



© UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor



**UpRising**

My Voice My Vote

# DEMOCRACY CAFÉ

## The Report

*In partnership with*



# What this document is about...

On Tuesday 18 November, UpRising staged the Democracy Café at the Speakers State Rooms in the House of Commons as part of Parliament Week. The event brought together over 100 young people from across our projects all over the country and sat them down with MPs to discuss the issues that affect us all, five months before the General Election.

The event focussed on the top polling issues in the general public. Rather than simply discussing typical 'young people's issues' the idea was to highlight how the concerns that affect young people are concerns that affect us all; and our UpRisers did not disappoint.

This report brings together the findings and opinions from this event. As such it does not aim to be a policy paper created by a rigorous evaluation process. It is more a reflection offering insight into the opinions of the young people we work with on our programmes.

---

## Contents

<b>Health</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Immigration</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Economy</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Crime</b>	<b>11</b>

# Health

The future of healthcare in Britain is on course to become the most important issue for voters in the 2015 General Election. NHS England reports that if the current model of care continues, it will lead to a funding gap of £30 billion between 2014 and 2021. With the NHS treating one million people every thirty six hours, we asked UpRisers what should be done in regards to healthcare in Britain, and how it should look in fifty years' time.

To UpRisers, the future of the NHS is very important, with 87% stating its future is important to them. Not only was it apparent that the NHS is well liked among UpRisers, but there is also a strong belief that all healthcare should remain free for all.

**87% of our UpRisers stated the future of the NHS is important to them.**



©UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor



UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor

While the group believed in free healthcare for all, they were not naïve about the funding this requires. There was wide recognition from UpRisers that the NHS needs more funding, or large scale reform to tackle the challenges the country face, such as an aging population. Policy suggestions were based around the need for more preventative measures, particularly around smoking and obesity, which according to a study conducted

**84% of UpRisers believe that healthcare should remain free for everyone**

by McKinsey Global Institute (MGI); cost almost £47bn and £56bn respectively each year.<sup>1</sup> A possible route to improving health in Britain which was suggested is to develop a “devomax” style system which gives additional powers to local authorities and elected mayors to make decisions of health related policy and regulation. This particular policy was mentioned in the NHS’s own five year forward view.<sup>2</sup>



“The NHS is such a huge part of being British and if it were to be privatised not only would we be losing our identity but we would also be widening the gap between the rich and the poor which is already a problem. It doesn’t make any sense to me when people say things like “it’s too expensive” because we seem to have billions to spend on new roads and millions to spend on international aid but we don’t have enough money to take care of our people?”

(Batool Shillingford, Birmingham)

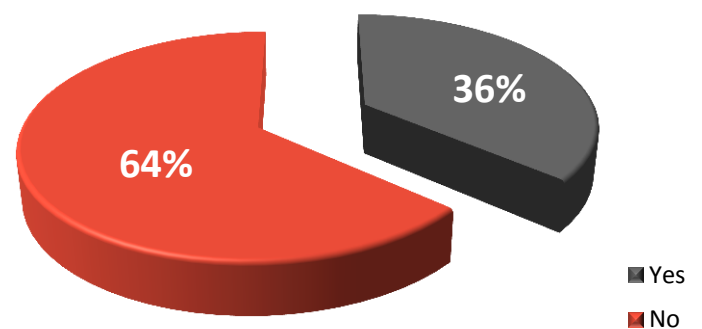
“The NHS is a fantastic thing and I believe we should do everything possible to preserve it. Perhaps moving the focus away from hospitals and A&E and developing more efficient medical centres and GPs who have access to information groups and websites which can provide the help they cannot give. I believe out of hours practise would relieve the strain on A&Es. Also, more incentives should be used to get young people into health care professions.”

(Meg Price, Birmingham)

There was general agreement among UpRisers that more needs to be done to tackle mental health, seeing as it carries a total economic and social cost of £105bn a year. Participants were aware that while opinion of mental health has improved drastically in recent years, there is still much more to do.

There was agreement in the room that mental health is still not seen as comparable with physical health, despite mental illnesses often being more debilitating. UpRisers called on future governments to have mental health waiting times drastically shortened, and for greater consideration of the impact that new government policies have on individuals affected by mental health.

### Are we doing enough to support people with mental health issues?



<sup>1</sup> <http://news.sky.com/story/1376640/obesity-costs-uk-more-than-war-and-terrorism>

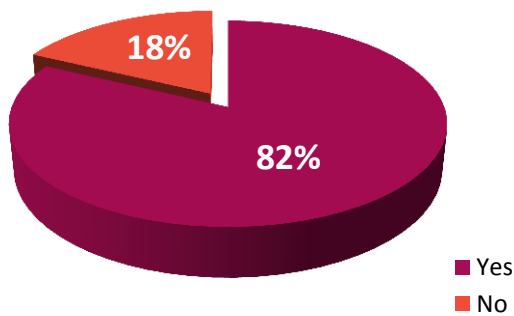
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/2014/08/15/5yfv/>

# Immigration

Regardless of personal opinions, it is undeniable that for many in Britain, immigration is a key concern, polling as the top issue for the country as a whole. At the Democracy Café, we gave UpRisers the opportunity to share and debate their opinions, not only on the different immigration policies, but also how the debate is being played out in the media.

Opinion regarding immigration in Britain was almost unanimous, with **93% agreeing that immigration is important to the future of Britain.**

Does the current debate on immigration matter to you?



The UpRisers pointed to two research reports, the first being a recent report by UCL into European migration to Britain which showed the huge net economic benefit migrants who entered Britain after 2000 have had.<sup>3</sup> The second use of statistics came from research by Shelter, which claims that less than 2% of migrants arriving in the UK in the last five years live in social housing.<sup>4</sup> Participants vocalised how sceptical they are of the immigration debate which currently takes place in Britain.

“Immigration is central to what makes Great Britain so great. Rather than internalising stricter immigration laws seen in practice across the Atlantic, as a nation we should celebrate what immigration has contributed. Immigration has founded a diverse and richly cultural nation, with tolerance for all. Immigration has allowed for growth in business, positively impacting on the economy, with curry houses equating over £3b a year collectively. We should be proud that the British immigration system has allowed 560,000 individuals in 2014 to make a fresh start and be a beneficial component to British society.

We need positive media presence surrounding immigration rather than the persistent negativity currently documented. It is not immigration that is the issue. The issue at hand is a gross exploitation of our generous welfare state. Rather than blaming immigration, we should look more closely into misuse of benefits and prevent our system from being exploited.” (Josiah McNeil, Birmingham)



<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1114/051114-economic-impact-EU-immigration>

<sup>4</sup> [https://england.shelter.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/132030/Factsheet\\_Immigration\\_and\\_housing.pdf](https://england.shelter.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/132030/Factsheet_Immigration_and_housing.pdf)

Following on from this, UpRisers believe that it is important to make key changes regarding the current immigration debate. The most significant change needed it is to distinguish between different types of migration. UpRisers feel at the moment that EU migration, non-EU migration, overseas students and asylum seeking are often lumped together, when they should be separate.

**98% of UpRisers  
think immigrants  
are poorly  
represented in  
the media**



“Although I’m a ‘world without borders’ type of person, and recognise immigration’s role in

history, one thing to note is the number of young people who are in class rooms that have come from Europe or somewhere else and speak another language sometimes with only little English. This means schools have to play catch up and cannot teach each child the same standard of learning. I think foreign families should within reason be able to move and live here under whatever circumstances (so long as intending to work); but I also think there is real need for a ‘transitional school’ or a programme so that schools do not take the burden of ‘playing catch up’ with children and can teach all children a good standard of learning. This is also about the child being able to get the most out of school as well. So, if a family moves here from abroad, instead of the child going to high school, being disciplined every time they speak their native language, and only socialising with others who speak their language, they could first attend a programme preparing them to attend British school in England, rather than be thrown into a foreign system where they are punished for speaking the (possibly only) language they speak at home!”

(Melissa Llewellyn, Luton)



Possible suggestions for this are to provide more detailed breakdowns of immigration, or to not include students and asylum seekers in statistics and targets, as their migration is entirely different to general migration. This mis-information is something our UpRisers are passionate about, with 98% agreeing that immigrants are poorly portrayed in the media.

# The Economy

The recent economic crash has reignited the debate surrounding the importance of the nation's economy; as across the world governments have implemented austerity measures in an effort to remove deficits in their finances. With further cuts in spending expected in the next government, we are moving to Britain's lowest public spending since the 1930s. But what does this all mean for young people? We put forward the topic of the economy to our UpRisers to get their thoughts on the current economic climate in Britain, to find out their opinions on how economic policies affect their lives, and how they feel about the economic future of Britain.

Information gathered at the Democracy Cafe suggests that young people care considerably about the economy, with **88% stating that the economy is important to them.**

This was 1% more than those who stated that the NHS is important to them. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority (93%) believe that more needs to be done to tackle income inequality in Britain, with many of them going further to say Britain needs to do more to tackle global income equality.



**93% believe more needs to be done to tackle income inequality**

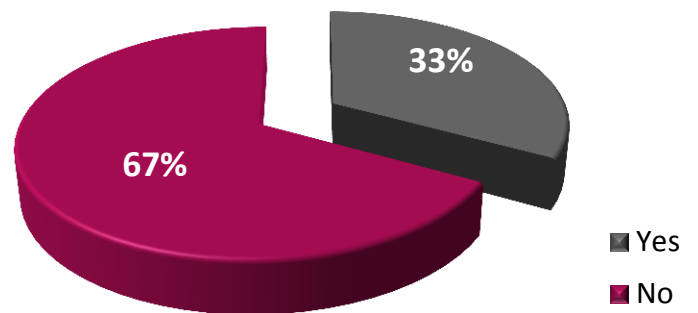
“The economy is backward and more than unfair on the masses. Companies such as Starbucks, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Amazon, Vodaphone and many more pay little to no tax which if they did could go into the economy in the multi billions, which I believe to be a disgrace and a complete disappointment. We're living in a time where the divide between the rich and poor is becoming more and more apparent and distressing. I'm unable to have a debate on the economy due to the above fact. If the economy

was such an important issue, wouldn't we heavily tax these companies and bring in the billions that they owe to the public, which could go into schools, hospitals, libraries and museums and many other areas where these funds are needed? But instead we raise the prices of travel, food, petrol, university fees and other areas where the common man and woman cannot simply afford to keep dishing out their wages on these necessities. Things need to be looked at and changed.”

(Omar Swaby, London)

Interestingly, the surveyed question which received the most emotive response was 'Do you feel that young people receive less money from the government compared to other age groups?' While it was acknowledged that the elderly in many areas require more funding than other age groups (and so they understood that less money was spent on them compared to the elderly), the groups universally agreed that cuts to youth services, or initiatives such as EMA, crippled many of their adolescent lives. It was frequently mentioned by participants past and present that young people have been hit worse by the recession.<sup>5</sup>

### Should it be made illegal to offer unpaid internships?



**88% believe the economy is important.**

This discussion ends on a somewhat gloomy tone, with UpRisers unsure how any government can cut the deficit further without hurting the very worst off more than already has been done due to the recession. Recent OBR statistics state that to remove the deficit completely, 60% more cuts would have to be made. Young people were also very angry that they will also feel the brunt of any future cuts or future economic changes, despite them being too young to have caused or benefitted from the situation which caused the crash.

“Young people do definitely receive less money compared to other age groups, but I don’t think that’s a bad thing necessarily. Things like EMA were right to be scrapped, as the majority of that money was spent on going out socially and not towards education. However, in terms of youth services there is little funding for programmes that benefit young people such as uprising, so perhaps more needs to be given to services in general and not to young people directly.

There is still a big division between the rich and the poor in our country. I don’t think benefits should be cut because to many, benefits are the bread line between providing for their family or going without. The debate on the economy is important to me, as the economy is the main factor for things like unemployment and the NHS.

(Safiyah Iqbal, Birmingham)



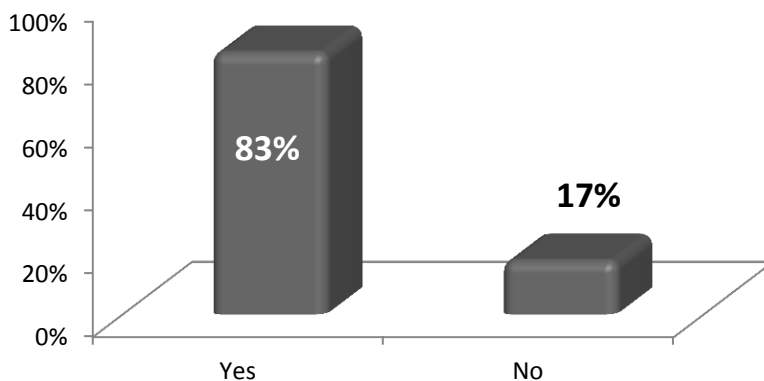
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-28305804>



# Unemployment

The recent world-wide economic crash has impacted the youth the most. While youth unemployment may not be at the rates of Spain (53.8%) or Greece (49.3%), the epidemic of youth unemployment and under-employment has led to the current generation of youth being labelled ‘the lost generation’. Debates around the cause of youth unemployment rage on, without any sign of an agreed view coming to light any time soon. We therefore put the topic of UK unemployment to our UpRising participants.

## Are you concerned about getting a job in the future?



A point that often came up while discussing the unemployment was the difficulty for young people finding employment. To

the UpRisers, statistics claiming that Britain has created more jobs than the rest of the European Union combined are irrelevant, because it does not feel tangible for the many young people who are struggling to get their first job at 16 or after university.<sup>6</sup> This was highlighted with **83% of participants stating they were concerned about getting a job in the future.**

90% of UpRisers agreed that more needs to be done by the government to tackle youth unemployment and to help more young people get into work. While the participants expressed a need for the government to

**90% think the government needs to be doing more to get people in to work**

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.finfacts.ie/irishfinancenews/article\\_1028140.shtml](http://www.finfacts.ie/irishfinancenews/article_1028140.shtml)

step in, over two thirds felt it should not be made illegal to offer unpaid internships, with many stating this would kill off their only lifeline to experience they currently have. Some suggestions on how to help with youth unemployment were based on being more interventionist during secondary education, with agreement across that board that a key reason for unemployment was due to poor career guidance/ future planning in school. Many participants expressed annoyance that university was constantly the only option expressed by staff as an option after college or sixth form, despite the fact that graduate under-employment is high.

**Only 33% of  
UpRisers thought  
that unpaid  
internships should  
be made illegal**

UpRisers suggested two key ways to improve education and thus improve employability in young people. The first suggestion was to reform PHSE into a more career/employability focussed class, centred around CV building, interview skills, etc. The second suggestion was to introduce professional mentors to the education system. The UpRising Alumni that attended felt the knowledge and experience they gained through their professional mentor on the UpRising Leadership and Fastlaners programmes should be replicated across secondary education. While it was acknowledged this may cost quite a lot of money to implement, the benefit would be seen in the results, and could be an efficient solution if lower unemployment was the net result.



“I think that unpaid internships are a good thing, as they help students to get vital work experience as well as allow them to begin making contacts that will help them later in life. There are many barriers preventing young people from getting a job, including companies not allowing students to do work experience with them. Therefore it makes it harder for students to start to get into work. I think that to improve this there should be more help for students within schools, colleges and universities. This might include companies allowing more students to do work experience within their company. As well as this there should also be stronger links within the school environment to outside business and companies to support students into the transition from education to the work environment. I think this will also make students more confident when approaching job interviews as well as giving them a higher chance of getting the job they want.”

(Sophie Webster, Liverpool)

# Crime

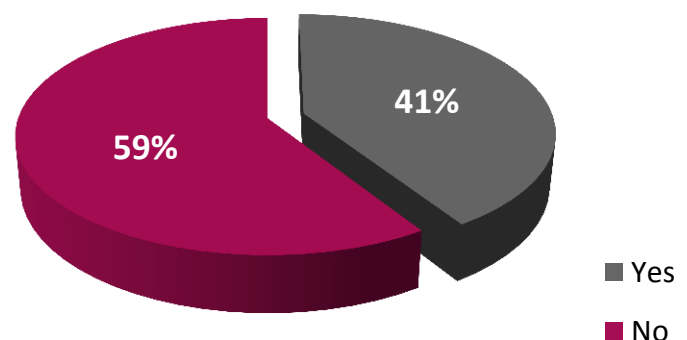
Media reaction to the London riots in 2011 perpetuated the idea that there is an issue with young people in Britain. Since then, young people have often felt they have been portrayed as violent or intimidating, with stories of courage rarely featuring in the news. Along with education and transport, crime is often stereotyped as an issue young people care more about than others, but is this true? With the government currently spending £176 million on Young Offender Institutes, and a third of young offenders re-offending within twelve months, we put forward the topic of crime to UpRising participants to get their views on crime in Britain.<sup>7</sup>

**95% feel young people are misrepresented in the media around stories of youth crime**

From conversations on the day, there is nothing to suggest that young people care more about crime than any of the other topics discussed. In fact, it became apparent that young people care more about health, unemployment and the economy than crime and transport, typical “young people” issues.

During the conversation, UpRisers continuously stated that the link between crime and the background of the individuals who commit them. Participants frequently referred to statistics showing that around half of young people who are in custody were in care at some point, and that one third of young people that offend have mental health issues.<sup>8</sup>

**Should recreational drug use be decriminalised?**



<sup>7</sup> <http://www.civitas.org.uk/crime/factsheet-youthoffending.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/our\\_work/youth\\_justice.htm](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/youth_justice.htm)

The UpRisers also felt more needed to be done to break the link between a person's upbringing and their prevalence to commit crime. Almost two thirds of participants felt Britain was too concerned with putting people in prison, instead of looking at preventative measure to prevent crime.



**75% of UpRisers believe we are too focussed on putting people in prison in the UK**

Conversation continued to discussions around young people, crime and the media. An overwhelming **majority of UpRisers (95%) felt young people are poorly misrepresented in the media**, which has a negative effect of the lives of all young people. Participants expressed sadness that older generations often forget that young people are just as frightened of crime as they are, and that a majority of young people have no interest in committing crimes.

“Yes young people are treated unfairly, but more so by the media than the law itself. However, you could argue that young people do bring it on themselves with events like the Riots. Because of that, the police are a lot more cautious and suspicious of young people, who the majority of the time are not doing anything wrong.”

(Safiyah Iqbal, Birmingham)



“The current criminal justice system I believe has to change to reflect a more open, fair and unbiased view towards young people. Too many young people, including myself feel threatened and wary when being approached by an officer instead of feeling safe. All of the experiences I have with the police have been a negative one, even though I have never committed a crime in my life. This needs to stop, the people who are in control of this need to look at this issue of bias and stereotyping and make a swift change. We are already seeing in the United States what it looks like when the citizens are being mistreated by the police, and it isn't pretty.”

(Omar Swaby, London)

# Conclusion

UpRising's Democracy Café clearly highlights that young people not only care about the issues typically assigned to them (transport, tuition fees, etc.); but that they are equally concerned with the same important issues that the wider population cares about. What's more our UpRisers illustrated an ability to clearly engage with these issues with well thought out, intelligent and balanced arguments.

**"It was fantastic to see Speaker's House filled with so many inspiring young people from UpRising's My Voice My Vote programme. The passion and enthusiasm displayed was extremely motivating, with all who attended displaying mature and informed opinions on the issues that affect them and their communities. The event only further highlights the need to engage young people in the political process and to ensure that their voices were heard."**

**Rushanara Ali, MP for Bethnal Green and Bow and Chair of Trustees for UpRising**

In 2014, we have seen the power of the youth voice amplified across Europe; from the independence referendum in Scotland (which saw record youth voting), to the political landscapes of Greece and Spain now defined by youth political engagement in parties. The significance of young people engaging in political debates is as prevalent as ever. It is now important that not only are young people's views and concerns listened to, but that young people themselves take more of an active role within our society to make our country a stronger, fairer and more cohesive nation. This is not only because our young UpRisers will become this country's leaders of tomorrow, but because they can also impact the decision making of today.



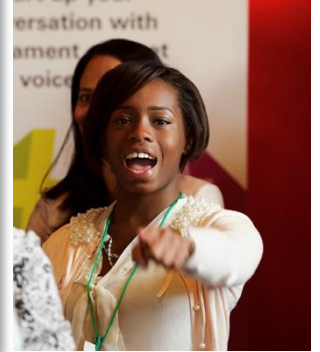
**“I really enjoyed the day it was a really good experience to meet others that are passionate about what we believe in. Going to the Houses of Parliament was amazing and something I never imagined I’d get to do.”**

***Emma Dixon***



**“It was really inspirational to speak to the MPs. I feel like I’m making an impact. It was great to see that we, as teenagers can make change, and to show that we’re not all out to be nuisances in society.”**

***Chris Simmons***



**“I enjoyed having the opportunity to become involved in discussions with other young people like myself and most importantly, the MP’s who have the power to make a difference within our community. I found it interesting that all the major problems that exist in the country such as health problems and unemployment for example inter-relate with each other to create a larger impact.”**

***Amber Hutton***

**“Having the opportunity to speak to MPs and debate issues with other young people has broadened my mind and helped me to express my opinions.”**

***McCauley Whyman***



**“Talking in our groups with people from other regions, I saw they had views about issues that were different to mine, they also had ideas I had never thought about. It was really interesting to spend this time with the other regions as I could see how different areas are different.”**

***Bethany Parkinson***



# UpRising

My Voice My Vote