

# Learning for Democracy

## A St George's House Consultation,

St George's House, Windsor Castle, Monday 30<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017

### Background Paper

There are many reasons to be concerned about the health of our democracy: distrust of politicians; declining turnout at elections; low levels of participation by young people, ethnic minorities and lower income groups; the difficulties of dealing with complex social problems, quality of political decision-making and legitimacy of the system among citizens.

Just 21% of Britons trust politicians to tell the truth ([Ipsos-Mori 2016](#)). Only one third are satisfied with how Parliament works and think the system by which Britain is governed works well, with those furthest from Westminster most likely to be dissatisfied (Hansard Society 2016 [Audit of Political Engagement](#)). Only 13% of people feel they have any influence. On average, 40% of 18-24 year olds voted in the last four general elections, compared to over 60% in 1992. The UK's youth turnout rate is the lowest in Western Europe, and half that of Sweden, for example.

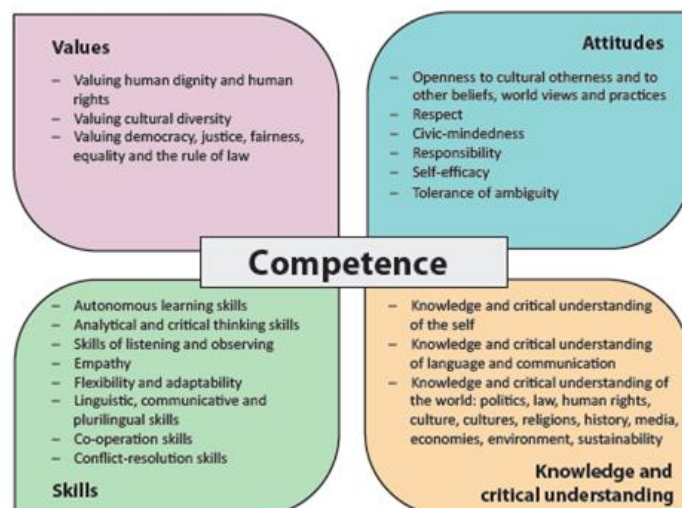
As the Prime Minister said, 'Our democracy should work for everyone, but if you've been trying to say things need to change for years and your complaints fall on deaf ears, it doesn't feel like it's working' ([5 Oct 2016](#)).

Some aspects of this problem can be addressed by improving the machinery of government and constitutional changes ("supply side"). However, such changes will reinforce inequality of influence if most people do not have the knowledge and skill to take part.

There is a great deal of evidence from many countries of how education can give people the confidence, skills and knowledge participate in the democratic process, thus improving the "demand side" of politics.

The core competencies for democratic participation are described in the [Reference Framework of Competencies for Democratic Culture](#) (see image). The UK agreed to use this to "increase the effectiveness of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education at all levels of education and

The 20 competences included in the model



training for all individuals" at a [Ministerial meeting](#) in 2016, but it has not yet started to do this.

These competencies are relevant to all age groups and all phases of education. They can also improve young people's academic success at school and develop skills – such as public speaking and team work – that are useful in the labour market.

### **Why the UK needs a coherent vision of learning for democracy**

Very few people have the opportunity to develop basic skills and knowledge for political literacy. Citizenship education is barely taught in most schools and often does not include political knowledge or skill. There is at present no political will or institutional support for all citizens to develop the skills and confidence to take part.

However, there is a great deal of evidence on the benefits of wider participation in politics, for both citizens and society. We know what core competencies and knowledge people need to take part effectively. There is also a lot of experience of how people learn to take part in different settings. Parliament's Education Service and Outreach teams offer excellent materials, training and sessions for schools and adults. Many organisations offer targeted provision, from campaign effectiveness and community organiser training to political literacy and public participation.

Almost every government launches piecemeal initiatives for active citizenship and participation, most of which are dropped or decline under the next government. The current government is promoting British Values, character education, the National Citizenship Service, social action by 10-20 year-olds (the [#iwill](#) campaign), Prevent and [A Democracy that Works for Everyone](#). The previous Coalition funded training for community organisers, community planning, NHS Citizen, voter registration and other schemes, some of which continue. New Labour put Citizenship into the National Curriculum and funded Community Champions, Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC), Take Part, Together We Can, the Empowerment Programme, a Duty to Promote Democracy and other initiatives, most of which have ceased. All governments invest taxpayers' money to create national programmes of support, training and materials, which are largely lost when funding finishes.

Everyone would benefit from a coherent, consistent and sustained approach to learning for democracy that is independent of party politics and available to all citizens through formal and informal education.

### **The consultation process**

A St George's House consultation takes place over twenty-four hours. We will begin at 11am on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> October and conclude with lunch on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October. Participants will stay in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

We will bring together 28 expert practitioners in education for democratic citizenship and leaders in education and civil society. In advance of the consultation participants will receive short briefing papers on the current state of education for democracy and summaries of previous commissions, inquiries and policy commitments under successive governments. This will enable participants to take stock in advance, allowing maximum time for discussion and reflection during the consultation.



## Outcomes

This consultation addresses the question of how formal and informal education can help to create a democracy that works for everyone.

The main outcomes we seek are:

- A Speaker's Commission
- A campaign on 'Learning for Democracy'.

These will be achieved by developing

- A compelling vision to inform education institutions and government policy  
A set of principles for practice;
- Evidence to show why Learning for Democracy matters
- High-level support for the vision as well as a groundswell within education and civil society.

To prepare the discussion we will gather evidence, case studies (stories) and learning materials, and build support among politicians, policy-makers, education leaders and practitioners.

We need this consultation to create a joined-up vision of education for democratic citizenship which adult education, civil society, schools, colleges, local authorities, universities and the government can use to develop provision on the ground.

We are confident that this ambitious agenda is possible because pieces of the jigsaw have been created over the past thirty years, including the [Speakers' Commission on Citizenship \(1988-90\)](#), [Crick Report](#), [Power Inquiry \(2004\)](#), [Youth Citizenship Commission \(2009\)](#) and [Beyond the Youth Citizenship Commission: Young People and Politics \(2014\)](#) and the [Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture \(2016\)](#). The report from this consultation will bring these pieces together with your insights to create a bigger picture with practical, implementable and impactful policy suggestions. Through this process we aim to build political momentum to make learning for democracy a priority for education providers, parliament and government.

This consultation will be an important step on the way to achieving the ultimate objective of a well-informed, effective democracy in which all citizens have an equal voice.

