

#GenerationVote

A guide to voter registration

In the run up to the General Election on May 7th, we want students and young people to be on the agenda. We've seen that politicians easily ignore us because we aren't registered. But in almost 200 constituencies, students and young people can swing the vote. So let's get registered and decide the election.

What is Generation Vote?

Back in 2010, only 44 per cent of 18-24 year olds voted in the General Election, in comparison to almost 80% of over 65s.

This means that the policies decided in Westminster are based on keeping those over 65s happy whilst ignoring the opinions of young people and cutting budgets for services that matter to them.

We've seen the Educational Maintenance Allowance axed in England and Wales, tuition fees trebled and attempts to strip back the Disabled Students Allowance, all whilst youth services are shutting down and young people are forced to work for low or no wages.

Imagine if those two figures were switched around, if 80% of eligible 18-24 year olds voted. We would see the apprentice minimum wage rise, guaranteed jobs for young people and homes fit for study.

That's why we are Generation Vote, because if we become a force at the ballot box, we could change the agenda of the UK.

What will we be doing?

From now until the 21st April (the deadline to register to vote for the General Election) we will be supporting Students' Unions to register as many students as possible. Support will come in the form of written resources, the Generation Vote Starter Kit, our General Election hub for students (www.newdeal2015.uk), training and a series of events.

Key Dates

February 5th- National Voter Registration Day. We are partnering up with Bite the Ballot to host the UK's biggest registration drive in one day. Students' Unions can run their own events!

April 21st- Deadline for all those eligible to register to vote on the polling day, including those people requesting a postal or proxy vote!

May 7th- Polling day! The day of the General Election when all registered voters can cast their vote.

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Common myths of voting!

Registering to vote and casting your vote can seem a bit confusing. These are just a few of the things we've heard others say about voting. Use these when chatting to students during your registration drives!

You have to be 18 to register to vote.

Nope- you can actually register from the age of 16 but you need to be 18 to cast your vote.

You can only vote once every four years

Wrong! Whilst the General Election takes place around every four years or so there are lots of other elections you can vote in. You can vote to elect your local councillors, members of the European Parliament and if you live in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales you can vote for devolved bodies too!

I can't vote because I wasn't born in the UK.

Not necessarily.

If you are an EU or Commonwealth citizen can register to vote. For a list of who can vote [here](#)ⁱ

I have to register at home and I live somewhere else during term time.

Definitely not. You are absolutely within your right to register at both your home and term time address. However, this doesn't mean you can vote twice. Sorry! You will have to decide where you would like to vote. [For help on deciding visit the General Election Hub here.](#)ⁱⁱ

My vote won't count anyway.

Out of 650 constituencies in the UK, we found that in over 200 of them students have the power to change the result completely. And it's not just about voting either, before you even set foot in a polling station you can have an amazing impact by campaigning to the candidates on the issues that matter to you.

It's too late to register now.

Nah, you're fine! In fact, for most elections you can register up to 11 days before the vote. Plenty of time.

You can't force me to register.

If our powers of persuasion haven't been enough then we will let you in to a little secret. If you don't respond to your local council they have the option to issue you with a fine of £80! Your local council will attempt to get you registered in a number of different ways. By matching you up with data they already have, by knocking on your front door and by sending you letters, the fine is really a last resort.

If I register to vote my details will get passed on.

When you first register to vote, unless you've opted out your details will go onto two registers, an electoral register and an open register. With the open register, which includes all of your contact details including name and address, anyone can buy this off your local authority and use your details. If you want to avoid this then you can tick a box during the registration process to opt out or once you are registered ring up your local council and ask them to take you off.

I don't know my National Insurance number, so I can't register.

This is tricky. You do need your national insurance number as a form of identification. Luckily you can find it [here](#)ⁱⁱⁱ

I don't have time to fill in a form and put it in the post.

You're in luck, if you live in England, Scotland or Wales then you can register online. Just go to <http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>. If you can register online then do it! It's much quicker and easier!

ⁱ <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/open/international/Voter-registration-for-international-students-in-the-general-election-2015/>

ⁱⁱ www.newdeal2015.uk

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/lost-national-insurance-number>

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Jargon Buster

We know that the world of voter registration can seem quite complicated and technical. So, we have put together some definitions to make sure you get the most out of your voter registration work!

Block registration

This was an old way that voter registration worked, your university or college could share information and register students to vote on mass. This typically happened with students living in halls. You can no longer do block registration in this way but for an alternative take a look at tick box enrolment!

Data match

You might hear someone referring to data match. With the new register lots of people need to be moved over. Local councils have tried to do this by matching people's information against their records. Your council may refer to green, amber and red matches. This means that either the information of an individual matches the council records and they have moved over, or that there is no data and the council needs to do work to register communities

Dissolution of Parliament

This is when Parliament closes to allow for the general election. Any law making duties finish and the Queen sets a date for Parliament to meet after the election. This is also known as the start of the 'short campaign' by this point all candidates for the election will be announced and candidates will start campaigning heavily. Parliament will dissolve on 30th March 2015

Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees the running of elections. The body regulates the amount of money that parties and individuals spend during the election. They are also responsible for the implementation of the Lobbying Act, a piece of legislation which regulates the campaigning work of charities and other organisations.

Electoral Register

The Electoral Register is the list of registered voters in a particular constituency or area. If you are not on the electoral register you are not eligible to vote.

ERO

ERO stands for Electoral Registration Officer, an appointed individual who is responsible for putting together and maintaining the electoral register

IER

IER stands for Individual Electoral Registration. This is a new system that came into place in June 2014. This system means everyone must register themselves to vote individually rather than the old system where one 'head of household' would register everyone at a property. This causes issues for block registration for students. Look at tick box enrolment as an alternative.

Local authority

A local authority is the administrative body in local government. The affairs of your local area are managed by your local authority. The local authority is your nearest town or city council. You may want to check what areas they cover to determine who to get in contact with about voter registration.

National Insurance Number

If you were born or live in the UK then before your 16th birthday you will receive your National Insurance Number. This number is used to administer national insurance contributions and as a form of identification. Under the new system of individual electoral registration your national insurance number is used in the validation process to get registered.

National Voter Registration Day

To commemorate the Great Reform Act of 1832, the first step to allowing all UK citizens to vote, Bite the Ballot (a youth voter registration org) started NVRD. This is one day where lots of organisations do actions to get people registered! Get ready for Feb 5th 2015!

Open Register

When your registration to vote has gone through your information will be put on to the open register, which lists all 'electors' or residents within your local area that are registered. This open register can be sold on to businesses and charities which could result in you being contacted. To get your name off the register you will need to ring up your local authority

Polling Day

Polling day is a technical term for Election Day! This will be May 7th 2015 when everyone registered can vote.

Tick box enrolment

Tick box enrolment is a process that NUS advocates within institutions. At the start of the academic year your university or college will ask for your address and other details to confirm you have started the year. This is often so they can get your up to date contact details or to confirm your attendance with the student loan company. We are encouraging institutions to team up with their local authority to include a tick box that allows all data you share with your university or college with the council so they can register you to vote!

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Have you got suggestions for more phrases to add to this jargon buster? Email georgie.laming@nus.org.uk

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How to work with EROs

The world of voter registration can be confusing and you will need to engage with your local council for help. Just like a Students' Union, each local authority is different. Here's a brief guide to get you started!

What's new?

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 brought about a key change in the way voter registration happens. Previously, one person in every household was responsible for registering everyone else who lives at that address. Under individual electoral registration, each person is now required to register to vote individually, rather than by household

How will it affect us?

There are concerns about the potentially negative effects of IER for some time. When Northern Ireland introduced the model they saw their registration figures drop by over 10%.

This coupled with the low registration numbers of young people could see the 18-25 demographic completely wiped off the electoral map if we don't act.

So, as one of the major influencers of young people, it's up to Student Unions working with the Electoral Commission and local authorities to make sure that students get registered.

What has NUS been doing?

NUS has been working since the government first drafted the legislation, back in 2011, to develop ways in which these risks can be mitigated against. As well as calling for more active engagement between all relevant parties (universities and colleges, students' unions, electoral registration officers, the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office), NUS strongly favours integrating student enrolment with voter registration. Meaning that when your students turn up on campus to confirm they are starting the new academic year, all of the contact information they provide is shared with your local council. This means the council can try to match your information with their records and register you!

The Student Forum

The Cabinet Office has worked with NUS, UUK, Guild HE, the AoC and ARC to create a 'student forum', which builds regional networks of EROs who can work in a coordinated manner with local HEIs, FEIs and students' unions.

Students' unions and institutions are encouraged to make contact with their regional ERO networks – to share best practice, develop strategies to secure high levels of student voter registration and ensure that communication is as effective as possible.

What students' unions can do

1. Get in touch with your regional ERO networks, and with your local EROs. Ask them what plans they have for getting students registered to vote, and how they plan to prevent students dropping off the register. **Ask them what you can do to help them with their plans.** Contact georgie.laming@nus.org.uk for the most up to date contact details!
2. **Talk with your institution about integrating voter registration into general enrolment.** This presents a key opportunity for institutions to support their students to become full active citizens, and should be seen as a key priority. Greg Clark MP, in his previous role as minister for political and constitutional reform had written to all vice chancellors calling on them to act to support student voter registration – this is a key vital way in which this agenda can be furthered. **Whilst this may be too late for the General Election, this is one way that you can make sure you have a sustainable model for getting students registered.**
3. Talk to your ERO about what else you can do to support voter turnout – **can you get a polling station on your campus?**
4. Create a login for the NUS General Election hub by emailing join@newdealnextgen.com

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Want more information? Contact
georgie.laming@nus.org.uk .

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Clubs and Societies Voter Varsity

Pit your baking society against your radio station in a challenge to see how many students they can get registered!

Who:

Student volunteers, fundraisers, societies, student media and sports clubs!

What:

Host a voter varsity. For one week ask your student groups to compete to register as many students as possible through any means possible. They could host their own events, run stalls, do sponsored runs- whatever talents or hobbies they have can be used to get students registered

When

The great thing about this activity is you could do it whenever. It could be your main activity for National Voter Registration Day or it could be a feature of your Refreshers Week!

Where

Anywhere and everywhere! You can do this on your campus, in lectures, in your student areas. Watch out if you do things in your local community and you are talking about political issues. If you are registered charity you come under the lobbying act!

Why

Clubs and Societies are so of the most active members of unions. They know lots of people, they are keen to reach more and everything they do is fun! They are also really great at connecting with people with a variety of interests. Your history society might reach one group of students but your Doctor Who society will reach a completely different one!

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Run a Fake Election

Get your students thinking about the General Election with a mini election on campus!

Who:

Union staff, political societies, volunteers

What:

Set up a fake election. For one week set up a stall on campus and put a poll on your website. Invite in your local candidates to speak to students and canvass for their votes. Have an election results night. Whenever someone votes at the stall or online, direct them to www.newdealnextgen.uk where they can sign up, register to vote and earn your union points on the hub!

When

This is a great warm up activity for National Voter Registration Week. The deadline to register to vote is 21st April. Think about when your half term is and how much impact you can have on students before the deadline.

Where

On campus and online. Let your political societies get really into this and give your campus, student union office and institution an elections makeover

Why

Lots of people don't vote in elections because they don't feel like they know enough about the issues. This is your opportunity to inform students about all the political parties, national issues and policy areas in the run up to the election. Plus you can drill home to them that they have to register to vote on May 7th, lots of people aren't aware that they need to register!

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Enlist Your Course Reps!

Course Reps have brilliant links with both students and institutions. Get them to help you introduce political education and debate into lectures and sessions.

Who:

Course Reps, Academic Representation Staff, Officers

What:

Ask if your course reps could be allowed to spend one day going into the start of lectures to host debates on an area relevant to their course or a party policy. Once you've got students talking, get them all to register on their phones in their lecture!

When

Whenever! Find a time in your institutions schedule, outside of exam or hand in periods, to do a 10 minute takeover!

Where

In lectures, seminars, lessons, free periods. Whenever works for you!

Why

If we want students to get voting and become a force to be reckoned with, we need to allow them space and time to debate. This is a great way of not getting students involved but staff in your institution too.



Need help convincing your institution or coming up with debate subjects? Contact georgie.laming@nus.org.uk

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Speak to local businesses

Do you have a partnership with a local business? Get them to help you promote voter registration.

Who:

Local businesses, your commercial department and your full time officers

What:

It could be anything! You could ask your local taxi company to put an advert in their cars or ask a local pizza shop to put voter registration forms in with orders!

When

From now until April 21st! The great thing about this activity is that it can run all the way up until the voter registration deadline.

Where

Have a think about which companies you partner up with as a union or the average day when you were a student. What companies did you interact with? Where did you shop? Lancaster City Council teamed up with the Lancaster University Student Union to run bus campaigns on voter registration as they knew it was the biggest mode of transport for getting on to campus!

Why

Students have lives outside of studying, so make sure you are approaching them from all angles! Plus, it's good to make sure that companies you are working with share your values and want to help with something as important as voter registration!

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Tap into your student media

Have you got student media on campus? Whether it's an aspiring journalist or a radio presenter, get them involved in spreading the word about voter registration and covering the General Election!

Who:

Student media societies, activities staff, local candidates

What:

- Put voter registration forms and links into your student publications
- Have a jingle competition on your student radio station
- Dedicate a whole show on student TV/ Radio to voting and the General Election
- Invite student media to interview candidates and grill them on their new deal for students
- Ask your student media groups to put together an election coverage team for the whole year!

When

Now! Take a look at the work that JumpTV at Bournemouth University did on the US Presidential Election for inspiration. www.jumptv.co.uk/USElection

Where

Out and about on your campus. Try asking the local council for access to the election count on May 7th as reporters. You can reward the best student journalist with exclusive coverage!

Why

Student media work incredibly hard and students love to get involved when they see exciting cameras and microphones roaming on campus.