



## How to spread the word

[votesat16.org.uk](http://votesat16.org.uk)

This guide outlines ways that you can get more people talking about lowering the voting age to 16, in particular through your online networks and using local media, and gain supporters for the campaign.

## Know what you want to get across

You might want to spread the message to people about Votes at 16 for different reasons —to discuss the issue, lobby them to support the campaign, or ask them to take part in a campaign activity. However you'll need to be short, snappy and on point to ensure your message gets listened to.

One way to make sure this happens is to think about what key messages you want to get across when you are talking about Votes at 16. Key messages are the messages you want your audience to remember and react to. Make sure that you have a think about what key messages you want to get across, whether you're posting on Facebook or doing a radio interview.

For example, three key messages about the need for Votes at 16 include:

- 16 and 17 year olds are knowledgeable and passionate about the world in which they live and are as capable of engaging in the democratic system as any other citizen.
- Lowering the voting age to 16, combined with strong citizenship education, would empower young people to better engage in society and influence decisions that will define their future.
- People who can consent to medical treatment, work full-time, pay taxes, get married or enter a civil partnership and join the armed forces should also have the right to vote.

It is also important to talk about why you are supporting the campaign so others can relate to what you are doing. For example, tweeting 'If you're 16 and 17, join the Votes at 16 Facebook group with me because I think it's unfair that we can't vote' or writing a letter to your local paper explaining how frustrated you we're that you couldn't vote for your MP, makes it personal, reaches out to your audience, and gives them a reason to get involved.

## Use your online networks

The online world can offer an easy way for you to promote your group or campaign widely, to a range of different people – free of charge.

Using Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, and blogs all allow you to speak to friends and your wider network about the campaign and how they can get involved.

## The five rules of campaigning through social networks

1. **Talk to as many people as you can:** Think of ways to mention the campaign to as many friends and contacts online as possible, for example invite friends on Facebook to like [www.facebook.com/votesat16](http://www.facebook.com/votesat16) or mention @Votesat16 for #FollowFriday on Twitter.
2. **Use interactive media:** If you can post videos, links to articles, blogs, podcasts to keep what your followers interested in what you are talking about.
3. **Keep updating:** Social networks are designed for information to quickly move from member to member. Constantly update. If you leave it for a few days, support will fade.
4. **Keep it simple:** If you create a blog about the issue then make sure that the site is easy to use and understand, for example that the content and navigation items are where they would



be expected and the language familiar to the audience.

5. **Ask people to participate:** In some cases, those that participate in the discussions or conversations will yield to a more successful marketing campaign.
6. **Respond:** If you get people following your posts about Votes at 16 then retweet their relevant posts and if someone messages you about the campaign make sure you get back in touch.

## Use your local media

Your local newspaper, radio or television media can be a good friend. Often the media can help you to air your case and reach your audience. Remember that local media need a local angle to the story. Make the most of your resources - i.e. yourselves! Make sure you have lots of young people lined up to talk about Votes at 16.

Positive media coverage is the key to winning any campaign. The media influences individuals and also decision makers. Positive local coverage can help spread the profile of your campaign.

When thinking about telling the media about your campaign activity it's a good idea to think about the following things so that you are on the right track.

1. **Who cares?** Before you do anything else, ask yourself this question. Just because you care passionately about something doesn't mean anyone else does, so make sure you have a story. For example, it might not be worth you press releasing about you getting together with a couple of friends to discuss Votes at 16 but if you have 100 young people at a panel debate with your local MPs then that is a story.
2. **Give them what they want.** As a general rule of thumb, news editors are most interested in stories that involve human interest. If you can talk about how real young people in your local area are denied the vote then that is really powerful.
3. **Be imaginative.** Media work isn't just about press releases. Press releases are a tiny part of the media work. Think about letters to editors, comment piece, statements, offer interview, quotes, blog (internal or external), or articles for student media.

## What are press releases?

Press releases are information that you send to media outlets, such as your local newspaper or radio station, to publicise news, events and activity. They can let the press know what you are doing so they can get in touch with you. Press releases should be short and snappy as journalists don't often have a lot of time to read them. Press releases really should be no more than one page in length.

It's best to email your press release to journalists and then follow up later in the day with a call to see if they have received it and need any more information. Try to build a personal relationship with journalists where you can. Be friendly, polite and helpful and they are more likely to cover your story.



Here are some simple guidelines to help you make your press release noticed:

### Sample press release

#### For immediate release: [date]

If you want the media to use the story as soon as they receive it just put 'for immediate release'. Or instead put 'Embargoed for: [time/date]'. This is a good way of giving journalists time to prepare and to ensure they don't use it until a particular time).

**Headline:** Start with a snappy headline

**Paragraph 1:** Summarise the story - who, what, where, when and why. All key information needs to be in this paragraph. For example 'teenagers (who) are lobbying local MPs (what) at the City Chambers (where) tomorrow (when) calling for the voting age to be lowered to 16 (why).'

**Paragraph 2:** Put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph.

**Paragraph 3:** "Quotes from you or someone relevant to the story." Don't try to cram too many points into one quote – each quote should make one point.

**Paragraph 4:** Any extra relevant information.

### Ends

Putting 'ends' tells the journalist that the press release has ended.

### Notes for Editors

Provide background information you have i.e. '3000 young people across Dorset have signed a petition'. Outline what you have to offer: pictures, interviewees. Outline any additional relevant information or facts and figures, but keep it short.

### Contact

Make sure you supply numbers where you can be reached day or night such as a mobile number. This can make the difference between your story being covered or not.

## Case studies

The press love case studies because they offer them a human interest angle. Gather case studies for use when they can help illustrate a point you are making in the media. Always ask their permission first, and make sure you respect any confidentiality issues. Write short and snappy summaries of their stories. Make it clear that interviews can be arranged with your case studies (again, make sure you have their permission first).

## Letters to editors

It is worth remembering that one of the most frequently read pages of any newspaper is the letters page. So letter writing campaigns in the press are a good way of getting coverage, whilst also giving the paper the idea there may be a story there. Letters are also a great way to respond to a story you disagree with.



## Useful links and resources

**Community Newswire:** If you have a newsworthy story, get it written up by dedicated Press Association journalists into an article and sent to thousands of national, regional and local newsrooms throughout the day via the Press Association's newsfeed. There is also step by step guidance about what makes news to give you the best opportunity of media coverage.

[www.mediatrust.org/newswire](http://www.mediatrust.org/newswire)

**The Newspaper Society:** Find contact details for your local and regional newspapers and radio stations.

[www.newspapersoc.org.uk](http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk)

**ITV Local:** You can upload video content and images directly to ITV to say your piece on the big news stories or want to highlight an issue affecting your life.

[www.itv.com/News/extra1/HowtoUpload/default.html](http://www.itv.com/News/extra1/HowtoUpload/default.html)

**Media Trust:** A range of guides on how to work with the media, including a sample press release.

<http://resources.mediatrust.org/guides>

**Headliners:** A national news agency, where young people aged 8-18 produce articles on issues that are important to them but of interest to everyone.

[www.headliners.org](http://www.headliners.org)

