young people. Further, their impacts are difficult to measure. These challenges are more likely to be overcome if they are designed according to participatory principles. Despite these challenges, the report concludes that such schemes have valuable contributions to make in achieving sustainable communities and resources should be invested in both promotion and direct funding¹⁶².

Pain's research (2005) also found that there has been relatively little investigation of inter-generational relations at the community, neighbourhood and public space levels¹⁶³. As a result, few evaluations of cross-generational

¹⁶⁰ Oldfield, C., and Fowler, C., for DfES (2004) *Mapping Children and Young People's participation in England*

¹⁶¹ Pain, R., (2005) *Intergenerational relations and practice in the development of sustainable communities*, p 5

¹⁶² Pain, R., (2005) *Intergenerational relations and practice in the development of sustainable communities*, p 6

¹⁶³ Pain, R., (2005) *Intergenerational relations and practice in the development of sustainable communities*, p 5

initiatives are apparent. However, there are a number of examples of initiatives designed to better engage older and younger people for the benefit of both groups. This section reviews three examples.

4.5.1 Speke Inter-Generational Project (SIP)

The University of Liverpool was commissioned to evaluate this initiative, which is an ongoing project designed to break down barriers between older and younger people. The aim was to encourage the formation of positive relationships between these groups through participation in joint activities. The project was designed to raise the levels of health and well-being. It involved South Liverpool PCT, Merseyside Police and Parklands Secondary School and brought together a group of older people and a group of young people aged between 14 and 16¹⁶⁴.

During the school term, SIP ran on a weekly basis. The evaluation looked at the impacts of inter-generational activities such as talks on a variety of subjects, quizzes, Tai Chi sessions and weekly raffles. It found that everyone involved in the project enjoyed taking part. Young people experienced improvements in their social skills and older people benefitted from the exercise, mental stimulation, social networks and fun, as well as the opportunity to work and socialise with the young participants. The main impact on the younger participants was how it changed their opinions about older people. They generally found their negative associations replaced by more positive ones. By the end of the project, the younger people were more willing to contribute to older people's lives¹⁶⁵.

4.5.2 Generations in Action (GIA)

The GIA programme was designed to encourage the transfer of skills and experiences of older to young people identified as in need of support. Managed through the Salford Business Education Partnership, the programme helped older people to engage with young people through mentoring and other one-to-one activities. The scheme has since been extended to other areas of England¹⁶⁶.

The evaluation found that the process of volunteering among the older participants was both incremental and complex. Positive outcomes were only achieved and maintained through appropriate management and nurturing of the programme over considerable periods of time. Local context also impacted on the programme, with geographical, social and economic settings all impinging on success. The scheme achieved greater awareness of volunteering among the older group through effective recruitment and

¹⁶⁴ Robinson, J., Hobby, L., Kirkcaldy, A., (2006) *Evaluation of SPEKE inter-generational (SIG) project*, p 1

¹⁶⁵ Robinson, J., Hobby, L., Kirkcaldy, A., (2006) *Evaluation of SPEKE inter-generational (SIG) project*, p 77

¹⁶⁶ Ellis, S W., for The Beth Johnson Foundation (2004) *Generations in Action: Final Evaluation Report*, p 4

retention, as well as celebrations and key events and media involvement¹⁶⁷. However, the evaluation falls short of drawing causal relationships between societal benefit and the project's activities.

4.5.3 Newcastle Coalfields Intergenerational Community Development Project

The overarching aim of this project was to challenge ageism, as well as other forms of discrimination and inequality. It was designed to have two facets. The first was a Community Action Programme that brought together young and older people in their communities to identify issues of concern and influence local decision-makers to make changes. The groups convened to achieve these goals were made-up of ten young and ten older people who worked together for an hour every fortnight over a period of six months. These sessions used visual facilitation techniques as they were intended to engage those with low levels of basic skills. The sessions addressed issues such as drugs, bullying, respect between young and older people, park improvements, litter, nature reserves, graffiti on gravestones, and facilities for young people.

The second facet was a supporting programme that arranged various activities to enhance the operation of the first. These activities included community tree planting, digital arts programmes, Young Enterprise programmes and dominoes clubs¹⁶⁸.

The evaluation found that the scheme was successful in influencing the personal perceptions and practices of the wide range of people involved. For those new to inter-generational programmes, it challenged their preconceptions and opened their eyes to a socially inclusive and principled approach. The project also aimed to wield influence over policymakers. However, the evaluation did not reveal evidence to suggest that policymakers adapted their actions and no impacts were seen in local policy documents¹⁶⁹.

4.6 Citizenship

This is a broad area for which a large amount of robust evidence exists. Rather than attempt to review the full picture here, this section focuses on a number of studies that make fundamental recommendations for the reform of the area.

¹⁶⁷ Ellis, S W., for The Beth Johnson Foundation (2004) *Generations in Action: Final Evaluation Report*, p 31

¹⁶⁸ Centre for Intergenerational Practice (2005), *Newcastle Coalfields Intergenerational Community Development Project: Evaluation Report*, p 2

¹⁶⁹ Centre for Intergenerational Practice (2005), *Newcastle Coalfields Intergenerational Community Development Project: Evaluation Report*, p 15

4.6.1 The delivery of Citizenship in schools

As part of their Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study Research, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has shown that there are four main types of delivery of citizenship education. These four types are based on a broad definition of citizenship education as asserted by the Crick Report which sees citizenship education as consisting of three inter-related components: citizenship in the curriculum, active citizenship in the school community and the wider community.

The four types of delivery are:

- 4) Curriculum driven citizenship – provides firm grounding in citizenship education in the curriculum, less strong in participation and student efficacy
- 5) Student efficacy driven citizenship – high levels of student efficacy in school, weak in extra-curricula activities and delivery through the curriculum
- 6) Participation driven citizenship – higher than average student participation but low levels of student efficacy
- 7) Citizenship-rich driven citizenship – high levels of participation and efficacy

The study has also shown that citizenship is usually delivered through one of three models: modules in PSHE; a dedicated timetable slot; or through a cross-curricula approach. Research found that school leaders have growing influence in deciding approaches to citizenship and that these decisions reflect visions or philosophies for citizenship since the curriculum guidelines have left the onus on schools to decide its delivery. The delivery of citizenship, for example, could be affected by available time in the curriculum, the number of appropriately qualified staff, or sufficient finance¹⁷⁰.

4.6.2 Recommendations for reform

Following the Crick Report, Citizenship was made a Foundation Subject of the National Curriculum in secondary schools, giving Citizenship statutory status. Primary schools, however, were only 'encouraged' to teach citizenship as part of Personal, Social and Health Education. Hence, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has published a non-statutory framework for the teaching of PSHE and Citizenship in primary schools.

The revised National Curriculum for 2008 in England identifies three priorities for the subject. These are to create:

- Successful learners who make progress and achieve.
- Confident individuals who lead safe and healthy lives.
- Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society¹⁷¹.

¹⁷⁰ Kerr, D., et al., (2007), *Vision versus Pragmatism: Citizenship in the Secondary School Curriculum in England*, pp 93-96

¹⁷¹ Heath, M., Rowe, D., Breslin, T., for the Citizenship Foundation (2008), *Citizenship Education in the Primary Curriculum*, p 3

The Citizenship Foundation, despite welcoming the new 2008 prescription, argues that primary schools should be obliged to teach citizenship. It argues that the socialisation process that results from education helps young people understand their society and allows them to make their contribution as informed, effective and responsible citizens. A substantial body of evidence tells that young people are aware of the social world around them long before they enter secondary school. Failure to embed citizenship at the primary school age risks creating a delay in young people's development into successful and functioning citizens¹⁷².

Work from Pike (2007) makes another argument of the adaptation of the existing approach to citizenship. His recent article argues that it should be more deeply embedded in less visible forms of education. At present, the more visible forms of citizenship education, such as public examinations, are being endorsed. Instead, he argues that less visible forms of education, such as embedding ethics and values across the curriculum and investigating the impacts of assessment policies on a school ethos's, should receive more attention. His argument concludes that the visibility of citizenship must be ethical, even spiritual, if it is to deal with the complex matter of how to live and not simply work in a liberal democracy¹⁷³.

This argument appears to be supported by Faulks (2006) who argues for a broader and bolder approach to Citizenship education in schools which would, among other things, encourages young people to question the political system as well as learn about it. Such an approach would free up space in the school timetable, lead to greater citizenship specialisation among teachers and allow pupils to more easily see the relevance of the subject. This would allow citizenship to play its important role as a counterbalance to the dominance of the market as the primary organising principle in modern society¹⁷⁴.

The NFER acknowledges that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to citizenship education is unrealistic and impracticable. Although it predicts that discrete delivery, more specialist teachers and clearer standards, among other things, may help improve citizenship delivery; it argues that they will not guarantee effective citizenship *per se* in all schools. Rather, it recommends addressing the structural challenges facing citizenship in schools to ensure that quality and consistency in its delivery is achieved¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷² Heath, M., Rowe, D., Breslin, T., for the Citizenship Foundation (2008), *Citizenship Education in the Primary Curriculum*, p 4

¹⁷³ Pike, M A., (2007) *Values and visibility: the implementation and assessment of citizenship education in schools*, *Educational Review* 59:2, pps 215 -229

¹⁷⁴ Faulks, K., (2006) *rethinking citizenship education in England some lessons from contemporary social and political theory*, *Journal of Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, Vol 1(2) 123-140

¹⁷⁵ Kerr, D., et al., (2007), *Vision versus Pragmatism: Citizenship in the Secondary School Curriculum in England*, pp 104-109

The arguments presented here argue for two major reforms. The first is the embedding of Citizenship at an earlier age in the school. The second is to ensure that Citizenship is increasingly embedded across the school curriculum rather than restricted to a single subject. If both were adopted, it would be likely that streams of the Citizenship curriculum would be embedded across the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools.

4.7 Measuring success

The focus on the apparent disengagement of young people from politics and civic society has produced a wealth of evaluation evidence on which to draw. As has been expressed in the previous section, a significant segment of this evidence has focused on measuring the impact of initiatives on formal engagement in particular.

Less evidence exists on the impacts of initiatives beyond quantifiable outputs. Considering that the evidence presented in the first section suggests the need for broad definition of what constitutes the 'political', and hence what can be construed as the 'engagement' of young people, this is a considerable gap in our present understanding.

Despite this gap, there are a small number of studies that consider what constitutes good practice in evaluating initiatives. Two studies in particular offer insight into how initiatives can be judged against broad criteria for engagement beyond the measurement of outputs.

4.7.1 Carnegie Young People Initiative

The premise of a literature review from CYPI is that there is a need to concentrate on how to implement policies for involving young people in public decision-making. The report analyses examples of national and local standards and draws-out lessons for creating good standards for young people's involvement. These are that standards need to be easy to understand, public, and testable, the culture and type of organisation needs to be taken into account, where possible, standards need to build on what is already in use.

The report concludes by making a number of recommendations, including developing a new national minimum standard, called Involving Young People Standard. This would have that has two elements, firstly, involvement of young people in decision-making and, secondly, resultant change¹⁷⁶.

4.7.2 Measuring the Magic

The report states that very little work involving young people in decision-making had been evaluated at that time. The paper draws on relatively small

¹⁷⁶ CYPI, (2003) *Organisational Standards and young people's participation*

number of studies. A range of different types of participatory work with young people were evaluated: geography (area-wide planning services; themes (sports, arts, health, environment); organisations (voluntary, school); methods (surveys, interviews, forums, peer researchers). Most of the cited evaluations had been undertaken by academics and independent consultants. Also, few were done with or by young people.

Most were small-scale and localised. Very few were large-scale, national or longitudinal. Nearly all were qualitative, although some also undertook quantitative surveys using small samples. Very few examples of large-scale quantitative studies, using either primary or secondary data analysis, were available. The evaluations also varied in quality. Still, findings were drawn to show that young people still had little impact on public decision-making. Few evaluations looked at the quality of decisions made, or influenced, by young people.

Also, there was little evidence on benefits for the wider community. Very few studies were found to have sought the views of young people that did not participate. Also, there was little on how to establish a culture of participation within an organisation or across a community. In the future, more evaluation programmes were needed to develop clear aims and objectives. The study recommended that all organisations involving young people in decision-making should self-evaluate their work and that independent evaluation is needed for some programmes. Evaluations and research should adopt a mixed methods, involving qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal and control studies where appropriate.

While nearly all the existing evaluations examined outcomes, nearly all also relied on stakeholders' perception of change rather than objective measures. There was also insufficient theorising about how programme processes and contexts interrelate with outcomes. Further debate was found to be required about goals, nature and effects of widening participation of all citizens within a representative democracy. There was a need to examine how systems can change to accommodate young people's participation, not the other way round. Further, more funding was needed for the necessary evaluation work. It concluded that self-evaluation needed to be established as good practice within evaluations and research¹⁷⁷.

4.8 Conclusions

The state has been highly active at the national and local levels in recent years with large numbers of initiatives designed to raise levels of participation. However, the state's actions have not been successful in their objectives, as is the case in other democracies. Initiatives have tended to focus on adjusting the old ways of making decisions. In this sense, the state's approach has

¹⁷⁷ *CYPI* by Kirby, P., and Bryson, S., (2002) *Measuring the Magic? Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision making*

been technocratic. Fundamental reform of democratic institutions has not been attempted.

This 'technocratic', or consultative, approach has not been successful as it has not taken account of changes in public behaviours and expectations. Rather, it has made the assumption that incremental reforms to existing approaches can be successful in bolstering institutions designed for previous generations. People are demanding new methods of engagement that reflect their need for higher levels of personal efficacy. Creating new mechanisms for engagement while existing institutions remain as they are is unlikely to be successful.

Further, few initiatives are apparent in the state's approach to date that seek to engage those likely to be uninterested in becoming involved. What currently exists largely relies on those already keen to engage to come forward. This nature of initiative seems likely only ever to attract a small proportion of exceptional young people that, as some research states, cannot be considered 'normal'. This suggests that initiative such as these will only ever attract a small proportion of young people. Participatory approaches designed to engage with hard to reach groups, including young people, are lacking. Giving more influence over the design, implementation and evaluation of policies to young people would likely be a powerful tool of engagement. Cross-generational initiatives show potential for creating positive images and dispelling stereotypes, yet do not alone seem to offer the kinds of influence that the modern population craves.

Measurement and evaluation are also significant challenges. At present, there are no evaluations available to this report that purport to measure the wide societal outcomes of a particular programme. Rather, many rely on input and output measurements. Those that do attempt to measure outcomes tend to rely on the perceptions of outputs of those involved rather than on quantifiable data that measures real outcomes. It seems necessary to develop a common method of appraising the outcomes of engagement projects.

5.0 Segmentations

This first half of the chapter presents three studies which have produced typologies, or segmentations, of young people in terms of their political interest, perceptions of citizenship and participation online. It should be noted that among the studies on young people and political participation, few segment respondents into typologies. The three presented below, therefore, were selected for inclusion as they focus specifically on politics and participation in relation to the target age group of young people aged 11 to 19 years old.

In light of the lack of robust studies segmenting young people into typologies of participation, the second half of the chapter considers broader socio-demographic features of those who do or do not participate. Drawing on data from four key surveys, young people's interest and participation in politics are analysed according to age, gender, ethnicity, household type and location.

5.1 Segmentations

5.1.1 Political interest and engagement

In their study of political interest and engagement among 14 to 24 year olds, White *et al.*, (2000) classified young people into five broad groups, based on group and interview data, according to their declared level of interest in politics and how they amplified and explained their level of connection with politics. The five groups are:

- 8) Indifferent
- 9) Cynically uninterested
- 10) Selectively interested
- 11) Generically interested
- 12) Highly interested and connected

These groups capture the spectrum of political interest within which movement can occur. Although the small sample base means that the internal distribution of the groups has no statistical significance, White *et al.*, note that young people under 18 were more common in the uninterested, rather than the interested groups. Apart from age, there were only slight differences in the composition of the groups. However, interest in politics did seem to increase with educational attainment¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁸ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, pp 11-14

	Level of interest	Expression of interest
Group 1: Indifferent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take no notice of politics • Seem oblivious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics lacks relevance • Conceive of politics in limited terms, mostly negative stereotypes • Find politics difficult to understand • Preoccupied with other interests
Group 2: Cynically uninterested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More cynical than Group 1 • Actively avoid engaging with politics at home, in school or media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mistrust of & lack of respect for politicians • Justify lack of interest in terms of the young people's exclusion from political process: politicians lack interest in their views; limited opportunities for engagement
Group 3: Selectively interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only take interest when it relates to an issue of concern • Otherwise share similar views as Groups 1 & 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express interest through variety of ways: e.g. actively pursue concern, or following media
Group 4: Generically interested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range from those with slight to substantial interest • Focus: general current affairs, parliamentary politics at election time, when an issue affects them is debated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to be more passive than Group 3
Group 5: Highly interested and connected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range from those who take quite a lot of interest to those passionate about politics • Focus: parliamentary politics in detail, structure, organisation of central/local government, political history, theory & processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level of commitment & interest than all other groups • Some may actively pursue political, constitutional, international issues

5.1.2 Perceptions of citizenship

Longitudinal qualitative research by Lister *et al.*, (2005) examined the experiences, understandings and perceptions of citizenship of young people aged 16 to 22 in Leicester. Participants were stratified according to 'insider' and 'outsider' status. 'Insiders' were 'successful' young people who were following a path through A levels, university and graduate-type employment. 'Outsiders', on the other hand, had few or no qualifications and had been unemployed for most of their time since leaving school¹⁷⁹.

	Insiders	Outsiders
Compulsory education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More favourable experiences than outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found school alienating or unsatisfactory
Transitions (school-university–employment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured, 'natural', automatic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haphazard, volatile • Move between spells of employment, training & unemployment
Career/job aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most on track to meet aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minority fulfilled aspirations

The research explored how participants - insiders and outsiders - perceived citizenship. From the results, Lister *et al.*, classified these perceptions into five models of citizenship¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁹ Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., Cox, L., (2005), *Negotiating Transitions to Citizenship: Report of Findings*, pp 2-4

¹⁸⁰ Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., Cox, L., (2005), *Negotiating Transitions to Citizenship: Report of Findings*, pp 4-5

Citizenship model	Subscribers
Universal status model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Citizen' means 'person' • 'Belonging' to local or national community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Insiders' more likely to subscribe than 'outsiders'
Respectable economic independence model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embodied by person in waged employment, paying taxes • Underpinned by understandings of 'first' & 'second class' citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In short-term, excluded participants still in education and economically dependent on parents • Long-term, 'outsiders' likely to be excluded from model because of unemployment & disadvantage in the labour market
Socially constructive model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive approach towards community • Abiding by law, helping people, having a positive impact • Underpinned by understandings of 'good' citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsiders little more likely to subscribe to this model than insiders
Social-contractual model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rights and responsibilities, including voting rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No distinct differences in terms of in/outsider status
Right-to-a-voice model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having the right and opportunity to have a say and be heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsiders little more likely to subscribe than insiders

The most dominant model among participants was the 'universal model', followed by the 'respectable economic independence' and the 'socially constructive models'. The 'social contractual' and the 'right-to-a-voice' models were the least common. Many participants subscribed to more than one model¹⁸¹.

5.1.3 Young people's participation online

As part of the UK Children Go Online (UKCGO) research project, Livingstone, Bober and Helsper (2004) investigated young people's civic participation online. Their analysis suggests that young people cannot simply be divided into those who participate more and those who participate less. Rather,

¹⁸¹ Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S., Cox, L., (2005), *Negotiating Transitions to Citizenship: Report of Findings*, p 5

demographic and internet use factors mean that young people take up opportunities to participate online in different ways¹⁸².

Using data from three key modes of participation – interacting with websites, visiting civic websites and creating websites – Livingstone *et al.*, carried out a cluster analysis of young people aged 12 to 19 who use the internet at least weekly. The results suggest three distinct groups of young users of the internet: interactors; the civic-minded; and the disengaged¹⁸³.

		Interactors	Civic-minded	Disengaged
Demographics	Age (average)	16 years	16 years	15 years
	Gender (most likely)	Male	Female	Male
	Socioeconomic Status	More likely ABC1	More likely ABC1	Less likely ABC1
Participation	Breadth of civic sites visited	Highest	Average	Lowest
	Interactivity	Not especially likely to visit civic website, but most likely to make own webpage	Much more likely to visit range of civic websites, especially charity & human rights sites	Much less likely than other two groups to interact with sites, visit civic sites or make own webpage

5.2 Political participation and interest and socio-demographic patterns

A number of studies have examined young people's socio-demographic backgrounds in relation to political interest and participation. This section analyses the findings of four key studies and surveys:

- White, C., *et al.*, (2000), Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14 to 24 year olds;

¹⁸² Livingstone, S., Bober, M., Helsper, E., (2004), *Active participation or just more information? Young people's take up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet*, p 14

¹⁸³ Livingstone, S., Bober, M., Helsper, E., (2004), *Active participation or just more information? Young people's take up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet*, p 14

- Molloy, D., *et al.*, for DTLR (2002), Understanding youth participation in local Government: A Qualitative study
- Park, A., *et al.*, for DfES (2004), Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds;
- Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey

5.2.1 Voting

5.2.1.1 Age

The 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey found that young people aged 13 to 15 were more likely to say they would vote in a general election when they were 18 than those aged 11 to 12. Those in the older age groups were also more likely to say the current voting age was right. Fifteen year olds were twice as likely as 12 year olds to say 18 was the right age (50 per cent compared with 23 per cent). Relatively high proportions of young people across all ages said the age for voting in a general election should be lower than 18. Younger age groups were more likely to say that people should be able to vote under the age of 16 than those from older ages¹⁸⁴.

5.2.1.2 Gender

Girls reported more favourable views about voting than boys. Seventy-two per cent of girls said they would vote in a general election when they were 18, compared with 65 per cent of boys. Boys were more likely to say the current voting age was right (39 per cent compared to 34 per cent). A higher proportion of girls than boys said the age should be 16 or 17 (45 per cent compared with 37 per cent)¹⁸⁵.

5.2.1.3 Household type

Multivariate analysis by Park *et al.*, (2004) confirmed that adult political interest and household income are independently and significantly associated with young people's views about voting. Those young people living in more affluent and more educated homes were more likely to think that everyone has a duty to vote and were correspondingly less likely to take a more instrumental view of voting. Nearly half (44 per cent) of those living in the most affluent homes thought that everyone has a duty to vote compared to 21 per cent of young people in the poorest homes. Those who lived with adults who had some interest in politics were also more likely to consider it everyone's duty to vote than those living with adults who had no interest in politics¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸⁴ Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey, pp 97-98

¹⁸⁵ Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey, p 98

¹⁸⁶ Park, A., Phillips, M., Johnson, M., (2004), Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds, p 19

5.2.2 Political interest

5.2.2.1 Age

Younger respondents in the Home Office survey were most likely to agree with this statement 'young people are just not interested in politics' – 61 per cent of 12 year olds definitely or tended to agree compared with 53 per cent of 15 year olds. Older respondents, however, were more likely to agree with the statement 'there should be a way to give young people a voice in politics' Among those aged 15, 86 per cent definitely or tended to agree compared with 74 per cent of those aged 12¹⁸⁷.

5.2.2.2 Ethnicity

According to the Home Office survey, black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani young people were most likely to agree with this statement, 'None of our politicians are bothered about the problems facing young people today' (60 per cent, 57 per cent and 55 per cent). Among black African, white and Indian young people the proportions were lower (43 per cent, 41 per cent and 40 per cent).

Black African, white and Bangladeshi young people (64 per cent, 58 per cent and 57 per cent) were most likely to agree with the statement that 'Young people are just not interested in politics'. Among Pakistani, Indian and black Caribbean young people the proportions were 50 per cent, 44 per cent and 44 per cent¹⁸⁸.

Agreement was high across all young people to give young people a voice in formal politics. Mixed race, black Caribbean and Indian young people were most likely to agree with this statement (95 per cent, 90 per cent and 88 per cent), while black Africans and Bangladeshis were least likely to do so. (71 per cent) The proportions for white and Pakistani young people were 80 per cent and 77 per cent¹⁸⁹.

5.2.2.3 Household type

Evidence from the Park *et al.*, survey showed that the most dramatic variations in young people's political interest related to the broader characteristics of the households in within which they lived rather than their own personal characteristics. Young people from richer households and households where the adult respondent had a higher education qualification were considerably more interested in politics than average¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁷ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 95

¹⁸⁸ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, pp 95-96

¹⁸⁹ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 96

¹⁹⁰ Park, A., Phillips, M., Johnson, M., (2004), *Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, pp 16-17

Around a quarter of young people living in households with an adult who had a degree or another higher education qualification and no interest in politics, did not have an interest in politics. For young people in households where the adult had no educational qualification and had no interest in politics, this figure rose to nearly half.

The relationship between young people's interest in politics and adult educational attainment is likely to reflect the fact that the latter is strongly associated with political interest. Multivariate analysis by Park et al., shows that, once adult political interest is taken into account, a range of other factors (including education and household income) are no longer significantly related to levels of political interest among young people because adult educational attainment is so strongly. Furthermore, their survey found that young people in households where the adult had quite a lot or a great deal of interest in politics were eight times more likely to have this same level of political interest themselves than were young people in households with an adult who had no interest in politics.

5.2.2.4 Location

The Home Office survey showed that young people living in non-rural areas were more likely to agree that 'None of our politicians are bothered about the problems facing young people today' than those living in rural areas (43 per cent compared with 35 per cent)¹⁹¹.

5.2.3 Party identification

5.2.3.1 Household type

Multivariate analysis by Park *et al.*, found that both adult political interest and adult educational background were independently and significantly linked to whether or not a young person identified with a particular party. Over half (53 per cent) of those in households where the adult respondent had a higher educational qualification identified with a political party. In comparison, less than third (32 per cent) of those in households where the adult respondent had no educational qualifications identified with a political party¹⁹².

Political party identification is also strongly associated with adult political interest. Nearly six in ten (59 per cent) of young people living in households where the adult respondent had quite a lot of interest in politics identified with a party, compared to under a quarter (23 per cent) of those living with an adult respondent who had no interest at all¹⁹³.

¹⁹¹ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 96

¹⁹² Park, A., Phillips, M., Johnson, M., (2004), *Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, pp 22-23

¹⁹³ Park, A., Phillips, M., Johnson, M., (2004), *Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds*, p 23

5.2.4 Participation in civic activities

5.2.4.1 Age and gender

Older respondents in the Home Office Citizenship Survey were more likely to have engaged in civic activities than their younger counterparts – 54 per cent of 15 year olds compared to 42 per cent of 11 year olds. Slightly more girls than boys said they had participated in civic activities (52 per cent compared with 46 per cent)¹⁹⁴.

5.2.4.2 Ethnic group

According to the Home Office survey, black Caribbean and mixed race young people were the most likely to have participated in civic activities, while Pakistanis were the least likely to have done so (62 per cent and 59 per cent compared with 29 per cent)¹⁹⁵.

5.2.4.3 Location

The same survey found that young people living in more affluent areas were more likely to have participated in civic activities than those living in deprived areas. Forty-four per cent of young people in the most deprived areas had engaged in civic activities compared with 55 per cent of those in the most deprived areas¹⁹⁶.

5.2.5 Involvement in groups, clubs and organisations

The Home Office survey revealed that young people's involvement in groups, clubs and organisations showed very similar patterns of variation with demographic and area characteristics as civic participation.

5.2.5.1 Gender

Girls were more likely than boys to have given help to groups, clubs and organisations in the past twelve months (70 per cent compared with 56 per cent)¹⁹⁷.

5.2.5.2 Ethnic group

Black Caribbean and mixed raced young people were most likely to have given help to a group, club or organisation in the twelve months prior to the

¹⁹⁴ Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey, p 79

¹⁹⁵ Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey, p 79

¹⁹⁶ Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey, p 81

¹⁹⁷ Farmer, C., (2005), 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey, p 83

interview (71 per cent and 67 per cent). Among the other groups, the proportions ranged from 52 per cent among Pakistanis to 63 per cent among white and Indian people¹⁹⁸.

5.2.5.3 Location

Like engagement in civic activities, young people living in the most deprived areas were the least likely to have given help to groups, clubs and organisations. Just over half (54 per cent) of young people in the 20 per cent most deprived areas said they had given help, compared with over two-thirds (65 per cent) of those living in the 20 per cent least deprived areas¹⁹⁹.

5.2.6 Issues of concern

5.2.6.1 Education

The survey by White *et al.*, (2000) found that education was an important issue for all young people. For those under 16, concerns included bullying, too much homework, exam pressure and treatment by teachers²⁰⁰.

Young people aged 14 or 15 who took part in the Home Office survey (2005) were more likely than those aged 12 or 13 to say they worried about taking exams or tests (42 per cent and 45 per cent compared with 32 per cent and 31 per cent)²⁰¹.

Survey evidence from Molloy *et al.*, (2002) showed that those between 16 and 18 were concerned with issues related to their current experiences of further education, including their treatment by teachers. They were also concerned about being used as 'guinea pigs' for new courses²⁰².

Among the 18 to 25 year olds, education concerns were linked to current or recent experiences of higher education, particularly cost²⁰³. Evidence from White *et al.*, echoes these findings. Respondents aged over 18 in their survey

¹⁹⁸ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 83

¹⁹⁹ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 83

²⁰⁰ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 6

²⁰¹ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 100

²⁰² Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 34

²⁰³ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 34

listed the standards of education, the cost of education and pressures in acquiring qualifications and employment as their three main concerns²⁰⁴.

Those between 22 and 25 in the Molloy *et al.*, survey mentioned concerns about government policy on education at the national level, including lack of respect for the teaching profession by politicians and the media, and the increasing pressure on teachers²⁰⁵.

5.2.6.2 Employment

Molloy *et al.*, found that employment was a particular concern for respondents aged 20 to 25. They commonly complained about the insecure nature of the labour market and the limited opportunities for those leaving education. All age groups reported concerns about low pay which impacted negatively on quality of life, especially for those with children²⁰⁶.

Survey findings by White *et al.*, showed that respondents over 16 had similar concerns. There were felt to be too few opportunities and limited choices for young people who left school at 16, limited opportunities for training and apprenticeships, and concerns about the treatment of young people by employers, especially poor working conditions and low pay²⁰⁷.

5.2.6.3 Finance

Lack of money was an issue raised by all age groups (White *et al.*, 2000). Young people under 18 were concerned with their lack of money to fund leisure activities. Those over 18 had similar concerns but also worried about supporting themselves independently in the future. The economy was mentioned and concerns about government taxes especially by those paying income taxes, tax on cigarettes and alcohol, or petrol and road tax²⁰⁸.

5.2.6.4 Social and leisure facilities

The study by White *et al.*, found that a lack of social and leisure facilities was a recurrent issues for respondents under 20, especially those under 18. Either facilities do not exist, in short supply or they are too boring²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁴ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 6

²⁰⁵ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 34

²⁰⁶ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, Pp 34-35

²⁰⁷ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 6

²⁰⁸ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 8

²⁰⁹ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 8

Young people aged 16 to 19 years in the Molloy *et al.*, study also consistently focused on the lack of youth clubs and leisure facilities in their local areas. Older respondents in the 20 plus age bracket were concerned about other social and leisure facilities that were affordable and safe. With regard to location, young people aged 16 to 18 years in both rural and urban areas identified the need for safe alternatives to pubs and clubs. Young people in smaller more remote locations or outside the city felt there was a lack of accessible and varied cultural and leisure facilities²¹⁰.

5.2.6.5 Discrimination

All age groups in the White *et al.*, survey raised discrimination as issue. Racial discrimination was the central concern although there were references to discrimination on grounds of sex and disability²¹¹.

Racism and racial tension were a particular concern for white and ethnic minority young people in areas of high ethnic minority populations (Molloy *et al.*, 2002). Young people from minority ethnic groups were concerned about attacks by white people on their community and other communities. Police treatment of ethnic minorities was another area of concern²¹².

5.2.6.6 Crime

The issue of crime was raised by all age groups in the White *et al.*, survey²¹³. The Molloy *et al.*, survey noted that respondents in urban areas voiced concerns about high levels of crime. Personal safety and the ability to go out alone at night were also recurring concerns for all, but particularly for young women living in urban areas²¹⁴.

5.2.6.7 Substance use and abuse

The Home Office citizenship survey (2005) showed that younger respondents were more likely than their older counterparts to say they worried about drug-taking in their town or village. Sixty-five per cent of 12 year olds cited drug-taking in their town or village compared with 53 per cent of 15 year olds²¹⁵.

²¹⁰ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, pp 31-32

²¹¹ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 8

²¹² Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, pp 35-36

²¹³ White, C., Bruce, S., Ritchie, J., (2000), *Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds*, p 9

²¹⁴ Molloy, D., White, C., and Hosfield, N., (2002), *Understanding youth participation in local Government (prepared for DTLR)*, p 33

²¹⁵ Farmer, C., (2005), *2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey*, p 100

5.3 Conclusions

Owing to the limited evidence base, it is not possible to make generalised conclusions about segmentations of young people. Primary research is necessary to underpin the creation of a robust segmentation of young people and their attitudes to behaviours pertaining to participation in its broadest sense.

The three typologies presented in this chapter focus on distinct issues regarding political participation and, as a result, are incomparable. However, one is able to draw conclusions from the socio-demographic data which can be supported by findings from the segmentations.

From the evidence presented, it is possible to conclude that a number of socio-demographic characteristics are associated with political and civic participation and interest. In particular, household type, in terms of level of affluence/deprivation and adult political interest, have a significant association with young people's views on voting, their levels of political interest, the extent to which they identify with a political party, and the frequency of their participation.

This finding is supported by the segmentation of Livingstone *et al.*, which found that young people from ABC1 households were more likely than young people from other households to be 'civic minded'. The research also found that disengaged young people were least likely to come from such households. The segmentation which emerged out of the research by Lister *et al.*, shows that young people's perceptions of citizenship and what it means to be a citizen are affected by their own levels of education.

With regard to age, the socio-demographic findings show that younger age groups tend to be less interested in politics than older ones. This is supported the segmentation developed by White *et al.*, which showed that young people between 14 and 18 were more common in the 'uninterested' than 'interested' groups. However, both younger and older age groups are concerned with issues such as education, finance, discrimination and crime. Younger people were particularly concerned with social and leisure facilities and drug-taking, while older respondents raised issues about employment and the economy.

It can also be seen that girls tend to invest more time in civic participation and helping a group, club and organisation. The Livingstone *et al.*, segmentation supports this finding as their research found that 'civic-minded' young people are most likely to be female.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 Disengagement?

There are many definitions of 'participation'. While some academics choose to interpret it along narrow lines, such as voting in elections or party membership, others argue that 'participation' should be seen as a 'lived experience' and therefore defined by young people. Young people themselves define participation in many different ways. For some it could be lobbying Government or signing a petition, for others it involves being a member of your community.

Young people face a wide range of barriers to participation including their own negative perceptions as well as more structural factors affecting their own generation in particular, such as the state's withdrawal from individuals' lives. Despite these barriers, evidence shows that young people do get involved. They might participate because they have the resources to do so, including the confidence, or because they have a desire to change things and a belief they can do so.

6.2 Evaluating initiatives

The state has implemented a large number of initiatives at the national and local level to raise levels of participation. As in other democracies, it has had limited success in its objectives. Instead of radically changing the way in which citizens interact with the political system, initiatives have been technocratic, focusing on adjusting the old ways of making decisions and not accounting for changes in public behaviours and expectations. However, people are demanding new methods of engagement that reflect their need for higher levels of personal efficacy. Creating new mechanisms for engagement while existing institutions remain as they are, is unlikely to be successful.

Few state initiatives have sought to engage those least likely to be interested in becoming involved. Current initiatives largely rely on those already keen to engage and participate. Participatory approaches designed to engage with hard to reach groups, including young people, are lacking. Initiatives which involve young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies of young people are thought to be powerful tools to increase engagement.

Furthermore, measurement and evaluation of initiatives designed to increase participation pose a significant challenge. Many existing evaluations rely on input and output measurements or the perceptions of outputs of those involved as opposed to quantifiable data measuring real outcomes.

6.3 Segmentations

Very few researchers have sought to produce segmentations of young people according to their participation in politics. The three typologies presented in the report focus on distinct issues regarding participation and have limited evidence on young people's socio-demographic backgrounds. Other survey evidence, however, has shown that certain demographic factors have significant associations with political participation and interest. Household type, in terms of affluence and deprivation, has implications for young people's views on voting, their levels of political interest, the extent to which they identify with a political party, and the frequency of their participation. Age and gender are also factors in participation. Younger age groups tend to be less interested than older ones, while girls seem to invest more time in civic participation than boys.

7.0 Appendices

7.1 Topic Guide

COI/Youth Citizenship Commission Engaging Young People Research

Telephone Interview Questions

Purpose

The questions in this document are designed to be used for half hour long telephone interviews with key stakeholders identified by the YCC. The purpose of these interviews is to gain a better understanding from the stakeholders' expertise of the reasons why young people have become detached from formal politics, the impact of political and public institutions on engagement, Government initiatives to motivate young people and indicators/measures used to evaluate their success. Interviews are also an opportunity for stakeholders to identify existing research into engagement and leads for further contact.

Considerations

The questions in this document are a guide rather than a rigid structure for a telephone conversation. The researcher might find it necessary to deviate from the wording of the questions in order to uncover the information being sought. Such deviations would be reliant of the researcher's judgement.

Also, timings are approximate and act as a guide. Again, it will be for the researcher to use her/his judgement to assess how much useful information can be gathered in each of the areas of questioning. However, the most valuable area of questioning will pertain to existing research and sources for gathering further data and hence the timings must be particularly flexible in this section.

Structure

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Each interview will open with a brief explanation of the following:

- Reference to the earlier email letter from the YCC contact (Ian Johnson)
- A brief explanation of the YCC's intentions in commissioning EdComs to undertake work on their behalf, focusing on youth engagement in our democracy and, in particular, why young people have become detached and distant from formal politics and initiatives to increase engagement.
- A brief summary of the researcher's role at EdComs, his/her role on the project and the organisation.

The researcher will also offer to answer any factual questions at this point.

2. Political engagement (10 minutes)

- Which young people are not engaged in the formal political process? Why? What personal barriers do they face?
- Which groups of young people are engaged? Why?
- What institutional barriers prohibit young people from engaging in the formal political process? How can these be overcome?

3. Government initiatives (10 minutes)

- Which initiatives have been most effective in motivating young people to engage in politics (formal and informal)?
- Have any initiatives sought to address barriers to engagement posed by institutional and political cultures, systems and behaviour? If so, how? Have these been successful?
- Thinking about particular initiatives, what are the positives and drawbacks in terms of influencing behaviour and motivating participation among young people?
- What are the differences between initiatives focusing specifically on young people and those that focus on cross-generational groups?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of these different initiatives? In your opinion, is one more successful than the other?
- When evaluating initiatives, what indicators/measures of success are used?
- Are such measures adequate? Could other benchmarks be used?

4. Further sources (5 minutes)

- Who are the key academics/opinion leaders working in youth engagement?
- Which are the leading organisations that have conducted research into youth engagement?
- Where are there gaps in research?
 - What questions remain unanswered?
 - What questions remain inadequately answered?

7.2 Letter to experts

Dear [name]

Re: Telephone interview for Youth Citizenship Commission Youth Engagement research

I am writing to ask you to be involved in the formative stages of an important piece of research into youth engagement in formal politics. Your knowledge and views will be vital to the process. This research will be carried out on behalf of the YCC by EdComs, a leading research consultancy. The demands on your time would be minimal.

The research aims to understand why young people have become detached and distant from formal politics. It will also begin to evaluate the tools and means to re-engage the disaffected. The research could also potentially help to identify and prioritise certain groups of young people in terms of their current political attitudes and behaviours.

This stage will be underpinned by short telephone conversations with key stakeholders to help build the evidence base by gathering expert views on the existing literature and revealing any gaps. Each telephone conversation will last for up to half an hour. I am keen for EdComs to have such a conversation with you.

The conversation will address some or all of the following areas in varying levels of detail:

- Evidence to explain why young people have become disengaged from the political process
- Segments of the youth audience on the issue of engagement with the political process
- Current effective Government initiatives to motivate young people
- Indicators/measures of the success of initiatives that aim to boost and increase political engagement

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. My colleagues at EdComs will contact you shortly by phone. EdComs aims to have conversations with key stakeholders in the near future. Please contact me or James MacGregor at EdComs (020 7401 4014, james.macgregor@edcoms.co.uk) if you would like to discuss this further. I hope that you will be available to make a contribution to this valuable work.

Yours sincerely
Ian Johnson
Head of Democratic Engagement
Ministry of Justice

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