



Youth participation and engagement in politics

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RESEARCH PAPER

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1. Summary

Worldwide, young people tend to participate less in traditional formal politics, such as voting and party membership. Reasons for disengagement from formal politics include feeling underrepresented, changing political identities, and mistrust of politicians or government. Young people are, however, engaged in other more informal forms of participation in political life, such as online activism.

These trends appear to be reflected in the Isle of Man. In 2006, the voting age for elections to the House of Keys was lowered to 16, making the Isle of Man the first place in Western Europe where 16- and 17-year-olds could vote in a national election. Turnout amongst those who have registered to vote in this age group has ranged from 45-55%. However, registration rates are low. There is no data available on the voting behaviours of young people aged 18 and over.

Candidates may stand for the House of Keys from the age of 18. Since 2006, one or two candidates at each election who were aged 35 or under have been successful, representing 4-8% of the House of Keys.

In recent years, there have been several prominent examples of young Island residents taking part in politics through more informal means, such as holding protests on pertinent issues including climate change and the Black Lives Matter movement, establishing voluntary organisations to raise awareness of issues and campaign for change, and using social media to take part in political activities.

Parliamentary initiatives on the Isle of Man to boost youth participation and engagement include the annual sitting of Junior Tynwald, the opportunity for young residents to attend the Commonwealth Youth Parliament, and regular school tours and other outreach activities. A proposal to investigate the establishment of a Manx Youth Parliament was approved by Tynwald in March 2019; it was concluded that the Manx Youth Parliament would function best if organised outside of Tynwald. At the time of writing, the Manx Youth Parliament has not been established.

Government initiatives include the Biosphere Youth Representatives, who work with stakeholders to develop ways of gaining young peoples' perspectives on Biosphere Isle of Man. In terms of education, the curriculum requires secondary schools to teach Manx culture and politics in some capacity in subjects such as P.S.H.E (Personal, Social, Health and Emotional) and Citizenship.

In the UK, politics is taught through the curriculum for Citizenship at Key Stages 3 and 4. The UK Cabinet Office launched a five year Democratic Engagement Plan in 2017 and a democratic engagement programme in 2015. The UK and many other countries around the world have established Youth Parliaments, which allow young people to engage directly with parliaments and governments, in some cases initiating legislation. The United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF have produced guidelines on how to include young people in political and electoral processes, which emphasise the importance of allowing children and young people to have a voice and their perspective considered within decision-making.

2. Young People and Politics: Global Trends

Definitions of 'youth' and 'young people' vary. 'Youth' is described in the Collins Dictionary as "the period of their (the youth's) life during which they are a child, before they are a fully mature adult".¹ Studies of youth participation in politics tend to examine the behaviours of people in their late teens and twenties. Following the UNDP guidelines, youth can be considered to be those between 15 and 24 years of age, whilst the EU notes that they're between 15 and 29 years old.²

Studies undertaken to explore the extent of youth participation in politics have shown that young people are less likely to participate in traditional forms of politics such as party memberships and voting in elections. Instead, young people tend to be more involved in modern and informal ways of participating, such as online activism. There are many reasons as to why people decide to disengage from formal politics, including lack of representativeness, changing political identities and mistrust of politicians or government, the latter being particularly relevant for younger generations.³ In 2014, the UNDP found that voter turnout among 18-25 year olds is lower than any other age group.⁴

In addition, parliaments tend not to be representative of young people; globally less than 2% of parliamentarians are under 30 years old, and the average age in parliament is 53 years old.⁵ Research by the Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology (POST) found that groups in society, such as young people, who feel underrepresented in politics, are less likely to participate in formal politics, as they believe that they will have little influence over the political system.⁶

3. Voting at 16 and 17

Legislation

In 2006, the Isle of Man reduced the legal voting age of residents from 18 years of age to 16 years. This was achieved through successful amendments to the Registration of Electors Bill 2006 by Steve Rodan MHK, who said that his amendment was based on 'the logic by which we give persons of age 16 and 17 rights in relation to the responsibilities that we give them', including the principle of 'taxation without representation'.⁷ Mr Rodan also said that if the Island could "get even a small number engaged at an early age it could lead to a lifetime's active interest in politics."⁸

This made the Isle of Man the first place in Western Europe where 16- and 17-year-olds could vote in a national election. At the time it was introduced, an Early Day Motion was tabled in the House of Commons, which "commended the decisions by the House of Keys," stating that it believes that it will "help engage the island's young adult population with democracy and the political process." Further it

¹ 'youth', Collins Dictionary, accessed 2 November 2022,

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/youth>

² 'Global Issues, Youth,' United Nations, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

³ 'Trends in Political Participation,' POST, Houses of Parliament UK, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0498/POST-PN-0498.pdf>

⁴ '#YouthStats: Public and Civic Participation,' United Nations, accessed 27 October 2022, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/political-participation/>

⁵ '#YouthStats: Public and Civic Participation,' United Nations, accessed 27 October 2022, <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/political-participation/>

⁶ 'Trends in Political Participation,' POST, Houses of Parliament UK, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0498/POST-PN-0498.pdf>

⁷ House of Keys, Item 5.3 (7 Feb 2006), 498 K123, <https://www.tynwald.org.im/business/hansard/20002020/kh07022006.pdf>

⁸ 'Island's voting age lowered to 16,' BBC News, accessed 28 October 2022, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/isle_of_man/4690678.stm

was stated that the House, "calls on the Government... once again to follow the Isle of Man's lead with a progressive extension of the electoral franchise to include 16 and 17 year olds."⁹

Turnout

In reporting figures for voting in House of Keys elections, turnout for 16-17 year olds is reported separately from adults (18+). There is therefore no data available on the voting behaviours of young adults aged 18 and above. For the purposes of the following examination of voter turnout, the definition of 'youth' refers to those aged 16-17 years old.

Since the implementation of the age amendment to the Registration of Electors Act 2006, the percentage of voter turnout from those who registered has varied between 45-55%. Table 1 demonstrates the voter registration and turnout over the last four general elections from 2006 to 2021.

Table 1: 16-17 Years Voting Turnout General Election 2006-2021¹⁰

General Election	Voted	Registered	% Turnout
2006	397	718	55.3%
2011	668	1234	54.1%
2016	535	1158	46.2%
2021	436	950	45.89%

The figures show that the largest percentage turnout was the same year that the reviewed voting age was introduced, with over half of those who registered participating in the vote. Over the next consecutive General Elections, the percentage of voters in the 16-17 year old age range has decreased, with the latest election in 2021 showing lowest turnout for this age group at 45.89%.

On the other hand, the number of those registered to vote had increased from 2006 in 2011 and 2016; while it declined again in 2021, it still remained higher than the figure in 2006.

Comparing the overall turnout percentage of 16-17 year olds with the adult population in 2021, there is approximately a 5% gap between them, with adult turnout at 50.68% and 16-17 year olds at 45.89% (see Table 2).

Assessing the 2021 general election turnout by constituency, in some areas there was a higher percentage of 16-17 year old turnout from those who registered, then there was for adult percentage turnout. For example, in Middle, 50.68% of adults who were eligible to vote did, compared to 71.08% of eligible voters aged 16-17 years who voted (see Table 2).

However, comparing the number of those registered to the actual population of this demographic per constituency reveals that a low number of 16-17 year olds are registering to vote. In 2016, 26.7% of 16-17 year olds on the Island registered to vote.¹¹

In April 2016, Liam Miller was elected as a Garff Commissioner at 18 years old. It was noted that at the time Miller was standing for election, Garff became the second highest constituency in terms of 16-17

⁹ 'Votes at 16 in the Isle of Man' Early Day Motions, UK Parliament, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/30134/votes-at-16-in-the-isle-of-man>

¹⁰ '16-17 Year old voter turnout, 2016 General Election', gov.im, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gov.im/media/1354314/16-17-year-olds-election-turnout-2016.pdf>

¹¹ 'Viewpoint: Under 16s are left behind in Manx politics,' Isle of Man Today, accessed 26 October 2022, <https://www.iomtoday.co.im/news/viewpoint-under-16s-are-left-behind-in-manx-politics-223386>

year old voter turnout, suggesting a positive correlation between young candidates and youth voter turnout.¹²

Table 2: 2021 General Election Turnout¹³

Constituency	Eligible Voters	Turnout (excluding rejected ballots)	Turnout %	Votes Cast	Average number of votes used	Eligible Voters Age 16/17	16/17 Year old turnout	16/17 Year old turnout %
Arbory, Castletown & Malew	5990	3379	56.41%	5821	1.72	68	30	44.12%
Ayre & Michael	5127	3204	62.49%	6024	1.88	90	39	43.33%
Douglas Central	5327	2282	42.84%	4039	1.77	88	35	39.77%
Douglas East	4891	1772	32.23%	3100	1.75	45	13	28.89%
Douglas North	4713	1982	42.05%	3494	1.76	70	27	38.57%
Douglas South	4897	2295	46.87%	4132	1.8	83	36	43.37%
Garff	5292	2718	51.36%	4802	1.77	85	44	51.76%
Glenfaba & Peel	6380	3639	57.04%	6756	1.86	97	39	40.21%
Middle	4755	2410	50.68%	4261	1.77	83	59	71.08%
Onchan	5200	2335	44.90%	4143	1.77	83	33	39.76%
Ramsey	6288	3367	53.55%	6300	1.87	76	30	39.47%
Rushen	5884	3429	58.68%	6042	1.76	82	51	62.20%
Total	64744	32812	50.68%	58914	1.79	950	436	45.89%

4. Political representation in the House of Keys

As set out in the [Representation of the People Act 1995](#), any Manx resident can stand for election as a candidate for the House of Keys from the age of 18.

At each General Election since 2006, one or two candidates who were aged 35 or under have been successful, representing 4-8% of the House of Keys:

Table 3: Elected Members of the House of Keys aged under 35, 2011-2021

Year	Name	Age at election	Constituency
2006	Juan Watterson (independent)	26	Rushen
2011	Juan Watterson (independent)	31	Rushen
2011	Zac Hall (Liberal Vannin)	33	Onchan
2016	Clare Barber (nee Bettison) (independent)	32	Douglas East
2016	Lawrie Hooper (Liberal Vannin)	29	Ramsey
2021	Lawrie Hooper (Liberal Vannin)	34	Ramsey

The youngest elected MHK in the last fifty years was Peter Karran, who was elected at the age of 25 in 1985.

¹² 'Viewpoint: Under 16s are left behind in Manx politics,' Isle of Man Today, accessed 26 October 2022, <https://www.iomtoday.co.im/news/viewpoint-under-16s-are-left-behind-in-manx-politics-223386>

¹³ '2021 General Election', gov.im, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gov.im/media/1374945/2021-general-election-turnout.pdf>

5. Youth Activism

In the Isle of Man in recent years, young people have been engaging in various forms of political activism, through protests, marches, petitions and the use of social media.

What is political activism?

The term “political activism” is used to describe ‘the range of nonprofessional and voluntary activities performed by citizens that are primarily aimed at influencing decisions and outcomes at any level of the political system’.¹⁴

In recent years, there has been a suggestion that people in the UK are increasingly aligning politically with those who share the same views as them on social, environmental and political issues (this is known as ‘issue polarisation’), rather than being part of party politics. As a result, activism can emerge in support of these views as a specific movement, and particularly occur in times of economic hardship or inequality.¹⁵

Protests and campaigns

Over the last few years, there have been various campaigns and particularly protests in which the young Manx people have been participants, aiming to raise awareness, accountability and recognition for a number of socio-political issues.

Over a period of eight months in 2019, there were a total of seven climate change strikes by students, which called on the Manx Government to set a target of carbon neutrality by 2035, demanding the “divestment from fossil fuels, fare-free buses” and to incorporate climate change into the Manx curriculum.¹⁶ The strikes were organised by the [Isle of Man Student Climate Network](#), an environmental organisation which largely operates through social media, making a series of demands to the Government including allowing under 18 representatives on the Climate Forum.

In 2019, students from Ramsey Grammar High School also prepared a [petition](#) to the Chief Minister asking for the Government to enact change on the use of single use plastics. This received four hundred and fifty signatures. Following the petition, Ramsey Grammar School stopped the sale of plastic water bottles from the canteen the same year, with the Department of Infrastructure installing more water fountains at the school, and Conister Bank sponsoring refillable water flasks to all staff and students.¹⁷

Towards the end of 2019, a campaign conducted by a group of students demonstrated against anti-abortion campaigners in Douglas.¹⁸ This was inspired by a series of protests that had happened in recent years regarding abortion, including the demonstration which occurred on [Tynwald Day in 2017](#), whereby five women dressed up as handmaids from the author Margaret Atwood’s classic novel regarding women’s reproductive rights.

¹⁴ Serrat, R., Cannella, V. (2021) ‘Political Activism,’ in: Gu, D., Dupre, M.E (eds) Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging, accessed 26 October 2022, https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-22009-9_238

¹⁵ ‘Political polarisation and participation,’ POST, UK Parliament, accessed 28 October 2022, [Political polarisation and participation - POST \(parliament.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ ‘Seventh climate strike for Island students in eight months,’ Manx Radio, accessed 27 October 2022, [Seventh climate strike for Island students in eight months - Manx Radio](#)

¹⁷ ‘Chief Minister praises ending of bottle sales,’ IoM Today, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://www.iomtoday.co.im/news/chief-minister-praises-ending-of-bottle-sales-228950>

¹⁸ ‘Manx students protest against anti-abortion campaigners,’ 3FM, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.three.fm/news/isle-of-man-news/manx-students-protest-against-anti-abortion-campaigners/>

In 2020 a global movement, 'Black Lives Matter,' sparked protests and demonstrations worldwide following the death of American George Floyd while in custody. A march of solidarity took place in the Isle of Man in June 2020, where more than 1,000 people marched Douglas promenade before kneeling in a two minute silence. A large proportion of the people who participated were from younger demographics. The organiser of the protest was Benard Mensah, who said that the demonstration had "burst" the idea that the Isle of Man is sheltered from racism and is racism-free, and hoped to begin more open discussions about race and equality.¹⁹

During the COP26 summit in Glasgow, Manx demonstrators protested through Douglas as a 'gesture of solidarity,' supported by people from all generations, including youth and political figures. The march was organised by the Isle of Man [Climate Change Coalition](#), which is made up by more than 30 groups, including Isle of Man Friends of the Earth and Isle of Man Green Party.²⁰

On 15th August 2022, Joe Locke, a 19 year old Manx actor, known for his lead role in the Netflix series 'Heartstopper,' made a speech via video message during the Isle of Man annual Pride event. In his speech, Locke advocated for reform to the "archaic" policy which prohibits gay men on the Isle of Man from donating blood.²¹ Using his platform, Locke has generated awareness surrounding this issue, not only on the Island, but throughout the UK, with news reports regarding his speech appearing in the [Metro UK](#) and [Attitude UK](#).²²

Volunteer organisations

There are several volunteer organisations on the Island, which have either been set up by young people, or have a large youth membership, which aim to create networks, committees and groups to promote specific goals.

In early 2020, a volunteer group named [The Hardy Commission](#) was set up by two Manx residents in their early twenties, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. The main aim of the group was to spread awareness surrounding racism on the Island, and to push political leaders in creating more inclusiveness and diversity in communities. The Commission also created an online form for members of the public to fill in to show their interest and encouragement towards changing Manx schools' curriculum to inculcate more education on Black History.²³ This led to letters being sent to MHKS on the 25th June 2020, with over 200 letters of support from the public.²⁴

Previous movements have also included the IOM Youth 4 Syria group, who campaigned for 25 Syrian refugees to be welcomed to the Isle of Man. As well as protests and demonstrations, a [public petition](#) was brought to Tynwald in December 2019 to be motioned by Mrs Caine, and was debated in Tynwald Court on [11th December 2019](#). Following the debate, the motion to establish a Select Committee to investigate the feasibility of the Isle of Man taking in Syrian refugees was lost. In the Keys, eight voted for but 14 voted against the motion, and in the Council, six were for, and two against.

¹⁹ 'Black Lives Matter: More than 1,000 march in Manx protest,' BBC News, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-isle-of-man-52983690>

²⁰ 'Isle of Man joins global protests in 'gesture of solidarity'' BBC News, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-isle-of-man-59210002>

²¹ See 'Can I give blood?' gov.im, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gov.im/categories/health-and-wellbeing/giving-blood/can-i-give-blood/#:~:text=Isle%20of%20Man%20Government%20-%20Can%20I%20give,%283%20times%20per%20year%29%20but%20normally%20less%20often.>

²² 'Manx actor Joe Locke calls for gay men blood donation U-turn,' BBC News, accessed 31 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-isle-of-man-62552683>

²³ 'Isle of Man schools must not 'shy away' from Manx slavery links,' BBC News, accessed 26 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-isle-of-man-52976889>

²⁴ Letters to MHKS 2020, The Hardy Commission, Facebook, accessed 26 October 2022, https://m.facebook.com/thehardycommission/posts/124626385951116?_rdr

Other examples include the [IOM Student Climate Network](#) and [The Manx Students Union](#).

Social media

Online activity plays a critical role in youth participation in and engagement with political matters. The internet is a “dominant force” in terms of campaigns, accessing information and the masses, sharing perspectives and political ideas, and the mobilisation of individuals.²⁵

The relationship between social media and online activity and political engagement is a topic that has been and continues to be widely explored by researchers. Online activism can support participation in traditional political activities such as protest marches. Some academics have gone as far as to say that social media and online news has provided more power to citizens, with the potential to be able to regulate the behaviour of politicians. This is due to the mass direct citizen involvement in online forums, petitions and public consultations. However, it is debated whether simply signing a petition online represents meaningful participation, compared to party membership or casting votes.²⁶

In June 2020, the [People of Colour IOM](#) platform was launched through Twitter by young adults.²⁷ It intended to create a centralised voice for issues related to the Black and POC (Person of Colour) community on the Island, following on from the Black Lives Matter protest earlier that month. This group was brought into the spotlight when a spokeswoman from the organisation urged Manx Radio to take action following an incident which happened on air regarding the Black Lives Matter movement. Consequently, Manx Radio suspended the news reporter responsible for the remarks whilst an investigation took place.²⁸

As a response to the failed petition calling for the establishment of a Select Committee to investigate the Isle of Man hosting Syrian refugees, a group of teenagers launched a podcast in May 2020 entitled, '[PolitiBabble](#),' to discuss Manx and International politics from a youth perspective, with the aim of reaching an international audience.²⁹

Another online initiative to encourage youth participation in local politics is, '[Youth Vote IM](#),' which is a nonpartisan organisation campaigning for an increase in youth voter turnout on the Island. The group called for young people to register and partake in the 2021 elections, using social media which they believe has the power to “bring about change.”³⁰

²⁵ Kahne, J. (2018) 'The Political Significance of Social Media Activity and Social Networks,' p.470, accessed 26 October 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2018.1426662>

²⁶ 'Trends in Political Participation,' POST, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0498/POST-PN-0498.pdf>

²⁷ 'People of Colour IOM group launched,' 3FM, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.three.fm/news/isle-of-man-news/people-of-colour-iom-group-launched/>

²⁸ 'Manx Radio 'must make changes' after Stu Peters investigation,' Manx Radio, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-isle-of-man-53266281>

²⁹ 'New youth-run political podcast established,' Manx Radio, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://www.manxradio.com/news/isle-of-man-news/new-youth-run-political-podcast-established/>

³⁰ 'Youngsters reminded to register to vote,' 3FM, accessed 26 October 2022, <https://www.three.fm/news/isle-of-man-news/youngsters-reminded-to-register-to-vote/>

6. Parliamentary Initiatives

Junior Tynwald

[Junior Tynwald](#) provides a forum for younger generations to participate and engage with current political topics and debates. Each secondary school is able to send up to six Junior Tynwald Members, as well as a reporter, who has the opportunity to work with either Manx Radio or Isle of Man Newspapers to produce a report which is either broadcasted or printed. The event is supported by the Executive Committee of the Isle of Man Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Representatives from the Island's secondary schools are invited annually to Tynwald, to act as Members in a mock Tynwald sitting. The schools are invited to submit motions to be debated at the sitting, which are reviewed by parliamentary clerks. Two of the motions are then selected by the Executive Committee to be debated at the sitting. All schools then have the opportunity to submit three questions which are discussed, and relevant Departments assist the Members in preparation with answers.

The President of Tynwald, the Hon. Laurence Skelly MLC stated that the participation of young adults in Junior Tynwald can "make a difference" to Manx politics, and that there was a "strong pedigree" of young politicians who attended presenting "relevant and challenging" debates and questions to Tynwald.³¹

The Votes and Proceedings from Junior Tynwalds held from 2010 to 2018 were laid before Tynwald in [October 2018](#) (2010-2017) and [December 2018](#) (2018).

Commonwealth Youth Parliament

The Commonwealth Youth Parliament is an event organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which brings together representatives aged 18-29 from the nine CPA regions: Africa; Asia; Australia; British Islands and Mediterranean; Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic; Canada; India; Pacific; South-East Asia.³²

The Isle of Man branch of the CPA advertises the opportunity for young persons between the ages of 18 and 25 to submit applications to attend the event, which are then used to nominate candidates. This application is then sent to the CYP, which if successful, will fund the representative to travel and attend the event.

The Commonwealth Youth Parliament is an opportunity to enable a young person to participate in education sessions, parliamentary proceedings, debates and voting on legislation, with the opportunity to meet and interact with experienced parliamentary officials, and likeminded young politicians.

Recent Commonwealth Youth Parliaments have been hosted in Africa, Australia, British Columbia, Jersey, India, occurring virtually in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The next event is to be held in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in November 2022.³³

³¹ 'Junior Tynwald is huge success,' Isle of Man Today, accessed 26 October 2022, <https://www.iomtoday.co.im/news/politics/junior-tynewald-is-huge-success-557316>

³² Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, accessed 27 October 2022, <https://www.cpahq.org/events/11th-commonwealth-youth-parliament/>

³³ Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, accessed 27 October 2022, <https://www.cpahq.org/events/11th-commonwealth-youth-parliament/>

Manx Youth Parliament

A proposal to establish a Manx Youth Parliament (MYP) was debated in Tynwald in [March 2019](#). Miss August-Hanson MLC, who tabled the motion, was inspired by other youth parliaments in nations around the world, and also by the recent increase in student political action.³⁴

Following the resolution in Tynwald in March 2019, a Standing Committee of Tynwald, the Tynwald Management Committee, was tasked with investigating how the MYP would be organised, funded, and its procedures. A [report](#) was published and laid before Tynwald in February 2020 discussing the findings of the Committee. The Committee advised that the MYP would “best fulfil its goals and have the necessary flexibility to be responsive to the needs of the young people if it’s organised outside of Tynwald.”³⁵ The report also discussed how the Members of Tynwald could provide assistance to the MYP with:

- (Limited) advice on social media strategy and publicity;
- Advising on the requirements for organising a sitting;
- Procedural matters and organisation of business;
- Advice on how to behave like a Member of Tynwald.

In summary, the Committee found that the MYP “should be able to co-operate with but be independent of Tynwald”.³⁶ There has been no further movement on the creation of a MYP to date.

Outreach Activities and Resources

The Clerk of Tynwald’s Office offers [tours of the Chambers](#) for schools and other young groups, with an optional mock debate, as well as various resources on the [Tynwald website](#).

7. Government Initiatives

The Isle of Man Government encourages younger people to take part in voting in political elections. There is a dedicated page on the website which has [guidance](#), and resources to educate on voting and the process.³⁷

The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture advertised in September 2022 for a ‘Biosphere Youth Representative.’ This invited applicants aged 18-24 who had a “passion for ensuring the Isle of Man a sustainable future,” to apply for a place as one of the two youth representatives who would be selected to join the [Stakeholder Partnership Group](#). This group “steers” the work of [UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man](#). The involvement of the youth representatives would include them being asked to develop ways of gaining young people’s positive ideas for Biosphere Isle of Man, and to represent these at Stakeholder group meetings, and if the ideas are successful, putting these into action.³⁸

A new initiative launched in 2022 by the Isle of Man Government was the [Government Conference](#). This was an event hosted by Government Departments, Members and Ministers, along with guest speakers and stakeholders. The event was open to the Manx public to attend and ask questions and interact with

³⁴ ‘MLC seeks creation of Manx Youth Parliament,’ Manx Radio, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://www.manxradio.com/news/isle-of-man-news/mlc-seeks-creation-of-manx-youth-parliament/>

³⁵ PP No 2020/0014: Manx Youth Parliament, 2020, <https://www.tynwald.org.im/business/opqp/sittings/20182021/2020-PP-0014.pdf>

³⁶ Ibid, p.3.

³⁷ ‘Young Voters,’ gov.im, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.gov.im/categories/home-and-neighbourhood/elections-and-voting/2021-general-election/voters/young-voters/>

³⁸ ‘Biosphere youth representatives sought,’ gov.im, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.gov.im/news/2022/sep/05/biosphere-youth-representatives-sought/>

political representatives. A number of students from some of the Island's secondary schools attended and engaged within the conference.

Education

The Isle of Man currently does not have a specified national curriculum which states the teaching of politics, governance and democracy is required as a school subject. Instead, enforced through the [Educational Curriculum Order \(2011\)](#), citizenship is required to be taught in schools. Therefore, unlike in the UK,³⁹ education on politics is not required to be taught to children at school in the Isle of Man.

However, through subjects such as Personal, Social, Health and Emotional (P.S.H.E), political issues are explored to some degree.⁴⁰ Politics is offered at Ramsey Grammar School as an A-Level subject, and Government and Politics A-Level is offered at Ballakermeen and St Ninian's High School. The Department of Education, Sport and Culture also works with the Clerk of Tynwald's Office to develop and promote resources on political topics for schools.

8. Initiatives in Other Jurisdictions

UK

Research has found that young people in the UK are less likely to register to vote, vote, be elected, and to participate in selected political activities.⁴¹ To deal with disengagement, the UK Cabinet Office launched the five-year [Democratic Engagement Plan](#), in December 2017 which aimed to achieve greater participation and involvement.⁴²

The UK Cabinet Office also published a policy paper in 2015, '[Democratic engagement programme](#),' which discussed government funding allocated to five organisations in 2014 to help encourage democratic engagement amongst some of the most disengaged groups from politics in the UK, including the youth.⁴³ Such organisations aimed at youth participation included; [UK Youth](#) and [Democracy Challenge](#) and [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) which developed a [peer educator training pack](#). In addition, Cabinet launched '[Rock Enrol!](#)', an interactive learning resource which encourages young people aged 16-19 to engage in politics.

Listed below are some other current initiatives throughout the UK working to increase youth participation:

- [UK Parliamentary learning](#): offers award-winning educational sessions, tours, workshops etc.;
- [Children's Parliament UK](#): aimed at primary school children

³⁹ 'National Curriculum in England: Citizenship Programmes of Study for Key Stages 3 and 4', GOV.UK, accessed 27 October 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-3-and-4>.

⁴⁰ See e.g. 'P.S.H.E.', Queen Elizabeth II High School, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://qe2.sch.im/pages/index/view/id/57/P.S.H.E>.

⁴¹ 'Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged?' House of Commons Library, accessed 28 October 2022, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7501/CBP-7501.pdf>

⁴² 'Every Voice Matters: building a democracy that works for everyone', GOV.UK, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-voice-matters-building-a-democracy-that-works-for-everyone>

⁴³ 'Democratic engagement programme,' gov.uk, accessed 24 October 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/democratic-engagement/democratic-engagement-programme#different-ways-to-engage-communities>

Youth Parliaments

There are numerous examples of youth parliaments across the UK and the world, working towards the common goal of increased youth participation and engagement with politics. An overview of key characteristics of youth parliaments around the world include:

- Active debates regarding current political issues
- Engagement or interaction with the local parliamentary processes (e.g. scrutinising, assisting Committees etc.)
- Membership between the ages of 11 – 25 years old, usually elected by members of the public or partner organisations

Examples of Youth Parliaments:

[The Welsh Youth Parliament – Wales](#)

- 60 Members consisting of young people aged between 11 and 18 years of age
- Members sit for two-year terms
- Youth Parliament meet for three sittings over a two-year term
- Functions include debating and raising awareness of issues important to the Welsh youth, and contributing to the work of National Assembly committees

[The Scottish Youth Parliament – Scotland](#)

- Can be up to 200 Members
- Candidates between the ages of 14 and 25 can stand for elections and vote
- Members sit for two-year terms
- Functions include campaigning and consults on various youth issues, and interacts with the Scottish political process such as scrutinising the national budgets and lobbying for change on issues

[Northern Ireland Youth Forum](#)

- Was set up in 1979 by the Department of Education to represent the views of young people to government and other decision makers
- Anyone can become a Member, as long as they are aged between 11 and 25 years old
- The Forum works with Local Youth Councils and submits views to the Minister for Education

[European Youth Parliament](#)

- A peer-to-peer educational programme that brings together young people from across Europe to take part in debates.
- It hosts an Open Forum for Youth, supports intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding by bringing people together to have discussions and debates, and presents opportunities to development skills such as active citizenship and public speaking
- Anyone aged 15-24 years, and is based in Europe (not only the EU) can join

[State and Territorial Youth Parliaments – Australia](#)

- [Victoria Youth Parliament](#) – young people between 16 and 25 years of age can participate; total of 120 Members are selected
- More than 25 pieces of State Legislation have originated from the Youth Parliament
- [New South Wales Youth Parliament](#) – young people between the ages of 15 and 18 can participate, in which they engage in legislative debate and decision-making

Provincial Youth Parliaments – Canada

- Members are aged between 14 and 21
- 5-7 day sessions where debates are held, and some parliaments conduct weekend conferences 4-5 times a year
- Some youth parliaments produce legislation enacting community and youth-oriented initiatives
- Example: [British Columbia Youth Parliament](#)

International Guidelines

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a review in 2015, '[Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle](#),' which identified key entry points for the inclusion of young people in political and electoral processes. It discussed the need for a youth-friendly legal framework in enabling political participation where national governments and parliaments can consider looking at elements including aligning the minimum voting age and minimum age of eligibility to run for office, and reviewing the framework to address context-specific legal barriers to youth participation.⁴⁴

It also noted that support for political participation should extend across the electoral cycle as opposed to being a one-off event three months before elections. It listed various mechanisms that could be put in place to encourage more young people to participate, including through civic education, training programmes, youth-led community development and volunteer organisations, and using online platforms for knowledge-sharing and networking amongst politically-engaged youth.

UNICEF also published a paper in 2001, '[Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making](#)' which discussed the fundamental rights that children hold to be able to express their views freely and to be taken seriously for their perspectives. Much of it explored the necessity of a shift in thinking on behalf of adults by involving the youth to adult conferences and other platforms upon which decision-making activities occur, actively listening to the needs of the youth, and keeping their best interests in mind when making decisions rather than ignoring or dismissing them.⁴⁵

9. Further Reading

House of Commons Library, 'Voting age', 19 November 2020, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01747/> (accessed 3 November 2022)

⁴⁴ 'Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle,' UNDP, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.undp.org/publications/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-electoral-cycle>

⁴⁵ 'Promoting Children's Participation In Democratic Decision-Making,' UNICEF, accessed 25 October 2022, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf>