

The
Electoral
Commission

Mobilising the first time voter

ACEEEO Conference
8-12 September 2004

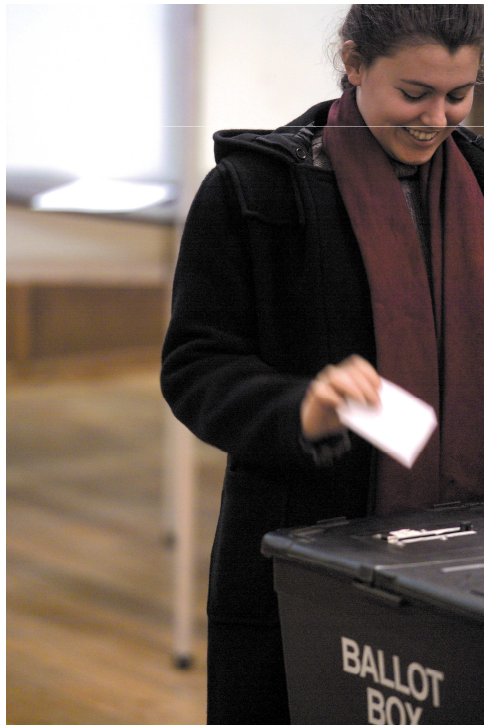
The Electoral Commission

The UK Electoral Commission

- Established in November 2000.
- Responsible for:
 - Registration and regulation of political parties;
 - Electoral modernisation;
 - Managing referendums;
 - Reviewing local government boundaries;
 - **Voter awareness and education;**

The Electoral Commission

The turnout challenge



- **‘To encourage greater participation in and increased understanding of the democratic process’**
= Increase turnout?
- Turnout in 2001 general election,
 - 59% of eligible voters
 - 39% of 18-24 year olds

The Electoral Commission

How we tackle the challenge

- Research
- Participation policy
- NIF
- Campaigns
- Outreach

The Electoral Commission

Research



- Non-registration higher among young
- Many reasons for non-voting common with others, but more pronounced among young
 - Alienation
 - Knowledge
 - Inconvenience
- Having say an important motivator
- Anti-'party politics', not politics per se
- Most likely to talk about election
- Important 'information gaps'
- Dialogue and language of **P**olitics is a turn-off

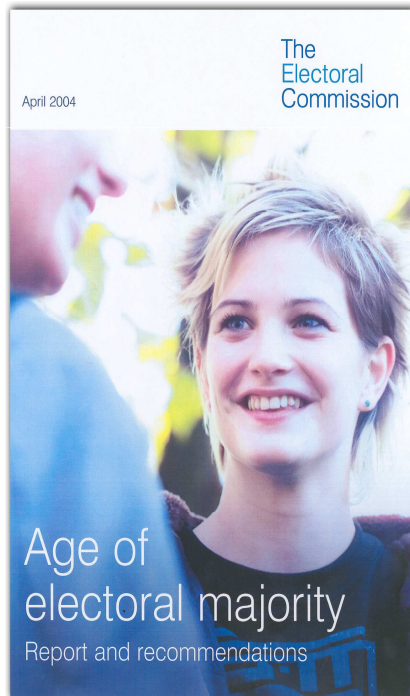
The Electoral Commission

Research into the attitudes of young people



- Voting not seen as a way of expressing dissatisfaction or seeking a solution to problems.
- Apathy or antipathy?
- Lower awareness/knowledge of politicians and policies:
 - **23% of 18-24s able to name MP at GE (41% of adults);**
 - **56% too little info about parties' policies at GE (44% of adults).**

Participation policy



- Strategic approach
- Voting age review
- New methods of voting

The Electoral Commission

New Initiatives Fund

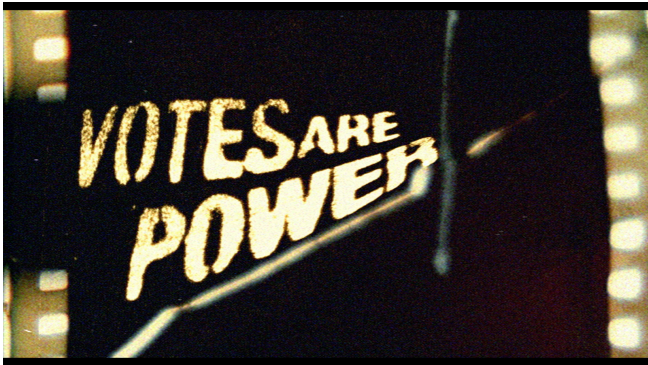
- Funds innovative, pilot projects.
- Bottom up not top down.
- Not targeted at any one group specifically, but a number of initiatives have focused on young people:
 - MPs in schools;
 - Educational websites;
 - Elections shadowing for young people.

Campaigns

- Key points in the electoral cycle
- Target audiences vary:
 - General public
 - Young people and students
 - Potential postal voters
- Informational and motivational
- Cross media;
 - TV and radio
 - Press
 - Websites
 - Leaflets and audio tapes

The Electoral Commission

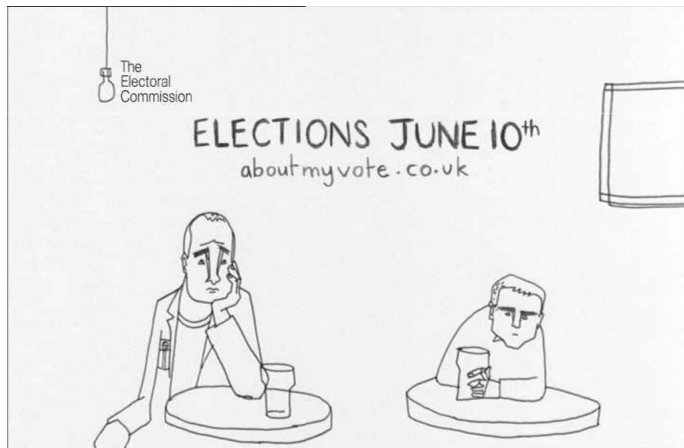
Recent campaigns;
Votes are Power



- Cinema advertising
- Creative competition
- Targeted press and merchandising
- Billboards

The Electoral Commission

Recent campaigns; **Don't do politics**



- National television campaign
- National press advertisements
- Aimed to make politics personal
- Targeted at the whole population
- Played particularly well with youth audiences

The Electoral Commission

Outreach programme



- Two year programme;
- primary audience – 16-24 years olds outside of formal education (*disaffected youth*);
- defined as ‘face to face’ activity;
- aimed at raising awareness of democratic institutions and voting among target audiences.

The Electoral Commission

Outreach;
**Educates and
activates**

- Lesson plans
- Session plans
- Workshops
- Stakeholders

The Electoral Commission

Outreach;
Takes a creative approach



The Electoral Commission

Outreach; Disseminates information



- Outreach leaflet
- Best practice – youth democracy report
- Media and press
- Information stands
- Presentations

The Electoral Commission

Outreach;
Builds
partnerships
and networks

- Working with stakeholders
- Steering groups
- Development of youth voting networks
- Partnership projects

The Electoral Commission

Youth Voting Network

- Brings together leading organisations in youth participation;
- Provides a means of monitoring progress;
- Share information and expertise;
- Opportunities to consult with key stakeholders

What is success?

The Electoral Commission

Measuring success

- We are at an early stage in the development of our voter awareness role. Early evidence suggests that our campaigns have had an impact.
- Outreach and NIF schemes to be evaluated in 2005.
- However, the Commission is not the only organisation with a responsibility in this area. Others need to consider how to connect with young people and encourage their participation.

Issues to tackle
to increase
young people's
participation

- **Education**
- **Improving access**
- **Making it easier to vote**
- More relevant, clearer and better communicated policies from **politicians and parties**
- Policies with local focus
- Politicians that are 'real people'
- Greater honesty
- Greater visibility (+ between elections)

Contact details

Ellie Greenwood - Participation and Liaison Manager
egreenwood@electoralcommission.org.uk

Beccy Earnshaw – Outreach Manager
Bearnshaw@electoralcommission.org.uk