

Written evidence submitted by Internet Matters

Representation of the People Bill – Public Bill Committee

About Internet Matters

Internet Matters is a UK not-for-profit dedicated to supporting parents, carers and professionals to keep children safe online. We produce expert guidance and resources, and use our research and insights to champion the views and interests of families, making evidence-based recommendations to all those with influence over children's digital lives.

1. Introduction

The Representation of the People Bill proposes extending the right to vote to 16- and 17-year-olds. As Parliament considers this change, it is important to recognise the information environments in which young people increasingly encounter news and political content.

Our research shows that many young people encounter political information online well before voting age, but often lack the confidence to assess its accuracy or credibility.¹ Young people are also concerned about the impact of misinformation and AI-generated on electoral results.

The Government's recently published Media Literacy Action Plan recognises the importance of strengthening citizens' ability to navigate online information environments.² As Parliament considers extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds, ensuring these commitments support young voters will be particularly important.

This submission sets out evidence on how young people encounter political information online and highlights policy considerations for supporting informed and confident democratic participation among newly enfranchised voters.

2. Summary of key recommendations

- **Government should ensure that reforms to strengthen media and digital literacy in schools are supported by dedicated teacher training, clear guidance and high-quality teaching resources.** While the Government's recent Media Literacy Action Plan and English curriculum reforms signal welcome progress, further clarity is needed on how teachers will be supported to deliver this effectively in practice.
- **Government should ensure sustained investment in media literacy initiatives beyond schools.** Many young people rely on parents, carers and other trusted adults when navigating political information online. Families should therefore be equipped with the

¹ Internet Matters, *Preparing young voters in today's online information environment* (February 2026), [link](#).

² Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, *A Safe, Informed Digital Nation* (March 2026), [link](#).

knowledge and practical skills needed to navigate online information environments confidently and support young people to do the same.

- **Government should ensure strong coordination and delivery of media literacy policy across departments.** The Government's recent Media Literacy Action Plan, led by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), is a welcome step toward strengthening coordination. However, Parliament should ensure there is clear accountability for delivery, including how progress is coordinated, monitored and reported across departments responsible for implementing the plan.
- **Government should engage directly with young people to understand the support they need to participate confidently in and trust democratic processes.** Internet Matters' joint research shows that many young people have concerns about misinformation, trust in political actors and the influence of online content during election campaigns. Ongoing engagement with young people will be important to ensure policies designed to support democratic participation reflect the realities of the information environments they navigate.
- **Social media platforms should play a role in helping users to identify false or misleading political information online,** alongside education and public awareness initiatives set out in the Government's Media Literacy Action Plan. Given the central role platforms play in shaping how young people encounter news and political content, platform design should support users to better understand the reliability and context of the information they see.

3. Evidence and analysis

3.1 Young people encounter political information online well before voting age

Young people increasingly encounter information about news, politics and current affairs online, often through social media platforms.

Internet Matters research finds that 78% of young people say they have seen content about news, politics or current affairs online. Exposure begins well before voting age: nearly three in four (74% of) young people aged 13–14 report seeing this type of content online, rising to 81% among those aged 15–17.³

Previous Internet Matters research has also found that 68% of young people who consume news do so via social media.⁴ These environments are typically fast-paced and algorithmically curated, where factual reporting, opinion, satire and misleading claims may appear side by side. The increasing presence of AI-generated and manipulated content adds further complexity, making it more difficult for young people to assess the reliability and

³ Internet Matters, *Preparing young voters in today's online information environment* (February 2026), [link](#).

⁴ Internet Matters, *Informed or Overwhelmed?* (October 2025), [link](#).

credibility of information they encounter online.⁵ This means that many young people are forming views about politics in information environments that are complex and difficult to navigate, often before they reach voting age.

3.2 Many young people lack confidence evaluating political information online

Internet Matters' research indicates that many young people feel uncertain about their ability to assess political information online.

Among young people who encounter political information online only:

- 53% feel confident telling whether information is true or false
- 59% feel confident distinguishing fact from opinion
- 56% feel confident recognising satire

When asked to apply these skills to a series of real-world political claims from the 2024 General Election campaign that were shared on social media, 41% of young people selected "don't know / unsure" for at least one example.⁶

These findings suggest that many young people lack confidence in the core skills needed to evaluate the accuracy, intent and credibility of political information online.

3.3 Concerns about misinformation and trust in political messaging

Concerns about misinformation in election campaigns are widespread among young people.

Internet Matters research found that:

- 63% of young people are concerned voters will be misled by false or misleading claims during election campaigns
- 60% are concerned about the impact of online misinformation on election results
- 60% are concerned about the potential influence of AI-generated or manipulated content on electoral outcomes⁷

At the same time, trust in political messaging is low. More than 60% of young people say they tend to ignore what political parties or politicians say because they are unsure whether the information can be trusted.⁸

Taken together, these findings suggest that exposure to misleading political information may be contributing to distrust and disengagement, rather than encouraging greater participation in political debate.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Internet Matters, *Preparing young voters in today's online information environment* (February 2026), [link](#).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

3.4 Schools and families both play an important role in supporting young people

Schools play a key role in helping young people develop the skills needed to navigate online information and political content. However, Internet Matters research found that only 56% of young people who consume news say their school has spoken to them about how to tell whether online news is true.⁹

Families also play an important role in supporting young people to navigate online information environments. Internet Matters research shows that 52% of young people say they would turn to a trusted adult when encountering distressing news content online, while 51% say they would speak to a trusted adult if they wanted to verify whether information is accurate.¹⁰

Supporting both schools and families will therefore be important in helping young people navigate political information confidently.

The Government's recently published Media Literacy Action Plan recognises the importance of supporting people to navigate online information environments and sets out actions across departments to strengthen media literacy over the coming years. However, the plan currently provides limited detail on how these actions will be delivered or how progress will be measured. As this work progresses, it will be important to ensure that commitments translate into practical support for schools, families and young people.

While education policy is devolved across the UK, supporting young people to develop the skills needed to navigate online information environments will be important across all nations.

4. Recommendations for Parliament

To ensure the extension of voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds supports informed and confident democratic participation, Parliament should consider the following actions.

1. Ensure school curriculum reforms in England are supported by teacher training and resources

Government should ensure that reforms to strengthen media and digital literacy in schools in England are accompanied by:

- dedicated teacher training through Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development
- clear guidance on how these skills should be taught across subjects
- an easy-to-access repository of relevant resources to teach media literacy

⁹ Internet Matters, *Informed or Overwhelmed?* (October 2025), [link](#).

¹⁰ Ibid.

2. Support media literacy initiatives beyond schools

Government should ensure sustained investment in initiatives that support families and communities in navigating online information environments, including providing trusted guidance and resources for parents and carers.

3. Ensure effective coordination and delivery of the Government's media literacy strategy

The Government's recently published Media Literacy Action Plan sets out priorities for strengthening media literacy across the UK over the next three years. However, the plan currently provides limited detail on how these actions will be delivered, coordinated across departments, or monitored for impact.

As Parliament considers the extension of voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, ensuring that media literacy initiatives are effectively delivered will be increasingly important. Parliament should therefore encourage Government to provide greater clarity and accountability for the delivery of its media literacy strategy, including:

- clear leadership and coordination across departments responsible for education, digital regulation and online safety
- transparent reporting on progress and impact of media literacy initiatives
- continued engagement with regulators, civil society organisations and education partners delivering media literacy interventions

Strengthening coordination and accountability will help ensure that the Government's media literacy ambitions translate into meaningful improvements in how young people and families navigate online information environments.

4. Encourage social media platforms to support users in evaluating information

Given the central role platforms play in shaping how young people encounter political information, policymakers should consider how platforms can better support users to identify misleading or manipulated content and access reliable information.

5. Engage directly with young people

Government should engage directly with young people to understand their experiences of encountering political information online and the support they need to participate confidently in democratic processes.