

## Voter apathy isn't restricted to campus



By [Kate Mitchell](#), Graphics Director (2013/14)

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As a collective, young Britons are strongly disengaged with politics. Logging on to Twitter this morning, I felt a sense of hope when I noticed that three of the top trends in the United Kingdom included the word vote, before realising that they were all referring to One Direction. Unfortunately an enthusiasm for attractive 20 year old boys strangely does not seem to transfer to middle-aged men with receding hairlines, with only 44% of 18-24 year olds chose to vote in the 2010 general election.

The first problem to solve is why we are not voting, and whether we should be. There are an undoubtedly a lack of politicians in key positions representing the interests of young people. Not only are our interests sidelined, but policies can be directly counter to our benefit, such as the horrific rise in tuition fees – a policy that all in second year and below will be very well acquainted with. This creates an understandable mixture of apathy and distinct disillusion. However armchair cynicism is pointless. Simply not voting means young people will have less influence on a party's chances of winning, and so they will be much less likely to cater to our interests. Those of us that are disillusioned with politicians need to persuade those who have no interest in politics that voting does matter, and create a collective voting force that politicians will be desperate to make their priority. Although this may be hard to do when currently we have to pick the best of a bad bunch, we have to prove our vote is important before things will start to change.

The next issue then is how to get more people interested in politics. Unfortunately Russell Brand's utter disillusion with the state of democracy that he scathingly articulated in his Newsnight interview with Paxman was incredibly influential amongst young people in the wrong ways. Numerous Facebook friends shared the video of said interview (and I was amongst the guilty myself). Having someone already of interest to young people deliver their points so eloquently would convince almost anyone that they agree with him. Whilst this may have decreased apathy, the only offered alternative seemed to be full on revolution, something one only needs to look to Kiev and Venezuela to see the downsides of. As truthful as many of his points are, it is idealistic to suggest that things can be changed in such a drastic way. As previously stated, this is the system we live in and our best option, realistically, is to manipulate it to best cater to us.

What is necessary, then, is a similarly persuasive counter-argument to sway opinions the other way. Whilst the Bite the Ballot campaign set up by Michael Sani is a great initiative, its website cites NUS, ASDA and Ofsted as supporters. Whilst this backs up legitimacy, the opinion of the CEO of ASDA is not going something people will enthusiastically share and retweet. Heed could be taken from the successful Rock the Vote initiative in the United States which promotes the benefits of voting for young people using public service announcements featuring celebrities such as Sarah Jessica Parker and Robert Downey Jr., on television channels with a strong youth demographic audience, including MTV and The CW.

On a more local level, the current interest across campus in the YUSU elections proves that young people will be interested in democracy if you almost literally shove it into their face. I have overheard many conversations in recent days about manifestos themselves that suggest interest is not entirely based on simply who you know. This proves that if people can see how politics will directly affect them and a

perception is created that, for want of a better word, it is fashionable to vote, people will.



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