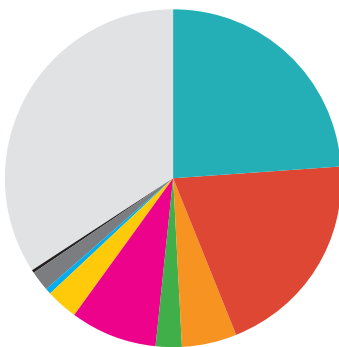


KYCC Curriculum for Life

UK Politics for Life

A guide to politics, voting and how it affects you

#KYCC4Life



Introduction

Welcome to our short guide to politics, voting and the UK political system. At Kent Youth County Council, we believe that the information given to young people at schools is far too limiting and instead everyone needs a curriculum for life.

This guide, one in a series which includes politics, finance, health and first aid is intended to give you a basic outline of what schools and colleges are not teaching you and will hopefully allow you to be more informed in the future.

We hope this is a useful guide for you and that it helps you to supplement the education you already receive!

Joshua Gray MYP & Ella Knapp
KYCC Cabinet Members for Education

Political Parties and Ideologies

What's a political party?

A political party is an organised group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected. Here, we will run over some of the main parties.

The Conservative Party

The Conservative Party seeks to advance opportunity, nurture responsibility and protect security. By trusting people, we help individuals grow stronger; by sharing responsibility, we help society grow stronger. We believe that there is such a thing as society, but it is not the same thing as the state.

The party stands for a free society and a strong nation state; we want to give people more opportunity and power over their lives, to make families stronger and society more responsible and to make Britain safer and greener.



The Labour Party

The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few; where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe and where we live together freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect. The Labour party believes in a just society, an open democracy and a healthy environment.



The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. We champion the freedom, dignity and well-being of individuals, we acknowledge and respect their right to freedom of conscience and their right to develop their talents to the full. We believe that the role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions which affect their lives.



The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

If you believe that we are big enough to make our own laws, in our own parliament; if you believe we should have the sovereign right to control our own borders; if you believe that we should be fiscally responsible, and stop adding to our national debts and expecting our children and grandchildren to pay the bill, then we are the party for you. If you believe in these things and that in this year, the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, you believe we should seize the opportunity for real change in our politics; rebalance power from large corporations and big government institutions and put it back into the hands of the people of this country, then there really is only one choice.



The Green Party

Imagine a political system that puts the public first. Imagine an economy that gives everyone their fair share. Imagine a society capable of supporting everyone's needs. Imagine a planet protected from the threat of climate change now and for the generations to come. That's the world we want to create and we believe we have the means to do it. By ensuring that everyone has access to a secure job that pays at least the Living Wage, by restoring public services to public hands, by investing in renewable energy and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, by building more social rented homes and bringing abandoned buildings back into use.



Other Parties

Of course, these five parties are not the only parties in England, and there are many others which focus mainly on individual topics, some of which could be important to you.

There are also parties in other areas of the UK such as Plaid Cymru in Wales and the Scottish National Party in Scotland however you cannot vote for these in Kent.

How to Vote

Before you are able to vote, you must register to be on the electoral register. You can register online www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.

Registering to vote is easy: it will take roughly five minutes of your time to vote online, and only a few details are necessary. You must be at least 16 to register and all you need is your National insurance number and you only need to register once unless you are changing your personal details.

Who Can Vote

Almost everyone can vote however, you must:

- be a British Citizen
- be 18 (for General Election)

Ways of Voting

There are a few different ways that you can vote. These are:

- in person at a polling station
- by post
- by proxy (getting someone else to vote for you)



In Person

Once you have registered, your council will send you a polling card telling you when and where to vote. Polling stations are usually open from 7am - 10pm and are held in public buildings such as schools or town halls.

When you get to the polling station, you will receive a ballot paper. You should take the ballot paper into a polling booth, follow the instructions in the polling booth or on the top of the paper and then put the paper in the ballot box.

By Post

You can apply to vote by post for a certain election on a specific date or permanently.

Once you have received your ballot paper, you should mark your vote secretly, fill in the postal voting statement, put both the ballot paper and voting statement in the provided envelope, seal it yourself and post your vote as soon as possible. You must ensure you post your vote quickly, otherwise it might not be counted.

By Proxy

Much like voting by post, you can apply to vote by proxy for a certain election on a specific date, for a certain period of time, or permanently. However, you can only vote by proxy if you have a medical issue or disability, are away on the polling day or you are unable to vote in person due to your work circumstances.

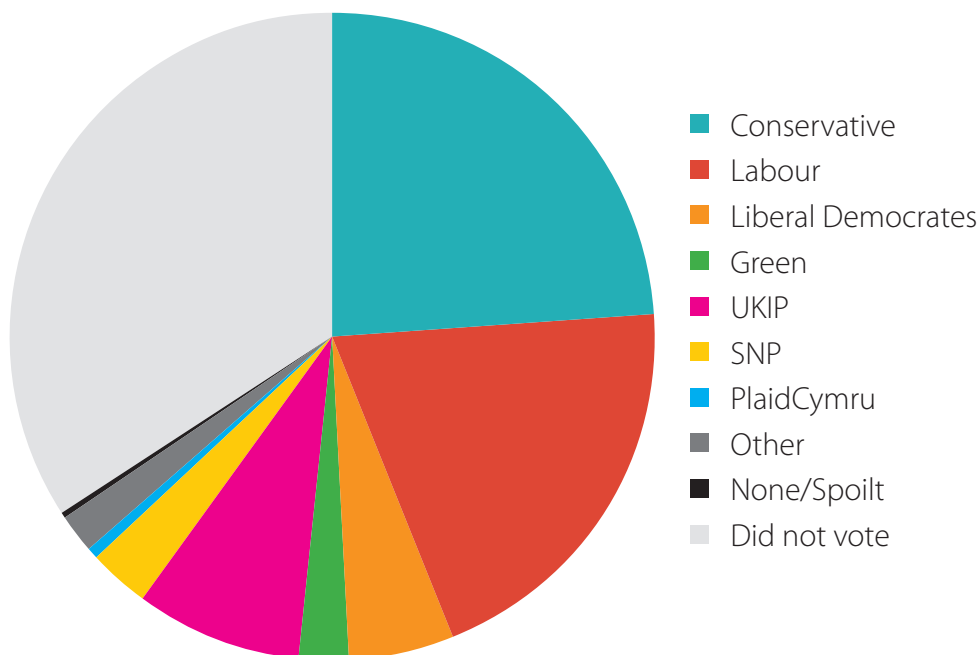
When applying for a proxy vote, you must give reasons and usually, you need someone to sign your application form to validate your reason. The person who is voting for you can then vote any way they want.

Why Vote?

In the UK, we are fortunate to have the right to vote. This means we have control over how our country is run and who is in government. When your local MP is voted in, they have the responsibility to voice your concerns in Parliament. Therefore, it is important that when you become old enough, you vote for the candidate, and party, that represents you the best. Your vote does count and makes a huge difference!

Also, you have the opportunity to exercise your democratic right as thousands of people go without the vote around the world so you must ensure you make use of yours. You can also respect the history of the UK and the people who campaigned or even gave their lives so that you can vote.

Change can also be stimulated when you vote which can affect all areas of your life. If you want certain things to happen in the country, the best way to achieve this is to vote for the party that you believe will do so.



Other Ways to Get Involved

Even if you are under 18, there are many other ways besides voting which can allow you to get involved in the political system.

You can join a political party and campaign on their behalf locally or nationally, showing that you have an interest in politics and want to make a change. This will also allow you to vote for your party's leader.

You could also join a pressure group and campaign on their behalf, these could be political or non-political and could range from campaigning for animal rights to electoral reform! This could involve rallies, demonstrations or e-petitions.

Another option available to under 18s is to participate in local youth forums and councils. The Kent Youth County Council allows you to campaign on issues important to you and young people – elections are every November and open up the option to get involved in the UK Youth Parliament. Their website is www.kent.gov.uk/kycc.

You can also get involved in local youth forums – look up where your district's is based online and get involved!



Human Rights

In the UK, we have a set of rights that protect us individually from danger or unfair treatment, and as a country from corruption and dictatorship. These rights come under the 1998 Human Rights Act, which include: the right to vote, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery, the abolition of the death penalty, the right to education, the right to liberty and security and many more.

Without our human rights, people could potentially end up being treated like animals or objects with no say in anything that happens with those who speak out being silenced.

Unfortunately, in some places around the world this is happening with countries being run by violence with students risking their lives every time they attend school. Also, throughout history, governments have imprisoned people who have not committed any crimes but have just been seen as a threat to the government.

Charities and organisations like Amnesty International work tirelessly trying to put an end to these unfair practices around the world every day. People have campaigned, protested and fought for the human rights that we have for centuries.



Voting Systems

The United Kingdom is split into 650 areas called constituencies, this could also be the town or district that you live in.

For each constituency, there is a seat in the House of Commons that a member of parliament (MP) takes in the house in order to represent their constituents.

Voting systems are the method by which we elect MPs. There are two main types: majoritarian and proportional.

Why does the type of system matter?

- Shapes type of parliament & affects party systems
- Reflects voters' wishes & caters for minority views
- Indicates swings in public opinion
- Produces strong government

Britain uses a majoritarian First Past the Post system where the UK is divided into 650 constituencies, each with one Member of Parliament (MP). People have one vote for one MP to sit in the UK Parliament in Westminster and represent their constituency. The candidate with the most votes is elected into parliament.

This is not the only voting system and in 2011 a referendum was held to decide whether the UK should adopt the Alternative Vote (AV) system. This would mean voters put a number by each candidate, with a one for their favourite, two for their second favourite and so on. A candidate will be elected if more than half the voters put them down as their favourite. If nobody gets half, the numbers provide instructions for where voters want their vote to go if their favourite candidate can't win. However the UK voted against AV and still uses First Past the Post.

These are both majoritarian voting systems however Proportional Representation is a proportional voting system. Proportional representation is an electoral system in which the distribution of seats corresponds closely with the proportion of the total votes cast for each party. For example, if a party gained 40% of the total votes, a perfectly proportional system would allow them to gain 40% of the seats.

There are many other pressure groups campaigning for a fairer electoral system using a proper proportional system. However, AV lost the referendum and we continue to have the FPTP system for the General Election.

Referendums

A referendum is similar to an election; the people of a certain country or region decide the future of their nation.

The difference between an election and a referendum is that in an election, there are many choices for different parties, but in a referendum, there are often only two choices on a certain issue, and many political parties are often divided.

Recent referendums include the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 and the vote on the UK's exit of the European Union in 2016.



Other Elections

Devolution

The government in Westminster has split some of its powers across the nation to other parliaments and assemblies.

In Scotland there is the Scottish parliament, both Wales and Northern Ireland have devolved assemblies, and London also has its own city assembly.

Another form of devolution is councils: county councils, youth county councils, district councils, parish councils and town councils.

Each devolved assembly or parliament has its own political parties, some of which are the same as those in England, but some are different and more local.



By-Elections

If an MP dies, retires, or is removed from their seat between elections, a by-election is called just in that single constituency. This usually happens a couple of times each year.

European Elections

The EU has a parliament called the European Parliament with members called MEPs. They meet in Brussels, Belgium and make decisions for the whole of Europe.



The UK currently elects 73 MEPs in 12 different regions, with 3 or 4 MEPs elected in each region. The whole South East, for example, is a region of its own with 4 MEPs voted on by the public.

Parliament and Government

The Government is made up of ministers or representatives from the ruling party and controls the policy behind the running of the United Kingdom.

Parliament's role is mainly to pass and amend laws proposed by Government, to represent voters and control the power of the government. To do this Parliament is split into two separate houses: The House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The House of Commons

- Made up of 650 MPs elected to represent their constituencies.
- The majority political party or a coalition of parties in the House of Commons forms the government.
- The leader of the majority party will become the Prime Minister, choosing other MPs from their party to fill positions in the government such as the Foreign Secretary or the Health Secretary.
- The House of Commons is also where MPs debate over legislation, after which they vote whether or not to grant approval.



The House of Lords

- The House of Lords is made up of hundreds of peers who have been appointed because of their experience and knowledge in their fields, such as business, law, education and culture.
- There are also some members of the House of Lords who have inherited their place there (however after these peers die their seat in the House of Lords will not be inherited by their children).
- The main job of the House of Lords is to delay legislation so that the government is forced to reconsider it.
- The House of Lords plays a vital role in making and shaping laws and checking and challenging the government through scrutiny of legislation.



Every 5 years, there is another general election which can change the MPs that are in parliament and sometimes changes the government and party in power.

Other Systems of Government

Britain is a democratic country, which means that the people elect the government. Other examples of democratic countries include Germany, Japan, India and the United States. Most democratic countries have, like the UK, a house of elected officials and then a Prime Minister or President who is also elected.

Acknowledgements

This booklet was produced by Kent Youth County Council.
If you would like to know more about what the council does,
visit www.kent.gov.uk/kycc.

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Elena Ewence

Hattie Oliver

Joshua Gray

Kane Blackwell

Leo Penry

Lilly Ebsworth

Ollie Oakley

Thomas Clowes-Pritchard

Vasilena Kuyumdzhieva

