Young people and citizenship: a study of opinion in Nottinghamshire

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We would like to thank Debbie Freer, a Research Assistant at the Nottingham Trent University, for her involvement in the project, in particular her preparation of the panel survey data, and organisation of the focus groups. Thanks also to Sarah Stewart-Dowse for her input to the project.
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1. **Introduction**

1.1 Conventional wisdom suggests that young people in Britain are alienated from the political process. This youth disillusionment can be measured in terms of declining party membership, political attitudes, and voting behaviour.\(^1\) In terms of the latter, the electoral turnout of young people is symptomatic of a generalised malaise that is afflicting the British political system as a whole. The rate of non-voting amongst all eligible adults is in steady decline for local, general and European Assembly elections,\(^2\) and there are diminishing levels of trust generally in British political institutions, agents and processes.\(^3\)

1.2 These developments have led some to talk about there being a crisis of legitimacy\(^4\) that should be met by initiatives to increase citizenship and engender a reinvigorated democratic culture. The Government’s programme of constitutional change seeks to address these issues concerning citizenship and participation in democratic affairs. Elsewhere, the Economic and Social Research Council has set up a special research programme on *Democracy and Participation* to investigate such matters.\(^5\) Furthermore, the *Crick Report* considers mechanisms through which young people might develop an engagement with the political process, and proposes to introduce statutory citizenship classes into schools’ teaching.

1.3 This report addresses these areas in relation to young people, and contributes to the theoretical understanding of political participation in Britain. In addition, we review

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the development of new initiatives designed to make the decision-making system more sensitive to youth concerns and more flexible to encourage youth participation in democratic affairs. It is claimed that together, these will help to embed the notion that young people have a stake in society and a role to play as full citizens.

1.4 The report presents the results of the second stage of a longitudinal project commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council. The results are based upon an analysis of six focus groups, together with a regional panel survey of 425 randomly selected young people who have only limited experience of formal politics. It aims to reveal the level of engagement that youth have with formal politics in Britain. Specifically, the research addresses whether or not there is a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ in terms of their attitudes towards politics. Analysis of the data tends to refute conventional wisdom that suggests that young people are apolitical and relatively apathetic. Instead, the findings signal quite clearly that whilst the first-time voters in our study are sceptical of political institutions, professional politicians and political parties, they are nonetheless committed to the democratic process. If they do show signs of disengagement from formal politics in Britain, then this is more to do with their perceptions of how politics is conducted and organised, than with disinterest.

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5 For details of this £3.5 million research programme, see http://www.esrc.ac.uk/fundops.htm. Professor David Marsh and colleagues will be undertaking research into the political attitudes of young people as part of this initiative.

6 The original survey of 1,597 “attainers” (new members of the electoral register) as they were then was conducted in June 1998. The report can be obtained from the authors, or from the Policy and General Purposes Committee of the Nottinghamshire County Council. See Wring, D., M. Henn, and M. Weinstein (1998) Young People and Politics: A Study of Opinion in Nottinghamshire, 1998. Nottingham: Nottinghamshire County Council.
2. **Young People: Political Participation and Citizenship**

2.1.1 There is growing anxiety amongst government circles that young people are becoming increasingly disengaged from politics and the democratic system. Current thinking is that this development calls into question the legitimacy of the political system itself, and also that it is also leading to the rise of a disenchanted and irresponsible youth generation. This is characterised by their apparent ‘unwillingness to obey the law, to play by the rules, or to pay for the needs of others’. Certainly, the rate of voting turnout amongst young people in recent elections has followed a steady downward trend. In the previous national election of 1992, only 61% of 18-24 year olds voted compared with a general turnout of 77.7%. In 1997 the latter figure was 71.4%, the lowest poll since the war, with only 68% an estimated turnout rate for 18-24 year olds of 68%.

2.1.2 However, a number of studies have suggested that whilst young people may be less interested in formal “politics” than other (older) age groups, such a development is not necessarily inevitable, and nor does it signal a disinterest in politics per se. Instead, some authors have concluded that young people are concerned about matters that are essentially “political” in nature, but that these concerns lie beyond the boundaries of how politics is conventionally understood. Thus, numerous

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8 Mulgan and Wilkinson op.cit., p.218.

9 Butler and Kavanagh op.cit., p.254


13 We take as our definition here, an understanding of politics that is concerned with the formal institutions of government (national, sub-national, and supra-national), conventional political
studies have found that this group do have a high rate of participation in various forms of voluntary and campaigning activity – the end results of which were intended to achieve some political and social change - without regarding this action as necessarily “political”. Furthermore, young people do care about certain political issues such as environmentalism and animal rights, but these are often ignored by mainstream political parties and elected representatives who in the past have tended, certainly at the 1997 General Election, to focus upon middle-aged, middle-England issues.

2.2 1997: A Turning Point in Youth Citizenship?

Nonetheless, young people, like their older contemporaries are sceptical of the way the British political system is organised and led. This is not a new revelation. A study by Marsh conducted during the 1970s for instance, found that people in general regarded politics as “a remote and unresponsive system run by cynical and aloof politicians”. As the period of Conservative Party rule came to a close, it was clear that this trend had failed to abate. Studies indicated that there was widespread disillusionment with the political system, and in particular, with those who were charged with overseeing it.

actors (especially the political parties), and traditional forms of political behaviour (such as voting in elections, attending political meetings, membership of overtly political organisations).


18 Only 22% of the electorate trust governments to put the interests of the nation above that of party, 28% agree with the statement that ‘parties are only interested in peoples votes, not their opinions’, and over a quarter of the population now strongly agree that ‘political parties and MP’s are out of touch with the needs of the electorate’. See Curtice and Jowell op.cit., p.92.
Having re-interviewed respondents following the 1997 General Election, Curtice and Jowell suggest that the poll result may have, albeit temporarily, increased some of the electorate’s sense of hope and optimism about the future.\textsuperscript{19} It is a mood the New Labour government has been keen to promote. Critically, ministers have attempted to demonstrate their willingness to listen to different groups. Britain’s youth, in particular, have been well courted.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed this follows on from statements made by Tony Blair prior to the election, notably the one in which he declared he would rather young people participate and vote against Labour than not at all.\textsuperscript{21}

Nonetheless, after two years in government, New Labour has failed to buck the underlying and long-term trend of public disillusionment with the political process. The rate of non-voting amongst the population as a whole is in long-term decline. In the early post-war elections non-turnout was relatively low. At the 1945 General Election voter abstention stood at only 26.7% of the eligible electorate, 1950 only 16.0%, 1951 it measured 17.5%, in 1955 it was 23.2%, and at the 1959 contest only 21.3% did not cast their ballot. In recent General Elections turnout has continued to decline. In 1987 the level of non-voting was 24.7%, although in 1992 turnout increased slightly with an abstention rate of only 22.3%. However, in 1997, this had risen to nearly 29%, the lowest post-war participation rate.\textsuperscript{22} The issue is more pronounced in local elections, which have been characterised by increasing abstention rates; in 1998, non-turnout for all local contests held (London, metropolitan, district and unitary) was 30%; in 1999 71% of the eligible electorate in England did not vote, 8% up from the 1995 poll when the same council seats were contested (63% abstention rate).

As far as electoral participation in European Assembly Elections is concerned, British citizens are clearly the least enthused amongst member countries when it

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, p.106.

\textsuperscript{20} See, for example, Peter Mandelson’s argument that the Labour Party is different and \textit{can} make a difference. ‘A lifeline for youth’, \textit{The Guardian}, 15 August 1997.

\textsuperscript{21} ‘Parties make their pitch to attract youth vote’, \textit{The Guardian}, 31 January 1997.
comes to exercising their right to vote. At the ballot in June 1999, turnout was 23%, (down from 37% in 1994) which compares unfavourably with other EU countries (see Table 1 below which compares turnout rates). Furthermore, successive reports demonstrate that there is significant public support for schemes designed to enhance citizenship such as constitutional reform. Such findings indicate that there is widespread alienation of the entire public, and not just of young people, from the political set-up. The apparent widespread apathy is not restricted to European elections: in the 1999 Leeds Central by-election fewer than one in five voters bothered to go to the polls. This marks the lowest turnout for a parliamentary contest in post-war British history.

### Table 1 Turnout in European Assembly Elections 1999 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.5 Partly as a response to the general disengagement that exists between citizens and the political process, the Labour Government has embarked upon a programme of widespread constitutional change. Many observers have claimed that the political reforms initiated by the Blair administration are rather ad hoc, with no underlying

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23 At one polling station in Sunderland, turnout is thought to have been just one-point-five percent, which would be the lowest recorded turnout in British history.
24 See successive ‘State of The Nation’ reports commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.
statement of principles designed to set out the rationale and long-term objectives of the changes:

‘Britain is entering a period that will see the greatest constitutional reform for a century, yet the country has no clear idea what this means and where it is supposed to lead.’

2.2.6 Nonetheless, the introduction of this package of reforms suggests that there is a clear understanding amongst members of the Government that the centralised unitary state as it currently exists is failing to encourage active citizenship and a participative culture in Britain. These changes amount to an attempt by the Government to devolve powers from Westminster. They include the establishment of directly elected chambers in both Scotland and Wales, forthcoming elections for a Mayor in London, and the possibility of regional tiers of government in England. There is a commitment to reforming the House of Lords. Proportional representation has already been implemented for the European Assembly elections, and the Jenkins Commission has reported on the possibility of reforming the electoral system for national parliamentary elections in Britain. Furthermore, various legal rights are to be introduced to enhance the role of citizens, including a Freedom of Information Act and the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law.

2.2.7 Other changes are being actively considered to encourage the development of a sustainable democratic culture in Britain. In 1997, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment published a White Paper, Excellence in Schools, which committed the Government to strengthening citizenship education in schools. An advisory group chaired by Professor Bernard Crick was instructed to:

‘Provide advice on effective education for citizenship in schools – to include the nature and practices of participation in democracy; the

duties, responsibilities and rights of individuals as citizens; and the value to individuals and society of community activity.\textsuperscript{26}

\subsection*{2.2.8} The \textit{Crick Report} as it has become known, claimed that the teaching of statutory classes in citizenship and democracy was essential if the Government’s programme of constitutional change was not to be undermined by increasing levels of political disenchantment amongst the public. Instead, such classes would help to facilitate the development of an informed and politically engaged citizenry, and ultimately a ‘citizen democracy’:

\begin{quote}
‘The purpose of citizenship education in schools and colleges is to make secure and to increase the knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature and practices of participative democracy; also to enhance the awareness of rights and duties, and the sense of responsibilities needed for the development of pupils into active citizens.’\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

\subsection*{2.2.9} Furthermore, in a prominent recent interview, Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that: “if the economic imperative is to develop what we call the knowledge economy, the social imperative is to develop a modern, responsible notion of citizenship”.\textsuperscript{28}

\subsection*{2.2.10} Local Government have also been charged with developing initiatives to stimulate the public’s attachment to and engagement with the political process. The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions’ White Paper \textit{Modernising Local Government: In Touch With the People} drew attention to what was perceived to be the public’s relative indifference about local democracy, reflected in diminishing turnout at elections:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Crick, \textit{Ibid}, p.40.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Blair, T. (1999) ‘My Moral Manifesto for the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century’, \textit{The Observer}, September 5\textsuperscript{th}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
‘(Renewal of local democracy) can only come about if there is higher participation in elections and close regular contact between a council and local people between elections.’

2.2.11 Significantly, the Government sanctioned the use of local experiments to ‘encourage people to register, to remove disincentives to vote, to make voting easier and to streamline or modernise the process of voting.’ As a response to this, local councils in Britain have recently been engaged in developing a number of innovative projects designed to develop clear and close relationships between councillors, council officers and their communities. These include various procedural methods and devices to mobilise the electorate, as well as consultation exercises to facilitate the participation of local people in decision-making. In terms of the latter, numerous projects, particularly those focusing on educating and engaging young people in the processes of local democracy, were reported as part of the Local Government Association’s 1998 Local Democracy Week. Local authorities experimented with citizen’s panels, community plans, forums, visioning exercises, opinion polling and surveys, and various school and youth initiatives.

2.2.12 Such initiatives are not new, however. In many respects, they build upon various projects originating in the USA, but which are now gradually filtering through into British practice via continental Europe. Within the academic literature, there is a suggestion that information and communication technologies (ICTs) in particular can be used to help develop an engagement between citizens and the political process. Proponents claim that interactive communication, through for instance the

30 Ibid.
31 The Modernising Local Government White Paper suggested that such experiments might include: electronic voting; mobile polling stations; voting at any polling station in the authority, or for example, at specified places in a nearby authority; voting in different hours, on different days, or over a number of days; entire elections by postal voting; and electronic or mechanical counting of votes.
use of electronic town-hall meetings, remote voting, and instant reaction polling, 
open up the prospect of meaningful and genuine dialogue between the electorate on 
the one hand, and public officials and elected representatives on the other.33

2.2.13 Much of the empirical research in this field is, by nature, in its infancy and 
somewhat speculative.34 Nevertheless, like the Net itself, studies have begun to grow 
at an exponential rate and surveys of the role and utilisation of ICTs in the political 
process do now exist.35 These suggest that, whilst many of the applications are 
experimental and concerned with improving access to public information and 
services, the technological infrastructure to support more ambitious forms of 
electronic participatory democracy and direct governance is being put in place. 
Santa Monica’s Public Electronic Network (PEN) provides public access (via 
networked terminals located in public buildings and home-based PCs) to the 
council’s computer network, including information and direct contact with staff, 
bulletin boards and electronic debating facilities.36 There are also numerous 
examples of experimental and established electronic town meetings aimed at 
facilitating citizen participation in governmental affairs. Horrocks and Webb list 
such projects as the Alternatives for Washington planning exercise held in the mid-
1970s, the Honolulu and Vision 20/20 in Georgia, (interactive cable and television

33 For a discussion of this position and counter-arguments, see Henn, M. (1996) Opinion Polling 
in Comparative Contexts: The Challenge of Change in Contemporary Societies, Ph.D. 
Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, pp.86-94. See also Van de Donk, W.B.H.J., and 
Van de Donk, I.T.M. Snellen, and P.W. Tops, Orwell in Athens: A Perspective on Informatization 
Teledemocracy’, in Social Science Computer Review, 10:4, Winter, p.518;
Information Technology Revolution. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Abramson, J.B., F.C. Arterton, and 
Los Angeles School for Communication, University of South Carolina; Varley, P. (1993) 
projects) *Alaska Television Tour Meeting*, the *Colombus Qube Tube*, and the two televoting projects in *Nova Scotia* and in *New Mexico* both undertaken in 1992.  

2.2.14 Central and local government is now actively considering applications of various measures for electoral politics across the UK. Such initiatives are designed with two key purposes in mind beyond merely improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. Firstly, to increase the “transparency” of government, by increasing citizens’ “access to a greater range of the information collected and generated by government”. Secondly, to “enable fundamental changes in the relationships between the citizen and the state”, by establishing direct contact between citizens and public officials and elected representatives. In turn, it is intended that such projects will enhance increased active participation by citizens in UK politics; the underlying rationale being to reverse the continuing trend toward voter apathy and alienation from the political process which appears to be an ongoing feature of contemporary society.

2.3 *The Nottinghamshire County Council “Youth and Politics” Project*

2.3.1 This report is based upon one such initiative commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council. The authority’s objectives were to initiate:

‘measures that lead to greater public involvement in local matters... it is suggested that to reduce apathy amongst young people, a key step is to change the culture to make them feel that they have a stake in their local councils. To this end, it is recommended that a survey of young Nottinghamshire voters is carried out so as to provide valuable primary research material on attitudes... to examine young people’s attitude to local government and the link to voting; and to assess how Nottinghamshire County Council can make its services more relevant to

younger people in the specific context of increasing interest in the
democratic process.\textsuperscript{39}

2.3.2 Nottinghamshire County Council is committed to a longitudinal programme of
research. The first stage of this research – a panel survey of 1,597 first-time
entrants onto the electoral register - was conducted in June 1998.\textsuperscript{40} The second
phase of the panel survey, carried out in June 1999, is assessed in this report.
This, in turn, has been augmented by a series of focus groups held in August 1999
that were designed to uncover some of the deeper perceptions and meanings that
young people in Nottinghamshire attach to politics and political activity, as well
as their aspirations and expectations.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Report of the Chief Executive’, Policy and General Purposes Committee, September 29\textsuperscript{th}
1997.

\textsuperscript{40} See Wring, D., M. Henn, and M. Weinstein (1998) \textit{op.cit.}
3. **Research Design**

3.1 *The 1999 Panel Survey*

3.1.1 Full details about the design of the panel survey, including who the survey participants are, how they were originally included within the study, and why Nottinghamshire is such an interesting case for analysis of young people’s political views and concerns, can be found in the first Nottinghamshire County Council report prepared by the current authors.\(^4\)

3.1.2 The 1999 panel survey was posted on 10\(^{th}\) June 1998 to all those from the original 1998 sample who had indicated that they were interested in taking part in further research for this project. Of this group of 867, returns were received initially from 143 young people. To boost the response, and increase the representativeness of the panel survey overall, a second wave of questionnaires was sent to those who had not responded by the end of June. Ultimately, 425 young people across the County responded. As it transpired, eleven of the original 867 addresses were unusable, resulting in a usable sample of 856. Our overall response rate therefore was a very satisfactory 49.6%.

3.1.3 Of these 425, a further 173 young people indicated that they were willing to take part in a focus group. All of those who had expressed their support for the continuation of the study were contacted in July 1999. Of all those contacted, 78 young people responded to the invitation to take part in a focus group.

3.2 *The 1999 Focus Group Research*

3.2.1 This focus group study was designed to uncover some of the deeper perceptions and meanings that the young people included in the study attach to politics and political activity, as well as their aspirations and expectations. In this respect,
Focus groups are used because they can gain a deeper insight into the views and opinions of young people in relation to political institutions and actors than is possible through the use of survey research alone. For example, where survey respondents have indicated that they strongly disagree with the statement that *It is important to vote in local elections*, a focus group provides an opportunity to delve into the reasons behind such a response. Survey research by itself does not aim to provide this depth of insight, and in this respect the focus group provides the opportunity to contextualise the data gained in a survey and supplement that data in very important ways.

3.2.2 Focus groups also allow people to express themselves in their own words using their own language, and they provide for interaction between like-minded people. This element of interaction is often seen as key to the operation of a focus group, whereby information is generated that might not become apparent in an individual one-to-one interview. In this respect, the researcher creates an atmosphere that nurtures different perceptions and points of view in a non-pressurised environment.42

3.2.3 It is important to note that focus groups do not intend to be representative in a way that social surveys do. Readers should be very careful not to interpret the findings from these focus groups in a way that one might do with a statistically representative sample survey that can be generalised to a wider population. Rather, focus groups are constructed so that a small number of individuals are recruited from a larger group where those selected share certain key characteristics of the target population. A focused, group, discussion is conducted on a number of occasions with similar types of people to identify consistent trends and patterns. It is from this series of discussions that broad impressions and themes emerge that may uncover an element of consistency or otherwise.

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41 Ibid.
3.2.4 Full details about the sampling strategy used to determine who should be included in the focus groups, together with how recruitment took place, and the actual operation of the focus groups, is outlined in Appendix 1.

3.2.5 The analysis that is presented in this report is the product of a full transcription of the tape recordings taken at each meeting, the notes made during each session by the assistant moderator, and the notes that were taken at the de-briefing session that followed each focus group.
4. **Results**

The discussion that follows is disaggregated into two sections. The first is based upon an analysis of the panel survey data, and where appropriate, compares the 1999 results with the data from the same respondents reported in the first wave in 1998. The second section focuses exclusively upon the focus groups. In many ways, the data here complements the panel survey, but is sufficiently large in scale to warrant separate analysis.

4.1 **The 1999 Panel Survey**

This survey, as with the previous panel, was designed to investigate not only how young people relate to political institutions and processes, but also how they rated various initiatives which have been suggested at national and local levels of government to increase voting turnout at elections. We were also interested in finding out how often this group discussed “political” matters – and indeed what political issues were of most concern to them – and what steps if any they had in the past taken to action these political interests. These findings are reported in the following sections. Figures in brackets refer to 1998 data and are reviewed in order to give some indication of any shift in overall views and orientations amongst our survey members.43

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43 It is important to note that we have compared the views of the 425 respondents who took part in the 1999 survey, with the views of the same people as they were expressed in 1998, not with the full 1,597 members of this earlier study. This is so that we can compare like with like. Our 425 respondents may, in important ways, differ from the 1,172 people who were not included in the 1999 panel. We have therefore excluded this group from further analysis. Consequently, the figures reported in the following section that refer to the 1998 panel survey may differ from earlier reports and papers connected to this project (see Wring, D., M. Henn, and M. Weinstein, 1998 and 1999, op.cit.) which are based on analysis of the full 1,597 respondents.
4.1.1 Political Engagement

4.1.1.1 Our research reveals that, far from being apolitical and apathetic, young people continue to demonstrate an interest in political issues. Firstly, we found that a majority of this age cohort do discuss politics with their friends and family at least “some” of the time, if not more often (over 50%).

4.1.1.2 We then wanted to find out how much interest young people had in political affairs. When asked about national politics, over seven respondents in ten replied they had some or more interest in the topic, the same proportion who had reported a year previously. Interestingly, there were significant levels of engagement with local affairs, which by definition are less high-profile, and do not receive the same media attention as national issues. More than two-fifths (44.8%) said they had at least “some” interest, four times the number who had none (11.1%). There appears then to be no significant shift in the level of interest in national politics since 1998, although marginally less engagement with local political affairs a year later (51.8% in 1998).

Table 2 Young People’s Political Engagement (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Not very much</th>
<th>None/not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, how often would you say that you talk about politics with your friends or family?</td>
<td>4.7 (5.4)</td>
<td>14.4 (16.5)</td>
<td>31.8 (32.1)</td>
<td>37.4 (33.0)</td>
<td>11.8 (13.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much interest do you normally have in national politics?</td>
<td>5.6 (9.4)</td>
<td>27.8 (25.2)</td>
<td>37.9 (37.0)</td>
<td>22.1 (21.2)</td>
<td>6.6 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much interest do you normally have in local politics?</td>
<td>1.9 (4.3)</td>
<td>10.7 (9.9)</td>
<td>32.2 (37.6)</td>
<td>44.1 (34.0)</td>
<td>11.1 (14.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1998 results in brackets)

4.1.1.3 As with the 1998 wave of the panel, we sought to build up an understanding of what exactly was of central political interest to our survey respondents. They
were asked what issue was of most importance to them. The results appear surprising at first sight, in that they indicate a shift in the issue priorities of this age group. In the first wave of the panel survey, respondents reported their chief concerns (in order of priority) as education, followed by the environment, general social concerns, and Europe. On this occasion, “Europe” had displaced education as the issue of most salience to our survey group (see Figure 1 below). However, given the proximity of our survey to the 1999 European Assembly election, and the intense media coverage given to European matters at the time, this is perhaps not particularly surprising. The other key issues mentioned included (in rank order) education, war and militarism, and the environment.

Figure 1  Agenda of Youth Concerns (%)

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44 To identify the major issue priorities of the young respondents, an open question (9) asked “Which community, national or international issue are you most concerned about?”. This open question was coded into 16 different categories to create the variable Issue (see the Appendix, Instructions for Coders, Q9 for categories and example statements). Only the first answer given was recorded.

45 Questionnaires were sent out the day after the election.
Political Activism

4.1.1.4 But to what length are young people prepared to go to realise their political aspirations, and resolve their political concerns? A series of questions asked whether or not our survey participants had ever taken part in any of a number of different forms of political activity. The findings (see Table 3) suggest that young people were more likely to have taken part in “informal” types of political activity (such as signing petitions, donating money to campaigns, joining campaign groups, or participating in demonstrations), than established types of action (such as joining political parties or writing to elected representatives).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever joined a political party?</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever written to your Member of Parliament?</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever written to your local councillor?</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever joined a campaign group?</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever signed a petition?</td>
<td>57.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever given money to a campaign?</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever taken part in a march or demonstration?</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1.5 This apparent disconnection from formal politics may, at least partially, reflect young people’s seeming disregard for, or lack of confidence in, professional politicians. The survey revealed that this age group considers the notion that political parties and elected representatives genuinely seek to further their interests and act upon their concerns, with a high degree of scepticism. The pattern of dislocation from formal politics is revealed when respondents were asked for their opinion of politicians (see Table 4). As was the case in 1998, only a minority (19.9%) agreed that politicians care about young people like myself, whilst majorities took the somewhat cynical line that, once elected, politicians lose touch with people pretty quickly (54.4%), and that parties are only interested in people’s votes, not in their opinions (57.5%). Similarly, respondents were
more likely to agree (46.5%) than disagree (36.3%) with the contention that, *it doesn’t matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same.*

**Table 4 Youth Perception of Formal Politics (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither/Nor</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians care about young people like myself</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16.9)</td>
<td>(42.5)</td>
<td>(40.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians are all the same</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(23.1)</td>
<td>(20.5)</td>
<td>(56.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once elected, politicians lose touch with people pretty quickly</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(49.6)</td>
<td>(32.6)</td>
<td>(17.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties are only interested in people’s votes, not in their opinions</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(55.0)</td>
<td>(26.8)</td>
<td>(18.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.4)</td>
<td>(17.6)</td>
<td>(32.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1.6 However, the survey revealed once again that young people do not agree with the notion that *politicians are all the same.* Perhaps this reflects respondents’ abilities to discriminate between individual MPs (some of whom may be recognised by our young panel to perform their duties well), and MPs as a collective body who may appear to be out of touch with voters generally. If this is the case, it suggests that, far from being politically “lazy” and disinterested, young people are relatively sophisticated (but cynical) observers of the political scene.

4.1.2 **Confidence in the Democratic Process**

4.1.2.1 Interestingly, the results indicate that whilst young people place relatively little trust in the custodians of the political system, they do nonetheless display important signs that they are engaged with, and have a high degree of faith in, the democratic process itself.
4.1.2.2 Having reached the age of assent more than 12 months previously, all our respondents had now had the opportunity to vote in at least one election. In line with the record levels of abstention reported for both the 1999 local and European elections, majorities however, decided not to. Nonetheless, higher than expected numbers reported that they had exercised their voting prerogative for these contests (see Table 5 below).

**Table 5**  
**Perception of Importance of Voting (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you vote in the recent local election on May 6(^{th}) 1999?</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you vote in the recent European parliamentary election?</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2.3 Somewhat paradoxically, the level of intention to vote in the next national parliamentary election is high, although our survey respondents are unsure which political party they will support in the contest. In 1998, 77.6% reported that they proposed to cast their vote in this ballot. Over eight in ten of the 1999 panel stated the same (83.7%). However, they were still left unsure which political party they would support when the time arises, with only 44.1% claiming to have already made this decision (this compares with 46.8% in 1998 – see Table 6).

**Table 6**  
**Intention to Vote, and Party Identification (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (%</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Don’t Know (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you intend to vote in the next parliamentary general election?</td>
<td>83.7 (77.0)</td>
<td>16.3 (5.7)</td>
<td>0.0 (17.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you do intend to vote (in the next parliamentary general election), do you know which party you will vote for?</td>
<td>44.1 (46.8)</td>
<td>55.9 (53.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46 All survey members had had the option to register and cast a vote for the 1999 European Assembly election, and all bar those living in the Nottingham City council boundaries, for the 1999 local authority election.
4.1.2.4 Their stated interest in the next national parliamentary contest is reflected somewhat in the strong commitment that our young respondents claim to have for the democratic process. Table 7 illustrates this, suggesting that by large majorities, they consider that it is important to vote in both national elections (73.2%) and in local contests (61.6%), with only a fraction expressing support for the negative contention that voting is a waste of time (6.4%). However, their support for the idea of voting had fallen somewhat over the twelve months since this same group was last surveyed, with corresponding figures of 81.6%, 72.4%, and 2.4% respectively.

Table 7  Perception of Importance of Voting (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither / nor</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important to vote in national elections</td>
<td>36.7 (44.1)</td>
<td>36.7 (37.5)</td>
<td>23.8 (16.7)</td>
<td>2.1 (0.9)</td>
<td>0.7 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to vote in local elections</td>
<td>17.4 (26.4)</td>
<td>44.2 (46.0)</td>
<td>32.2 (25.7)</td>
<td>5.6 (1.7)</td>
<td>0.5 (0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting is a waste of time</td>
<td>1.9 (0.5)</td>
<td>4.5 (1.9)</td>
<td>20.0 (16.3)</td>
<td>42.6 (42.9)</td>
<td>31.1 (38.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Measures to Increase Voter Turnout

4.1.3.1 So, how might this general support for the democratic process be translated into increased participation in elections? A short questionnaire such as this one is unable to probe sufficiently deeply by itself to build-up an understanding of the underlying motivating factors that inform the attitudes reported in this discussion so far. This is the task of more qualitative research of the type that can be found in the next section of this report. However, we did ask a series of questions to provisionally test out the degree of support for (or opposition to) various procedural mechanisms which have been proposed to make voting both easier and more accessible to people.
4.1.3.2 One obvious area to rectify in any campaign designed to increase voter turnout, involves raising young people’s awareness of how to register to vote. Over a third of our respondents reported that they did not know how to do this (34.8%), although encouragingly, this figure had fallen since 1998 when a majority of young people (57.5%) reported that they were uncertain about the process involved.

4.1.3.3 In section 2.2, the DETR’s White Paper *Modernising Local Government: In Touch With the People*, was briefly outlined. In the paper, certain proposals are suggested that are designed to solve the problem of low election turnout in Britain. We asked the young survey respondents whether or not they considered that these methods would increase or not their likelihood to vote in elections. The results indicate that in all but one case, the largest group of respondents claimed that such scenarios would make no difference to their likelihood to vote (see Table 8). The one exception to this rule was that a majority of young people (55.9%) claimed that spreading voting over more than one day would increase their attendance at elections.\(^{47}\)

4.1.3.4 Nonetheless, the findings clearly indicate that for all cases, those who view the introduction of these procedural changes positively, outweigh the numbers of those who view them negatively. This is perhaps not surprising, given that people are unlikely to report that making the voting system more flexible would reduce their propensity to vote. These net turnout differences between those who be more likely to vote, against those who would actually be less likely to turnout to cast their ballots, is set out below.

4.1.3.5 Interestingly, we found that of the five respondents (1.2%) who reported that they had a “physical disability or long-standing health problem that makes it

\(^{47}\) At present, voting in Britain for local, national and European election contests takes place on Thursdays only.
difficult… to access some buildings”, two mentioned that improving access to polling stations would increase their likelihood to vote. Two respondents reported that it would make no difference, and one declined to answer.

Table 8 Proposals to Increase Voter Turnout (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you be more or less likely to vote if:</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>Make no difference</th>
<th>Net turnout increase (+/-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vote in a public place (such as a supermarket)</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>+29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote over more than one day</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>+54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling stations were open for 24 hours</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>+36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote by post</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>+38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote by phone</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>+28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote from home (via the Internet or by digital TV)</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>+29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting was compulsory</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>+31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to polling stations was improved</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>+19.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.4 Summary

4.1.4.1 The data from the questionnaire survey that has been analysed in this section suggests that our young survey respondents are sufficiently interested in political affairs to dispel the myth that they are apathetic and politically lazy. The results indicate that they do discuss political matters with their friends and families, and furthermore, that they typically have a sharp awareness of issues that are of particular concern to them. They are also strong supporters of the democratic process, with large majorities indicating that they consider it to be of importance to vote in different types of election. They are therefore politically engaged. However, young people continue to be left somewhat uninspired by, or even cynical of, political parties and professional politicians. By all accounts, this data would suggest that they are “Engaged Cynics”.
4.2 *The 1999 Focus Group Research*

The findings that are presented in this section are the results of aggregated data from all six of the focus group meetings. However, where differences in attitude have been expressed these have been identified for comparative purposes. For a complete breakdown of the membership of the six focus groups, please refer to Appendix 1 of this report.

4.2.1 **Political Apathy**

4.2.1.1 At the outset of each session the research participants were shown a series of statements made by prominent media commentators that accused young people of being lazy, apathetic and disinterested. One of these statements, made during the 1997 General Election campaign, described young people as ‘airheads’ and ‘know-nothings’. The groups were asked for their general reaction to this characterisation and for how they might respond to such allegations.

4.2.1.2 The reactions of the groups to these statements was somewhat mixed. Research participants in group 1 were the only ones to exhibit an outright hostility to the comments that were made, seeking an explanation for their origin and offering a detailed and coherent defence of young people. In the other groups there was an air of resignation to the young people’s responses. Many of the young people present tended to accede when faced with such criticism, and there was a distinct lack of outrage. In this respect, the researchers were surprised at the level of acquiescence.

4.2.1.3 There was agreement across all six groups that there is an element of justification to the charges of apathy in relation to *some* young people. However, in accepting that many young people are not politically aware, several participants questioned whether this was not the case for the rest of the population. Whilst the media commentaries were unhelpful in terms of their style they did contain some
accuracy in that a ‘a small percentage’ of young people do conform to the stereotype. A view was expressed that certain ‘young people think they’re rebelling by not voting’. It is interesting to note that individuals within each group were prepared to admit to being apathetic about politics and voting. For these people there was a general feeling of ‘I do other things, elections aren’t important to me’.

4.2.1.4 There was, however, a consistent message from all six focus groups that politics is not aimed at young people. Rather ‘politics’ is seen as something that is distant from their lives. This was felt most strongly by group 1 who complained that ‘there is no encouragement for us to take an interest’. An overwhelming majority of the focus group participants agreed that if politics were aimed more at young people they would take a more active interest:

> ‘All politicians complain that they are not getting through to the younger generation but they don’t give the younger generation any real reason to be interested in politics’.

This general feeling was reinforced by one of the young people from group 6 who said that ‘young people choose to exclude themselves because they find no connection with themselves [and politicians]’.

4.2.1.5 There was a general consensus that if there is a degree of apathy amongst young people then the political parties are partly at fault for not actively encouraging them to take an interest in politics. One participant expressed a general frustration when they said that ‘they don’t give us any incentives to want to know about it’. The question was posed that instead of blaming young people for a lack on interest in politics, why don’t the political parties find a way to get young people interested? There is a perception that the political parties do not make the effort to target their communication towards youth, and also that they ignore youth issues such as student grants. Consequently, young people do not have the
incentive to take an interest in politics. Rather, they feel as though their concerns are not addressed and that instead they ‘are encouraged to be passive’.

4.2.1.6 It was also felt that the political parties only really bother to communicate with people prior to elections or if there is something particularly wrong that needs to be addressed. This was a view expressed most forcibly by research participants in group 1 and group 2 and is typified by the following comments:

‘The way I see it, politicians only tend to claim an interest in people when it’s time for elections. If it isn’t an election then they don’t bother.’

‘Yeah, that’s the only time they want to speak to you, when they want your vote’.

‘It’s as if they don’t care. Once they’ve got your vote, that’s it, finished’.

4.2.1.7 Moreover, many of the research participants felt that assigning negative labels to young people and the perpetuation of a ‘yob’ stereotype in the media made matters worse. The young people in group 1 and group 3 were most forcible in this respect, seeing it as evidence of ‘narrow’ thinking, stating that ‘they don’t know how to communicate with the younger generation’. They suggested that rather than encouraging young people to take an interest in politics, the likely outcome of such statements would be to increase the alienation that young people feel for the political system: ‘Comments like this widen the [generation] gap’.

4.2.1.8 There was also a general agreement that many young people had a negative image of party politics that consisted of politicians shouting at each other in the House of Commons. Such an adversarial style of politics is regarded as remote and boring, rather than inspiring. This representation of politics as conflictual and antagonistic has very little connection with young people’s everyday lives. As
one of the research participants said, ‘I see a lot of politics going round in circles’.

4.2.1.9 There was a broad agreement amongst those research participants in group 1, group 2 and group 5 that whilst some young people are apathetic, what is uncovered is not a disinterest in politics per se, but one that stems from a frustration that their views and desires will not be addressed. Some young people think ‘why bother – we’re never really going to change things’ and ‘I’m not going to change their mind’. As a result, young people show very little interest in politics because they do not feel that their views will be taken seriously. This feeling of powerlessness is exemplified by the following statement:

‘We’ve got no interest because we don’t think there’s going to be any change. If we thought there was a chance to change [things] we’d probably be interested’.

4.2.1.10 Politics is seen by many of the young people who took part in these focus groups as something that is complicated and difficult to understand. Many of the focus group participants identified a strong link between apathy and a lack of information, and suggested that young people should be introduced to politics at an earlier age - in schools. One person commented that ‘they should teach us about politics at school’ as a way of encouraging young people to take an interest in political affairs. A lack of such learning was seen to have a negative influence amongst young people - ‘perhaps we are ignorant, perhaps it is down to the education’.

4.2.1.11 The final question in this part of the focus group discussions asked the research participants whether they felt that young people are singled out for special treatment by the media. There was a general consensus that young people are often scapegoated, predominately because they are ‘an easy target’. Many of the young people in the focus groups were disappointed that the press rarely makes
the effort to publicise the good things that young people do and what they achieve:

‘We all get cloaked under this veil that is "youth" and it is really unfair, I think. Generally, we are one of the easiest sections of society to criticise, because most of the time we haven’t got a way of getting back…’

However, it was generally felt that young people are not marginalised any more than other groups of people. There wasn’t a strong feeling that young people were being unfairly picked on, in comparison with other minority groups such as ethnic minorities.

4.2.2 Increasing Political Awareness.

4.2.2.1 Following publication of the report from the government backed committee of enquiry headed by Professor Bernard Crick, the Department of Education and Science intends to press ahead with plans to include citizenship on the national curriculum. Citizenship is a multifaceted and complex concept. There are many differing interpretations of what the term means. Consequently, when the focus groups were asked about their views of the Crick proposals questions were couched in an accessible, jargon free language.

4.2.2.2 It was hoped that participants would be able to evaluate the spirit of the government’s plans if not the exact, as yet unpublished, details. The key questions were whether or not the groups thought that citizenship classes were a good thing and, if so, what they would like to see on a curriculum. There were prompts based on some of the items discussed and recommended in the Crick committee’s report but time was set aside to allow for participants to freely express and elucidate their own suggestions.
4.2.2.3 Almost all of the group respondents agreed that political education would be a welcome addition to the curriculum. Where there was any dissent to this view it was vague and did not appear well formulated. In contrast those supportive of such an initiative talked of the need for this kind of tuition because, as one participant said, it: ‘makes politics part of everyday life from a young age’. More philosophically, another commented: ‘Politics is about the future. History is about the past’.

4.2.2.4 Of the various topics suggested, there was a clear consensus that classes needed to be taught about why parties and elections existed and what they did. Few expressed satisfaction with the information available to them and would have welcomed the opportunity to gain knowledge in an educational setting. Implicit in the comments was a feeling that all of a sudden they, as young voters, were suddenly able to cast a vote at 18 but had not had anything properly explained to them. From their comments, some clearly had an idea of which party they supported but most appeared bemused by what these organisations were offering. It would appear that the rival politicians, in their desire to talk to each other and to the media, had ignored their principal audience - the electorate.

4.2.2.5 There was clearly less enthusiasm but some acknowledgement of the need for coverage of what parliament and government do and how they functioned. Comparatively little was said about these institutions or any other aspect of the central state. A significant minority of participants discussed the need for some coverage of local politics, recognising its continuing importance in terms of its role within the community.

4.2.2.6 Other participants argued that it was important to consider contemporary issues. A variety of these were discussed, but in general, less importance was attached to these than to an explanation of how parties and government work. Those issues that were discussed included Europe, Northern Ireland, the NHS, the Single Currency, environmental matters, and so on. One member of group 1
received a fair degree of support when suggesting that political theory ought to be part of the curriculum: ‘...I think we ought to know about these different ideas so we can choose what we are interested in.’

4.2.2.7 Groups were conscious that boredom could hamper effective political tuition within the classroom. This may be overcome however, if teachers were to adopt a participative, interactive, and imaginative approach to their classes. This would then have the potential to engage young people in the classroom, with the added benefit of providing pupils with key transferable skills (such as discussing and debating issues, forming coherent, reasoned and consistent views, and so on).

4.2.2.8 There was also a clear recognition that, by its nature, the subject matter gave rise to the potential for bias and/or indoctrination be this in the delivery of teaching or even the curriculum itself. However, when asked whether they would be in favour of the teaching of politics in schools in an even-handed manner, the great majority of the research participants agreed in the affirmative.

4.2.2.9 More than one group believed the material could be usefully incorporated in the existing Personal and Social Development Education programmes widely taught throughout the state schools sector. More than one group suggested that History classes should incorporate the subject matter. The great majority of the research participants felt that the teaching of politics classes whilst important, should not be afforded the same status as subjects that were seen as central to the National Curriculum (such as English, history, Maths and Science).

4.2.2.10 Questions were raised about the most appropriate age at which such classes should begin. There was a concern that given the perceived difficulty in the subject matter, that young people would, during the early years of their schooling, be confused and may form negative views of politics classes. This
then would be counter-productive. However, there was certainly much support expressed for such teaching at secondary school level.

4.2.2.11 There were almost universally strong objections to the inclusion of ‘morality’ as part of any courses. One group did, however, talk about the advantages of teaching ‘ethics’, and another said it could be subsumed by religious instruction. If the topic were to be approached at all it would have to be done so with some care and attention to presentation. As one respondent put it: ‘Parents should teach morality not teachers.’ And another offered the comment: ‘... the law yes, but morality no.’

4.2.3 Young People and Voting.

4.2.3.1 When asked, most group members endorsed the view that voting was important. Whilst a minority dissented, the majority believed the activity to be a cornerstone of citizenship. One of the participants in group 3 put it thus:

‘I don’t think you can moan about what the parties are doing if you haven’t voted. If you’ve shown no interest then why show an interest in what they are doing if you are not bothered about government or whatever.’

However many of those group members who had voted expressed a degree of frustration having actually been to the polls. Several first-time voters complained of feeling a sense of anti-climax, frustration and disappointment.

4.2.3.2 There was a strong feeling from some quarters that having had the opportunity to vote the young people in the focus group meetings did not feel significantly empowered. Many of the research participants had expected the act of voting to represent an important and symbolic landmark in their transition into full
citizenship. Nor did voting make them really feel like they were involved in the decision making process. A member of group 5 said: ‘I feel no different to when I couldn’t vote. I can’t move political molehills never mind mountains.’ Even a participant from the ‘enthusiast’ group 1, commented: ‘There was a lot of hype and it was a big let-down.’ Several people related this concern to the commonly endorsed view that the main parties were quite similar in outlook and thus offered them a limited electoral choice. Linked to this, many participants agreed that they didn’t feel well informed and complained that they lacked access to the type of material that could rectify this personal shortcoming.

4.2.3.3 Most groups welcomed the proposals to change the way in which voting was conducted. Participants thought voting in supermarkets, on the telephone or through the Internet would probably encourage turnout amongst young people. Reforms involving new technology were generally received favourably. This perhaps is not surprising, given that such technologies are marketed to improve access to the voting process. There was, however, a strong caveat. It would be unacceptable if such initiatives compromised the security and privacy of the ballot. One participant expressed caution about allowing voting in commercial premises:

‘Putting your government... in a supermarket is dodgy. Just outside a supermarket as a separate government operated thing with no money being paid to the supermarket [would be preferable].’

There was also popular support for the proposal to extend the time period in which people could go to the polls beyond a single day.

4.2.3.4 None of the participants appeared to believe technology was crucial for enhancing the democratic process. Accessible information was seen to be the key. Neither were the conventional registration/get the vote out campaigns
welcomed with much enthusiasm. Even the high profile media conscious initiatives were criticised by some, although, typically this was more in terms of how the campaigns were packaged, rather than the underlying rationale itself. As one member of group 3 volunteered: ‘Damon Albarn doesn’t need to tell me to vote. I can work it out on my own’. Rather, as another member admitted:

‘I feel a bit patronised by being told voting is cool and trendy. It’s not really. It’s a serious thing. This guy going on about that. That is not for me’.

4.2.3.5 Nor were MPs’ birthday greetings welcomed. As one critic put it: ‘The thing I remember about... getting stupid birthday cards of politicians is that they don’t work. They put me off completely.’ The ‘enthusiasts’ in group 1, perhaps not surprisingly, offered alternatives, notably awareness raising campaigns involving anything from beer mats to cinema adverts.

4.2.3.6 Where there had been a good deal of consensus on most of the questions, the subject of compulsory voting caused a marked divergence in opinion. Some welcomed the proposal because they felt it to be an elementary democratic duty of citizens to go to the polls. One person cited the Australian system as an example of how this can work:48 “In Australia, I think there's a law that makes it compulsory, I think that could be quite a good idea”. But other participants, noticeably in the ‘sceptics’ Group 5, adopted a contrasting standpoint. An ‘enthusiast’ philosophised: ‘...if you make people vote it defies the point of them choosing to vote.’ One member of the ‘sceptics’ group said:

‘It’s your right to vote for the party you want. If there’s no party you shouldn’t have to vote. You’ve got the right not to vote’.

48 Voting at federal elections has been compulsory in Australia since 1924. The penalty for failing to do so is a $20 administrative fine.
Fellow group members continued with a sustained attack on a rule change they believed would be impractical, stupid, undemocratic, counter-productive and encouraging of uninformed participation.

4.2.3.7 Perhaps surprisingly, given their youth, participants did not appear supportive of the proposal to reduce the voting age to 16. Contributors suggested they thought themselves too immature and unaware at this age to properly participate in an election. As one participant volunteered:

‘I think at 16, going by what we were like, all you are interested in is having the drinking age lowered. Nothing else matters to you.’

The ‘general’ group 6 thought 16 year olds too impressionable and that two years on was a better age at which to be allowed to vote because you were so much more effected by the issues. When this was discussed in more detail, some of those initially critical about the idea of lowering the age limit did relent when the proposal was linked to the political education programme discussed in Section 4.2.2 above. Some conceded that by linking this type of development to a new law giving those benefiting from the tuition would make sense.

4.2.4 Young People and Local Government

4.2.4.1 In the final section of the focus group meetings, the research participants were asked if they thought that local government is important, or whether all decisions about community matters and local services should be taken nationally. In response, the overwhelming majority of young people in the focus groups said that local government was important to them. There was a very positive identification with local representatives who are seen to be in the position to take decisions that can be ‘tailor-made’ to local communities because ‘they can see more closely what is happening’. Local councils were seen as a good thing
because ‘they know your area’, as opposed to national government: ‘How can a national government possibly be aware of what is happening in the community’?

4.2.4.2 In terms of the balance of power between local and national government, the majority of research participants were generally in favour of maintaining the status quo, feeling that ‘we shouldn’t change the way it is now really’. There was a clear recognition that ‘the country’s got to run as a whole’, and they were generally not in favour of any more devolution to the regions. However, there was some confusion about the division of responsibilities between national and local government and a desire to be better informed about whom is responsible for what. Also, the research participants wanted to know more about how decisions at the national level effected their locality.

4.2.4.3 A minority of research participants in group 4 was in favour of increasing the powers of local government. They argued that if the power of local government were increased - meaning that local government could make more of a difference - then this would act as a real incentive for people to vote in such contests. The following statement illustrates this view:

‘Local government seems to be quite petty most of the time. They don’t have any real power... They don’t always have the power to change anything. That’s why people think, oh there is no point going to local elections. It’s all the same petty bureaucracy’.

4.2.4.4 When the focus group participants were asked what sorts of issues they would like to raise with their local councillors, the responses that were given were very detailed and showed a clear understanding of things happening in their local communities. Several young people focused on issues relating to the local built environment and the way in which planning decisions effect local communities, (e.g., the development of the local economy, the state of the housing stock,
modernisation of shopping areas, local traffic systems and so on). A number of very localised environmental issues were also discussed, as were issues relating to the provision and funding of education.

4.2.4.5 There was also a call for a greater transparency in council affairs. Several of the young people in the focus groups demonstrated a distrust of local councils, suggesting that 'they seem to spend it more on salaries than on the constituents'. Where such views were expressed there was a clear desire to hold local representatives to account by challenging them to explain and justify 'where the council tax money goes'.

4.2.4.6 The focus group participants were then asked if they thought that local government do enough to consult with young people about local government services and issues. In common with their views about national politicians, the research participants complained of a lack of consultation and communication from their local council:

‘There is a general feeling between politicians and the general public that it’s kind of them and us situation. There is them who are making the decisions and us who don’t get their opinions heard’.

Once again, the general feeling was that local politicians were aloof and only bothered to get in touch with them before an election.

4.2.4.7 Furthermore, several of the young people in the focus groups were unsure about how to contact their local representatives, whether they held regular surgeries, and so on. Whilst national politicians were highly visible in the national media local representatives were rarely seen to be in the public eye. A common complaint that was made was that ‘you know what is happening in national government by watching TV...I haven’t got a clue what our local government is doing now’.
4.2.4.8 The final area that was addressed in the focus group meetings asked the young people present to look towards the future and suggest ways in which their local representatives could establish better consultation and communication with local people. In response to this, the overwhelming majority of research participants were enthusiastic about finding ways to realise the relationship between citizen and government at the local level. That such a relationship had not been already achieved was seen as frustrating. This is typified by the following comments:

‘I think there certainly is a role [for local government] in local communities, but I don’t think that it’s utilised by local government’.

‘They do need to consult with us a lot more, but I don’t know how they could do it’.

‘I think young people definitely have to be made more aware of how they can actually find out about what is going on. I don’t think anyone actually knows how they can voice their opinions at the moment’.

4.2.4.9 The positive nature of responses to the problem of communication and consultation can be summed up by comments made in group 2, that what young people wanted was ‘more information’, ‘more contact’, and ‘more recognition’. A meaningful dialogue with local representatives would provide evidence to citizens that local councillors were spending public money wisely, efficiently, effectively, and appropriately. This would also enable local Government to take a more proactive role in raising awareness about local issues and disseminate the plans and achievements of the council:

‘If something is being done they should say, well yes we’ve done this new play area; we have made speed bumps in the road; it would be nice to have some contact’. 
4.2.4.10 On a certain level the research participants thought that surveys that ask local people about their opinions on issues of concern and mail-shots that would tell local citizens more about what the local council were doing would be a good thing. However, there was a recognition that for many people ‘newsletter’ style circulars were automatically thrown away. Rather, the great majority of the research participants were in favour of direct personal communication with their local representatives. Many of the young people in the focus groups wanted the opportunity to talk to their local councillors, having good memories of those occasions when local politicians had visited schools and colleges to ‘talk to people, find out what they want’.

4.2.4.11 A theme that surfaced on a number of occasions was that local representatives and officials should listen more actively to what local people wanted. It was felt that councils should be more accessible, helping local people to voice their opinions about local affairs. Moreover, many of the focus group participants wanted more contact and consultation when policies were in the planning process so that they could have their views heard in advance of the decisions being taken.

4.2.4.12 In relation to party political campaigning for local elections, the focus group participants were unhappy about the amount of national party material that was circulated, and were keen to hear more about local issues. There was also a negative response to adversarial campaign material – ‘I want to know what they actually believe. Not what the other party aren’t doing’ – and they did not like the personal character of the election material that they had received from the political parties that let them know that ‘they’ve got so many kids, a dog’.
5. Conclusion

5.1 Contrary to the perception of some media commentators, this research has assessed the attitudes of young, potential first-time voters and uncovered a group with an interest in political issues if not the formal institutions associated with them. The data signals quite clearly that there is a civic orientation amongst the young to the democratic process, but an antipathy to formal, professional politics. This trend is most marked when significant numbers of respondents confessed to having been involved in minimal, politically related activities such as giving money, petition-signing, and even attendance at demonstrations. Such political activity as we have uncovered perhaps reflects the sample’s concern with issues relating in particular to the environment and international affairs.

5.2 It was seen that respondents displayed important signs that they were engaged with the democratic process. This was most clear when a large proportion of those questioned expressed some desire to take part in elections. The commitment was especially marked in the case of national and local contests if not for the recent European Assembly poll.

5.3 In the light of these findings, we embrace the sentiments of the Political Studies Association, which in response to the Crick Report, caution against an over-identification of citizenship with participation in electoral politics. It would be unwise to reject recent developments in extra-parliamentary political activity as simply a negative detraction from the real business of politics – voting in elections. To do so would be to disguise young people’s search for political solutions to what they consider to be issues of serious concern. Instead, methods should be developed to establish an ongoing dialogue with young people, and harness their political energies into constructive civic action. The creation of lines of communication would do more to enhance a culture of citizenship than

relying solely upon new mechanisms designed to improve voter turnout in elections.

5.4 Voting is, of course, a vital form of political participation that should be encouraged. Indeed, we advocate the extension of the vote to 16 and 17 year-olds. In recent times, the onus has been placed firmly on young people to give much greater attention to their responsibilities as budding citizens. In the light of the unanimous recommendation of the Crick Report to include citizenship classes as statutory teaching in schools, we feel that consideration should be given to confirming the most fundamental of citizen’s rights – the right to vote in elections. A move to lower the age of assent to 16 may act to bring more young people into the democratic process, and ensure a more equal balance of rights and responsibilities. Such an action would give young people the opportunity to be real rather than notional citizens. This would be an ideal outcome of the Crick report recommendations and potentially make their impact all the more tangible. Indeed, when asked, our respondents positively embraced many of the curriculum proposals outlined for inclusion in the new citizenship classes.

5.5 However, extending the vote to young people and increasing voter turnout at elections is not, in itself, the panacea to a generalised declining sense of confidence that exists towards our political system at this time. As Smith notes, there is an important distinction to be made between procedural mobilising devices (such as voting in supermarkets and by the Internet) and the more participative initiatives that we have seen local authorities experiment with in the recent period to involve people in the art of decision-making (such as citizen’s forums and youth polls):

‘The former seeks to co-opt and pre-empt the voters, while the latter seeks to cultivate authentic voices in the decision-making process. For that to prevail we need to create a truly civic society

with a concomitant civic culture. This apparently obvious point seems in danger of being overlooked.\textsuperscript{51}

5.6 The apparent concern that we have found from our study with regional politics suggests that this is a fertile area for local government in which there are significant possibilities for connecting with the concerns of young people. Certainly, this group is interested in local issues such as protection of green-belt land and local youth services. Critically local government is central to the development of youth citizenship because on the one hand it provides the bulk of their education and on the other is responsible for the electoral registration process which affords them the opportunity to vote.

5.7 Young people are interested in “politics”, but it is a politics that has a wider definition than that conventionally understood by decision-makers as associated primarily with voting. The potential therefore exists to create a sustained engagement with the political system by young people. However, developing such a civic culture amongst youth is dependent upon government at all levels reflecting upon the true meaning of citizenship. If the product of such reflection were to embrace a wider conception of what it means to be a citizen, then the potential for a positive response from the nation’s youth may be forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{51} Smith, \textit{op. cit.}, p.17.
Appendix 1

Focus group strategy

The focus group technique was developed and used predominately by sociologists and psychologists in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the focus group is a method of research that has been largely underused in social research in the post-war period, with its application being largely restricted to marketing researchers in the private sector and those working in the media. The method, however, has had something of a renaissance in the past decade with political parties in particular using the techniques to test out political campaigns.

Sampling Strategy for the 1999 focus group study

All of the focus group participants for this study had taken part in both the 1998 survey research and the follow-up survey carried out in June 1999. Furthermore, they had all indicated on both of the 1998 and 1999 questionnaires their willingness to participate in further research (see page 46 below for a more detailed breakdown of the characteristics of the focus group participants).

Some degree of caution should be exercised in respect of the over-representation of women in our study, and readers should bear this in mind when interpreting the findings. In selecting membership for the six groups we invited an equal number of

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54 The full demographic-breakdown of participants is as follows: 27 women took part in the focus groups compared to 18 men; Thirty-one of the participants were 17 year olds compared to 14 who were 18 year olds. There were 41 white people and 4 from ethnic minorities; Thirty-five of the participants were still in either full-time or part-time education, whilst seven were either in employment or on an apprenticeship and 2 were unemployed (one person did not state their occupational circumstances); thirteen of the young people were from Rushcliffe, 10 were from...
young men and women. That those who did take part in the research were more female in composition may be a matter for further investigation, especially given that two female research assistants played a central role in the recruitment process.

It was hoped and anticipated that in varying the group composition we would provide for some interesting comparisons between groups of carefully selected young people. The focus groups were constructed according to the broad criteria outlined below as determined by their responses to questions in the 1999 survey.

- **Group 1** – those young people who were defined as highly engaged and enthusiastic in relation to democratic politics and the country’s political institutions. This consisted of those young people who were very positive about the democratic political process (the importance of voting, positive about taking part in political activity, and talking about politics with friends and family), and who had expressed a positive view of political parties and politicians.

- **Group 2** – those young people who identify with a variety of contemporary youth concerns (environmentalism, animal rights, third-world poverty, militarism and world peace, and so on). This would be determined with reference to the open question in the survey that asks people to say which key issue they are most concerned about.

- **Group 3** – those young people who have left the education system. This group comprised mostly of those young people who are in work, either full-time or part-time, but also included those who are on an apprenticeship, or a government training scheme/New Deal.

- **Group 4** – those young people who have remained in either full-time or part-time education.

Gedling, nine from Nottingham, and then relatively equal numbers of three or four were from Ashfield, Broxtowe, Mansfield, and Newark and Sherwood.
- Group 5 – those young people who are to be defined as sceptics. This group was effectively the opposite of group 1, comprising those young people who are neither engaged nor enthusiastic in relation to democratic politics and the country’s political institutions. This group of young people does not talk about politics with their friends or family and have a negative view of political parties and politicians.

- Group 6 – a general group that include a mix of the young people to be found in the above five groups.

We targeted focus groups of eight members as the optimum size. It is important to achieve the right membership for each group in terms of numbers to mitigate against detrimental effects. If a group is too small there is the possibility that the crucial interactive dynamic can be lost and it also introduces the possibility that a strong character may dominate. On the other hand, a group that is too large can become unmanageable for the moderator and there is the risk that the group may fragment. Again, there is the potential for quieter members of the group to be edged out of the discussion. Achieving the correct size provides the potential for all group members to participate evenly.

Given that it is a common experience for people not to attend when they had been expected, we aimed to recruit 12 members to each group as a fallback position. Were surplus group members to materialise, we would thank them for coming, explain the situation, apologise for any inconvenience caused and pay them their participation fee and travelling expenses.

**Recruitment to the Focus Groups**

Initially, we faced problems with recruiting to the 6 sessions. Many of the young people who had been selected for the study were very difficult to reach by telephone, and once contact had been made it often took several telephone conversations to gain a firm
commitment to attend at a particular time. Once someone had verbally indicated their intention to attend, we sent a formal letter of notification that detailed essential information such as the time and location of the focus group and included a map. This letter also had a tear-off confirmation slip which we asked the young people to return to us. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured in advance of the sessions, both through the telephone conversation and in the confirmation letter.

Timing and Organisation of the Focus Groups

The six focus groups were held on consecutive days during the week beginning Monday 16th August with two groups taking place on the Thursday 19th. Five of the 6 groups took place in the early evening between 5.30 and 7.00 p.m. thus ensuring maximum turnout and convenience. It was felt that any early would preclude attendance from those working or studying during the main body of the day, and that any latter might cause some concern for those who would need to travel home out of Nottingham on their own.

The room was laid out in a manner that was thought to be most conducive to a relaxed discussion. The moderator was positioned at the head of the research participants whose seats were arranged in a semi-circle. In this way the moderator was able to maintain equal eye contact with each of the focus group participants, and they in turn were able to relate to each other freely. We organised for a selection of light refreshments including hot and cold drinks and sandwiches that were available when the research participants arrived.

Two tape recorders were used during each session to ensure that we captured a clear recording of each event, and to insure against the possibility of mechanical failure of either one of the recorders. Both tape recorders were tested in advance of the sessions to ensure correct positioning and voice clarity. A number of visual aids were also created in

55 Due to these problems, telephone calls to recruit young people to the focus groups continued into the week of the focus groups itself. Several young people were contacted at very late
advance of the sessions and used during the focus groups. These comprised of sample headlines from national newspapers, quotations from media commentators and various show cards that were intended to aid and stimulate the discussion.

*The Operation of the Focus Groups*

The role of the focus group moderator is to guide, lead and direct the conversation whilst remaining wary of unwittingly reinforcing any particular comments or behaviour in a way that may encourage agreement amongst the group. The moderator for each group employed open-ended questions that were designed to obtain the greatest amount and depth of response from the research participants.

The assistant moderator took detailed notes of the session and observed the meeting with a critical eye. Such note-taking fulfills two purposes. Firstly, it is intended to serve as an immediate aid to forming analytical impressions of the event, rather than relying on human memory whilst waiting for the tape recording to be transcribed. Secondly, the assistant moderator also used the notes as the basis for a summary to be read out at the end of the meeting. In providing immediate feedback in this manner we ensured that the focus group participants were given the opportunity to comment on the initial impressions of the research team and indicate whether they were content with their accuracy.

A rotational system was used for the moderator and assistant moderator role, and a research assistant was present throughout the proceedings to ensure that the recording equipment functioned properly and to distribute the various materials. The research assistant also paid the young people their participation fee and reimbursed their travelling expenses at the end of the meeting.

At the outset of each focus group the research participants were given a brief introduction by the moderator to reaffirm the purpose of the meeting and lay out the ground rules for notice in this manner.
the session. Once this had been done, each of the young people were invited to say a few words about themselves by way of introduction and then the moderator moved into the first question.

Once the session(s) commenced it became apparent that there was too much material to cover in the one and a half hours that had been planned for each meeting. Given that many of the themes from Section E (see appendix 2) occurred naturally during the preceding discussion, it was decided that this section should be excluded to the advantage of the discussion as a whole.

Once the focus group session had ended, the young people had been thanked and had left the meeting, the moderator and assistant moderator had a short de-briefing meeting. This consisted of a discussion of the focus group to assess the immediate impressions gained from the focus group.
Appendix 2

Focus groups schedule

Focus Group Topic Guide - Young People and Politics
Summer 1999

Preamble (5 mins)

A. MEDIA AND POLITICIANS VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE’S POLITICS (20 mins)

i. Certain media commentators have been critical of young people for their lack of interest in and knowledge about politics.

SHOW CARDS
(A journalist in The Independent accused young people of being) ‘airheads’ and ‘know nothings’ (in relation to politics)
(Similarly, an Evening Standard reporter called young people) ‘intellectually lazy’

How would you respond to these criticisms?
What makes you say that?

Why do you think young people rather than other age groups are singled out for this kind of criticism?
B. LEARNING ABOUT POLITICS (20 mins)

The government wants to encourage young people to take a greater interest in politics. They want to make the study of politics compulsory in schools.

i. Do you think teaching politics in schools is a good idea? What makes you say that?

ii. Given that it now looks likely that politics will be on the national curriculum, what sort of areas do you think should be taught in politics classes at school?

iii. Do you think any of the following should be taught as part of the national curriculum:

   SHOW CARD
   • How parliament and government work
   • What parties and elections are for
   • Politics in your local community
   • Particular issues (GET THEM TO IDENTIFY)
   • Law and morality

iv. After looking at this list, are there any other areas that you think need to be taught in politics classes at school?

v. All things considered, what is the one area that you think is most important for young people to learn about in classes in politics?

   What makes you say that?
C. VOTING

(20 mins)

There is growing concern about the decline in the numbers of young people voting.

SHOW HEADLINES
i. Do you think it is important to vote?
   What makes you say that?

SENTENCE COMPLETION
A. Now that I have had an opportunity to vote, I feel . . .
   Ask participants to share what they have written, and to talk about it.

ii. Do you always vote (if not, why don’t you?)

SENTENCE COMPLETION
B. I would be more likely to vote, in the future if . . .
   Ask participants to share what they have written, and to talk about it.

iii. Which of the following do you think would encourage you personally to vote?

iv. And which would encourage young people in general to vote?

SHOW CARDS
- Allowing voting in Supermarkets
- Allowing voting by telephone
- Allowing voting through the Internet
- Campaigns to raise awareness (SHOW ‘Stick it in the Box’ and ‘RTV’)
- Making voting compulsory
- Lowering the voting age from 18 to 16
- Forming youth/school councils, etc (EXPLAIN)
D. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Let’s move on now by looking at local government.

One area that people don’t seem to talk a lot about when discussing politics nowadays is local government.

i. Do you think local government is important, or should all decisions about community matters and local services be taken nationally?

ii. You all have local councillors - County and District Councillors or (Nottingham) City Councillors. If one of your councillors was here now, what sort of issues would you like to discuss with him or her?

iii. Do you think local government does enough to consult with young people about local government services and issues?

iv. What could local government do differently?

v. How would you feel if they tried to take local government away from you?
E. POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES (10 mins)

Let’s move on now and finish by discussing politicians and political parties.

i. Do you think politicians and political parties have anything of importance to say to you as a young person?

Take a look at this video of party election broadcasts.
SHOW VIDEO

ii. What did you think of the broadcasts? Did you like (any of) them? What makes you say that?

Repeat the question from above:

iii. Do you think politicians and political parties have anything of importance to say to you as a young person? What makes you say that?

iv. Do you think they are talking about issues that young people want to hear? What makes you say that?

v. What issues do you feel particularly strongly about? (These could be local issues, national ones, or international issues).

vi. Do you think politicians adequately address these issues?

vii. Do you think they approach them from “your” point of view? (e.g., when they talk about crime, do they talk about the sort of crime issues that concern you?) (e.g., when they talk about spending money on public services, do they talk about the sort of public services that concern you?)

F. SUMMARY (Assistant moderator)

(5 mins)

i. Let me just attempt to summarise what’s been said this evening then.

ii. Is that a fair summary? Is there anything that anyone would like to add?
Appendix 3
Questionnaire panel 2 and materials

June 11, 1999

Dear Friend,

We are writing to you about some research that we are involved in which looks at the views of young voters in Nottinghamshire. This research has been commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council.

You may remember that you said you would be interested in taking part in some further research when you sent in a completed questionnaire last Summer.

We have two mini-projects in mind. The first of these is to update our information from that survey. This involves you answering the attached questions on the two-sided form attached with this letter. This survey is being sent to hundreds of young people like you as an important way of finding out more about your concerns and opinions.

Please help us by filling it in and returning it to us in the pre-paid envelope that has been supplied (it will cost you nothing to post, so please do not attach a stamp). Please return by 25th June 1999.

All replies will be treated in the strictest confidence. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers to anything in this questionnaire. The only correct answers are your own personal opinions on an issue.

The second part of the project will involve you in meeting with other young people to discuss your ideas and concerns in what we call a Focus Group. This will be an opportunity to talk in more detail about the issues raised in the attached questionnaire. There is a payment of £15 for attendance (as well as bus fares) at this short discussion group, should you be interested in attending. At the end of the attached questionnaire, there is a box for you to tick if you are interested in taking part.

Thank you once again for your cooperation. We value your views.

Matt Henn,  Mark Weinstein,  Dominic Wring,
Nottingham  Nottingham  Loughborough
Trent University  Trent University  University
Please answer as many of the following questions as you are able. For all questions (except where asked otherwise), please indicate your answer by ticking the relevant box. So, if you voted in the recent European parliamentary election, you would tick the response box number one, as in the example here . . .

7. Did you vote in the recent European parliamentary election on June 10th 1999?  
   Yes ☐ 1  No ☐ 2

1. Are you (please tick all that come close to describing your situation):
   In education (full-time) ☐ 1  In education (part-time) ☐ 2  In paid work (full-time) ☐ 3
   In paid work (part-time) ☐ 4  On an apprenticeship ☐ 5  On a government training scheme/New Deal ☐ 6
   Unemployed ☐ 7  Self employed ☐ 8  Other (please write in) ______________________ ☐ 9

2. How much interest do you normally have in local political issues?
   A great deal ☐ 1  Quite a lot ☐ 2  Some ☐ 3  Not very much ☐ 4  None at all ☐ 5

3. How much interest do you normally have in national political issues?
   A great deal ☐ 1  Quite a lot ☐ 2  Some ☐ 3  Not very much ☐ 4  None at all ☐ 5

4. Generally speaking, how often would you say you talk about political issues with your friends or family?
   A great deal ☐ 1  Quite a lot ☐ 2  Some ☐ 3  Not very much ☐ 4  None at all ☐ 5

5. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

a) I think that it’s important to vote in local elections:
   Strongly agree ☐ 1  Agree ☐ 2  Neither agree nor disagree ☐ 3  Disagree ☐ 4  Strongly disagree ☐ 5

b) I think that it’s important to vote in national elections:
   Strongly agree ☐ 1  Agree ☐ 2  Neither agree nor disagree ☐ 3  Disagree ☐ 4  Strongly disagree ☐ 5

c) I think that voting is a waste of time:
   Strongly agree ☐ 1  Agree ☐ 2  Neither agree nor disagree ☐ 3  Disagree ☐ 4  Strongly disagree ☐ 5

6. Did you vote in the recent local election on May 6th 1999?  Yes ☐ 1  No ☐ 2

7. Did you vote in the recent European parliamentary election on June 10th 1999?  Yes ☐ 1  No ☐ 2

8a. Do you intend to vote in the next parliamentary general election? (for a Member of Parliament)  Yes ☐ 1  No ☐ 2

8b. If you do intend to vote in the next parliamentary general election, do you know which party you will vote for?  Yes ☐ 1  No ☐ 2
9. Which community, national or international issue are you most concerned about? (please write in fully using the space provided) ______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

10. In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following (please tick all that apply):

(a) Joined a political party? ☐
(b) Joined a campaign group? ☐
(c) Signed a petition? ☐
(d) Taken part in a march or demonstration? ☐

(e) Written to your Member of Parliament? ☐
(f) Written to your local councillor? ☐
(g) Given money to a campaign? ☐

11. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Politicians care about young people like myself.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Politicians are all the same.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Once elected, politicians lose touch with people pretty quickly.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Parties are only interested in people’s votes, not in their opinions.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) It doesn’t matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Do you know how to register to vote? Yes ☐ No ☐

13. Would you be more or less likely to vote if:

(a) you were able to vote in a public place such as a supermarket? ☐
(b) you were able to vote over more than one day (including weekends)? ☐
(c) polling stations were open for 24 hours ☐
(d) you were able to vote by post ☐
(e) you were able to vote by phone ☐
(f) you were able to vote from home (e.g., via the Internet or by digital TV)? ☐
(g) voting was compulsory? ☐
(h) access to polling stations was improved (e.g., for those with disabilities) ☐

14. Do you have any physical disability or long-standing health problem that makes it difficult for you to access some buildings? Yes ☐ No ☐

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. And don’t forget to put the completed questionnaire in the stamped return envelope provided! (you do not have to put your own stamp on as postage is already paid).

Name: _______________________________ Tel: _______________________________

If you would like to take part in further focus group research, please tick this box

This survey is a joint initiative between Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham Trent University, and Loughborough University.
Appendix 4
Instructions for questionnaire coders, Q.9

Appendix 1

Instructions for Coders, Q9

Q.9 Which community, national, or international issue are you most concerned about? (Please write in)

Always take the First answer given only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Social Issues</td>
<td>Poverty (in UK)/ Poverty/ homelessness/ minimum wage/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leisure/ Children’s play areas/ Lack of local amenities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth generally/ Social Services (Closure of residential homes etc.)/ Child abuse</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welfare and State Benefits (Claiming benefits - under-age pregnancies)</td>
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<td>2. Environmental protection</td>
<td>Global warming/ Greenpeace etc./</td>
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<td></td>
<td>developments on greenbelt land etc./</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pollution/ re-development of existing sites (Arnold Leisure Centre)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rural issues/ effect on environment of industrial processes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Re-cycling/ destruction of wildlife habitats</td>
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<td>3. War/ Militarism/ Armaments</td>
<td>Nuclear testing &amp; nuclear weapons/ war/</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State of affairs in East/ Liberation of N Cyprus</td>
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<td>4. Third World Concerns</td>
<td>Starvation/ 3rd World poverty/ famine/ Debt</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Countries worse off than GB/ widening gap poor &amp; rich countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Education</td>
<td>student fees/ funding/ grants/ school &amp; nursery class sizes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School standards</td>
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<td>6. Health</td>
<td>NHS/ Cancer prevention/ AIDS</td>
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<td>7. Economic issues (GB)</td>
<td>Taxation/ interest rates /Employment &amp; unemployment</td>
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<td>8. Europe</td>
<td>Single European currency/ monetary union</td>
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<td>Independence from Europe/ abolishing duty free</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Politics</td>
<td>Political party mentioned/ Constitutional issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Crime &amp; Law and Order</td>
<td>Death Penalty/ Drugs/ Football Hooliganism</td>
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<td>11. Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Standards in Public life</td>
<td>Corruption in politics</td>
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<td>13. Animal Rights</td>
<td>Vivisection/ fox-hunting/ live exports</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Transport</td>
<td>Concessionary Bus passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Miscellaneous</td>
<td>World Cup to England/ outlaw fire-arms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>