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Votes at 16 Campaign

Thank you for contacting me about the voting age.

I welcome the ongoing discussions and debates on this issue. There was a rising level of interest in the issue following the Scottish Independence Referendum, although most polls do show that a majority of adults oppose the change. In the 16-18 cohort, there is a modest majority of 16 year olds in favour, 17 year olds are evenly balanced, and 18 year olds are against.

In the UK, the view taken has been that there is no single moment when someone moves from childhood to adulthood; instead responsibilities and permitted activities build up over time. For example, a person must be 17 before they can leave home without parents' consent or hold a licence to drive and 18 before they can sit on a jury or buy alcohol. I think this illustrates that, so far, we have viewed attaining adulthood as a process rather than a single event.

I also believe it is notable that most democracies consider 18 the right age to enfranchise young people. So far in the EU, only Austria and Scotland have lowered the voting age to 16 for national elections.

Of course, it is vital for young people to be involved in politics, but there is much more to this than the voting age. Interestingly, a 2009 report by the Youth Citizenship Commission stated that the voting age is not the principal factor in encouraging young people's interest and involvement in politics and citizenship.

I hope that this helps you to understand my position. Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP