



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## *News Release*

Issued: 9 June 2015

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**STORY UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL WEDNESDAY, 10 JUNE 2015 00.01 BST**

### **Schools should discuss political issues in classroom, study suggests**

Discussing political issues in the classroom plays a crucial role in getting young people to participate in the democratic process, a study suggests.

Students who engaged in discussion about political issues in class were significantly more likely to vote and be engaged with politics in a variety of other ways, researchers found.

No other factor – such as discussing politics with parents or friends – has greater influence in determining the civic attitudes of 16 and 17 year olds, according to the study.

The researchers say that all senior school pupils should learn about political structures and processes, and be given the opportunity to discuss political issues in the classroom.

They found that those who had taken a school course in which politics and society were discussed – such as Modern Studies in Scotland – were less likely to find politics difficult to understand.

Analysis of the factors that might encourage young people to take part in politics found substantial differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The University of Edinburgh team surveyed 800 16-17 year olds – half in Scotland and half in other parts of the UK – and found that students in Scotland were more politically engaged than those elsewhere.

Two thirds of 16 and 17 year old Scots surveyed said they would have been “very likely” to vote had they been eligible to do so in the General Election. Only 39 per cent of 16-17 year olds elsewhere in the UK said the same. In Scotland, 16-17 year olds were allowed to participate in the independence referendum in 2014, but not in the recent General Election.

Scottish 16 and 17 year olds are also more likely to have taken part in other forms of non-electoral political engagement, such as petitioning and writing to a Member of Parliament. A total of 57 per cent reported that they had done so, compared with 40 per cent in the rest of the UK.

Young people in Scotland were better informed about politics than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK, according to the study.

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Sixty per cent of Scottish pupils used three or more different types of information sources to learn about the General Election in the three months preceding the survey, which was carried out in February 2015. This compared with 43 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds elsewhere in the UK.

In Scotland, 63 per cent of those surveyed said they had discussed how the UK is governed in the three months preceding the survey with members of their family. This compared with only 39 per cent of those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Amongst adults, giving 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote was also substantially more popular in Scotland. Fifty per cent of those expressing a view felt that young people should be allowed to vote in all elections, compared with 30 per cent in England, 33 per cent in Wales and 34 per cent in Northern Ireland.

Dr Jan Eichhorn, of University of Edinburgh's School of Social and Political Science, and one of the authors of the study, said: "Through good political education in schools and early voter enfranchisement, we get the next generation of young people to understand the relevance of politics better and engage in it more extensively.

"But we need to ensure that all young people can discuss political issues in a qualified way in classroom settings. It can't be left to chance, because of where they live, whether they are supported in their first engagement with politics."

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### **Additional Note**

*All figures presented in this briefing are based on respondents who gave an answer to the question, meaning non-responses and don't knows are not included in the calculation of the percentages. This research was part of a larger survey for which more than 7400 adults were interviewed across the UK.*