

Young people urged to use their vote

BYC, a national charity working to engage young people in democracy, believes that the more votes cast, the more influence young people will have during the life of the next Parliament.

Alex Delaney, 26, BYC chair, said: "Cast your vote and make a difference. As well as having a significant say on the outcome in key marginals, the British Youth Council will use every vote that you cast – for whatever party – to make the case for a greater youth voice to be heard and involved in our democracy.

"We will continue to campaign on the issues you've already told us matter to you, not only throughout the whole of this Parliament but up until the next election whenever it is called!"

During the run up to the election, BYC has been campaigning to promote the issues nominated and voted on by young people for its election manifesto.

The manifesto, based on ideas submitted by more than 600 young people, includes a call for the voting age to be lowered to 16.

Alex said that despite what older generations may think, young people did want to have their say and that lowering the voting age would encourage more youngsters to engage with politics.

He added: "It's been interesting to see how one of the focuses for media attention around this election has been on the 'youth vote'. Discussion has focused around how much of an impact the live TV debates and social media may be having in encouraging a higher voter registration and interest among 18 to 24-year-olds, and which parties may appeal to the younger voter.

"This of course, coupled with a healthy dose of cynicism from

the media and the public, as to whether young people are really interested in voting, are mature enough to vote, or should even be given the vote at all!

"We at BYC would argue that young people have always had an interest in what happens at a local and national level. Through the 600 plus youth councils around the country, over 600,000 young people have voted for youth representatives to champion the issues that are important to them.

"Thousands more are involved in making decisions and voting at school councils. And of course there are those who are involved in the youth branches of the political parties.

"We believe that introducing votes at 16 will encourage more young people to take part in the local and national elections.

"Lowering the voting age would be the foundation that the UK Parliament could build on to change the way that 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds see politics."

BYC volunteer Jack Green, 16, said: "At 16, I feel I am mature enough to have my contribution towards the running of the country. I should have the chance to vote in general and local elections and choose who represents me.

"Young people are taught in school and college what democracy is and how government works, yet we have to wait to vote.

"I have political opinions and express these by supporting petitions, joining groups and social networking sites and discussing things online, but I can't vote.

"Votes at 16 would mean youth issues are represented more and that more is done for young people."

As well as campaigning for the voting age to be lowered to 16, the BYC Election Manifesto calls for an equal minimum wage for everyone aged over 16 and a national youth transport card that offers 16 to 25-year-olds a third off public transport.

The manifesto also urges the next Government to keep the promise to end child poverty in the UK by 2020 and to invest in comprehensive mental health services for young people.

To date more than 600 people have pledged to support the manifesto, including more than 260 Prospective Parliamentary Candidates.