

#GenerationVote

A guide to voter registration

In the run up to General Election 2015 students' unions across the UK took part in #GenerationVote, undertaking a fantastic range of effective and creative registration drives. With the full transition to IER fast-forwarded to 1st December 2015, we have a short period of time to revive that spirit in the face of another threat to students missing out on proper representation.

What is Generation Vote?

Generation Vote was created as a challenge to student opinion being repeatedly overlooked by party policy in favour of tailoring manifestos to groups better represented on the electoral roll.

The low registration rates of 18-24 year olds (44% in 2010), international students and other groups have for too long been used as an excuse for ignoring their opinions and cutting budgets for services that matter to them.

On top of this, the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration very shortly before May 2015 meant the likelihood that many students might not realise that they needed to re-register, or that other household members would be unable to do it for them.

Students' Unions across the UK really showcased their enthusiasm, creativity and effectiveness in their response to this as part of #GenerationVote.

Together we registered an estimated 100,000 students, strengthened local relationships and showcased a nuanced, engaged and powerful student voice through fantastic local and national media coverage. This alongside giant foam hands, piles of pizza and the occasional llama amounts to success of which we should all be proud.

However, the momentum of Generation Vote needs to continue.

With the government fast forwarding its full IER transition to December 1st, we are now faced with an extremely short amount of time to prevent a mass drop-off of students from the electoral register. The subsequent proposed changes to constituency boundaries could mean drastically reduced representation and influence for students within their areas.

To help with inspiration for a response that suits you, we've compiled an updated Voter Registration Guide, full of examples and learning from the nationwide activity over the past year, with a focus on actions that should be quick and resource-light to organise.

Myth Busting

You have to be 18 to register to vote.

Nope - you can actually *register* from the age of 16 but need to be 18 to vote.

You can only vote once every four years

Wrong! Whilst the General Election was a huge focus in May, there are lots of other elections you can vote in. Upcoming elections in 2016 include Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish elections, local government elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, Mayoral elections, and the possibility of an EU referendum.

I can't vote because I wasn't born in the UK.

Not necessarily. If you are an EU or Commonwealth citizen can register to vote. For a list of who can vote [here](#)

I have to register at home and I live somewhere else during term time.

You are within your right to register at both your home and term time address for certain elections. This doesn't always mean you can vote twice, but given the variety of elections taking place in 2016 it's highly likely that there will be something you want to get involved in. Regardless of this, having your name on the register both at home and at your term-time address can influence policy makers to pay attention to people like you.

My vote won't count anyway.

There are a lot of areas and constituencies in which students have the potential to be a powerful force over the next year. Before you even set foot in a polling station you can have a big impact on policy by campaigning to the candidates on the issues that matter to you whilst being registered to vote. But it's not just about that: it's about preventing us from being erased as a group when the IER database is updated, and subsequently having the equivalent of less representation for the number of us that there are.

If I register to vote my details will get passed on.

When you first register to vote, unless you've opted out your details will go onto two registers: an electoral register and an open register. With the open register, which includes all of your contact details including name and address, anyone can buy this off your local authority and use your details. If you want to avoid this then you can easily tick a box during the registration process to opt out or once you are registered ring up your local council and ask them to take you off.

I don't know my National Insurance number, so I can't register.

First, are you sure there's no way of finding out? If you work, or have worked, your NI number should appear on your payslips. Otherwise you can find it [here](#), or send alternative ID alongside your form with a note to say you don't know your NI number.

I don't have time to fill in a form and put it in the post.

You're in luck, if you live in England, Scotland or Wales then you can register online. Just go to <http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote> . If you can register online then do it! It's much quicker and easier!

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Jargon Buster

Data match

With the new register lots of people need to be moved over. Local councils have tried to do this by matching people's information against their records. Your council may refer to green, amber and red matches. This means that either the information of an individual matches the council records and they have moved over, or that there is no data and the council needs to do work to register communities. The deadline before non-matched data is deleted is December 1st 2015.

Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees the running of elections. The body regulates the amount of money that parties and individuals spend during the election. They are also responsible for the implementation of the Lobbying Act, a piece of legislation which regulates the campaigning work of charities and other organisations.

Electoral Register

The Electoral Register is the list of registered voters in a particular constituency or area. If you are not on the electoral register you are not eligible to vote.

ERO

ERO stands for Electoral Registration Officer, an appointed individual who is responsible for putting together and maintaining the electoral register

IER

IER stands for Individual Electoral Registration. This new system, which came into place in June 2014, means that everyone must register themselves to vote individually, rather than the old system where one 'head of household' would register everyone at a property. The transition to full IER was due to be completed in December 2016, however the government has fast-forwarded its plan by a year to December 2015. Anybody not registered to vote by 1 December 2015 will therefore be left off the new register and will not be eligible to vote in the May 2016 elections unless they register individually under the new system.

Local authority

A local authority is the administrative body in local government. The affairs of your local area are managed by your local authority. The local authority is your nearest town or city council. You may want to check what areas they cover to determine who to get in contact with about voter registration.

National Insurance (NI) Number

If you were born or live in the UK then before your 16th birthday you will have received your NI number. This number is used to administer national insurance contributions and as a form of identification. Under the new system of individual electoral registration your national insurance number is used in the validation process to get registered.

Open Register

When your registration to vote has gone through your information will be put on to the open register, which lists all 'electors' or residents within your local area that are registered. This open register can be sold on to businesses and charities which could result in you being contacted. To get your name off the register ring up your local authority, or tick the box to opt out whilst registering.

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Tick box enrolment

Tick box enrolment is a process that NUS advocates within institutions. At the start of the academic year your university or college will ask for your address and other details to confirm you have started the year. This is often so they can get your up to date contact details or to confirm your attendance with the student loan company. We are encouraging institutions to team up with their local authority to include a tick box that allows all data you share with your university or college with the council so they can register you to vote!

A Note on National Insurance Numbers

Following #GenerationVote campaigns earlier this year, a lot of unions identified student uncertainty around National Insurance Numbers as one of the biggest barriers to getting students on the register.

It can be frustrating to see students who might otherwise have registered on the spot be prevented from doing so because they don't know or don't have easy access to finding out what their NI number is.

Things that unions have found helpful with this include:

- Having a briefing sheet for any volunteers about how to find out what your national insurance number is, and ways to access it quickly (eg some people can access payslips through their phone).
- Noting emails of students who missed out because of their NI number to follow up with steps to help them either find it or send alternative ID.
- Adding notes onto paper forms explaining the lack of NI number
- Having stations to scan or photograph IDs to be sent in place of an NI number
- Specifically publicising the need to know your NI number as a major part of your voter registration campaign

Councils sending records before the deadline

Something to be aware of is that although 1st December is the date that local authorities have been given, some have started sending their records to the government ahead of time when it's more convenient for them.

This obviously makes it even harder for us to prevent students from dropping off and makes our registration efforts even more urgent.

If possible, it's worth contacting your Electoral Registration Office to check whether they plan to turn over details ahead of time.

Regardless, it's important to start registering students straight away, and ideally online to avoid the extra time that it takes local authorities to process registration forms.

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Face-to-face registration

In the run up to the General Election, a lot of SUs told us that simply getting out there and registering people on the spot was one of the best ways to get the job done.

Face-to-face registration was easy to inject a bit of creativity into and adapt to different situations, as well as having loads of potential to be student-led.

Hiring or using existing student staff can be a great help, but if that's not possible a few good places to look for volunteers are:

- students who are engaged in issues that could be affected by voting
- students from political societies (as long as they remain neutral whilst registering people!)
- students studying relevant subjects
- students who generally take part in a lot of union activity.

Dundee



Ahead of the General Election, Dundee University Students' Association recruited engaged students to carry out face-to-face registration as Election Champions.

They identified students registering other students as a major strength of the campaign, particularly where registration was taken into halls of residences and could be carried out in a relaxed environment.

Thinking through the most effective target areas ensured that time and resources were being directed effectively and the atmosphere amongst ECs and students was really positive.

Dundee also provided a briefing and packs of information about who could vote and how to access national insurance numbers, which helped Election Champions feel confidently informed about the process and address any barriers that cropped up.

"I think students speaking to other students made a difference. It made for a very non-aggressive target and in all honesty people were very friendly about the whole thing, probably because we were of a relatable age and situation. And our friendly faces went a long way!"

– Niall Christie, former Election Champion

Chester *"Our RTV ambassadors were from a range of backgrounds (new Sabb elects, women's sports and even international students) so were highly representative of the student population. Their charisma and passion enabled us to engage lots of students from across the different parts of the University."*

Lancaster *"Our liberation officers were involved in the campaign and we ensured that all of our activities were accessible and welcoming to all students. We also had a diverse range of students and officers who volunteered as part of the campaign. There was a focus on engaging underrepresented groups and this was achieved through ensuring our volunteer base was diverse so we could reach out to all student communities".*

Bradford *"Students who volunteered really enjoyed the process more than expected; even the paid ambassadors had a good time. Once we explained to the students the value of what they were doing, they really took to it."*

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Who

SU Officers and staff, student staff, engaged students, course or hall reps

What

Stalls and old-school approaching people!

Online registration makes it easy to register students quickly with tablets and laptops, and doesn't need additional processing time from your council. However, paper forms can still be useful if your resources for online registration don't match the number of volunteers you have and can be easily counted before you send them off.

Think about what's likely to make students interested in talking to you. Will they be alarmed at the possibility of unknowingly falling off the register?

When

If you use paper forms, get them in a week before your deadline so that they have enough time to be processed.

If your Officers already schedule weekly time to talk to students, you can build in registration really easily.

Student course, community or hall reps and society leaders can all use their reach in specific areas to build registration into their networks.

Where

You know your campus, institution and students best. What are the busy times in different areas?

Social/eating areas and cafes are often good, especially if you want to talk people through things easily.

Sport and gym areas that get busy at particular times or on particular days can also be handy.

Halls and residential areas with high student populations are good to target, as are students waiting for and leaving lectures.

Why

Approaching people is a good way to get registrations done quickly, and to assess the feeling amongst your students to inform other sides to the campaign.

It can also be organised cheaply, at short notice and carefully targeted.

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Registration Stations

A fantastic way to make registration both easy and a visible issue is to have standout 'registration stations' on your campus. Ahead of the General Election, some SUs made #GenerationVote into a campus landmark with eye-catching or quirky attractions so that the need to register could be widely recognised and help with registration was easily accessible.

The important advantages to this are that everyone knows registration is an issue, and everyone knows where they can go.

Birmingham Guild

Birmingham used registration stations in two ways.

Firstly, their use of Big Red Buses – one for a student residential area and one for halls – were visually striking and let students know that registration was a big event.

A place that they could go to register was well-known, with the buses also appearing on campus for students to use.

At the same time, the Guild had a permanent screen available in their reception area for students to register at their convenience.

The combination of the two meant that they could actively and strikingly draw students in to register whilst having a very accessible area for students to use when it suited them.

"The bus was very popular and made for a striking image and statement outside the Guild".

"We created a bespoke 'Registration Hub' which allowed students to quickly register online – this enabled students an opportunity to quickly and easily register at reception."

Cumbria *"We had satellite stations where students could come along and sign a physical form and hand it in to UCSU offices - this was a very popular method and we submitted over 500 completed physical applications to the local electoral offices at the end of the week."*

UEA

"A great strength of UEA is the central square, which gives an excellent focal point for students to gather. On a pleasant day, this provides an excellent opportunity to meet lots of students... we used our pedal-powered smoothie bikes to run a stall giving out smoothies in the square, which brought us into contact with hundreds of students."

Who SU officers and staff, student volunteers and staff, innovative and creative societies

When You could make a registration hub into an ongoing fixture on campus, or pick a day to really cause a stir. If you're setting up a handy online hub, they'll be great for emphasising an upcoming deadline. Paper forms, on the other hand, will need to be sent to your local authority with enough time for processing.

Where SU receptions, libraries and busy indoor areas are good for easily accessible online hubs. Being indoors is also often preferable to students around the winter months! For a big landmark though, well-known and well-loved campus areas are great – especially if there's a famous icon that you can utilise for registration purposes!

Why Hubs are good for making key registration periods feel like a real campus event. Everyone knows where to go to register, and to get help with anything they're unsure about.

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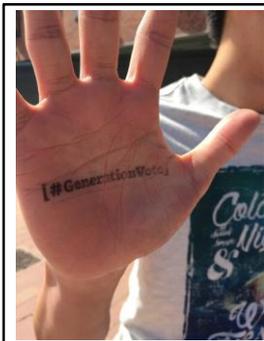
Attract a crowd

To bring in large groups of students who may not be caught by other activity, lure them with fun events, treats or discounts and then target crowds and queues.

For #GenerationVote ahead of the General Election, a lot of SUs used funding for fun occasions and giveaways which would attract groups of students who they could then register.

Students across the UK had funfairs, ice cream vans, hog roasts and many a pizza party at their disposal.

However, to attract groups of people doesn't have to be so high budget at short notice. Discounts and vouchers to existing SU offers and events can be an easy incentive without too much admin.



Chester used the attraction of ice cream vans to get a lot of students into one place where they could start conversations about voter registration and get lots of people signed up. The positive atmosphere made the act of registration seem less of a chore and more of a celebration.

"Ice creams were not offered as an incentive but were open to all staff and students. This created a great vibe, encouraged students to venture outside and enabled us to capture many of them to engage them in the RTV campaign."

FXU *"Registering/Bringing proof of registering to FXU gained you a wristband, which gave you 10% off selected food in the Stannary on that day."*

Manchester *"We discussed getting something BIG and attention grabbing on campus to focus energy around registering to vote. We rented a helter skelter, and arranged with the University to have it in the most prominent location on campus. We then had student volunteers and staff of the SU registering students and telling them about the elections outside the helter skelter."*

Who SU Officers and staff, student and society volunteers, cafes, shops and campus venues where registration deals could be negotiated or events could take place.

When Is there something coming up that students are already excited about that you could build registration into?

Otherwise pick busy times or times when you know there might be particular things that would attract students.

In the colder months, this might change from ice cream to warming refreshments or from summer amusements to an autumnal or winter fair.

Where Popular spots and places that can comfortably accommodate the crowds you want.

Why During pre-May #GenerationVote activity, unions often identified and designed events to draw in students who may not have been caught by other registration activity going on.

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Competitions and prizes

Whether between different local SUs, societies or individual students, some healthy competitive spirit can be the perfect way to get more students helping out with registration.

Some SUs found the competition between societies particularly fierce when offered resources as incentives. Others made use of existing rivalries and varsities between institutions.

Oxford Brookes used an upcoming event that students were already excited about to kick off their societies' competitive spirit. This meant that voter registration activity fit neatly into existing student and SU plans.

"We set up a competition for societies to compete to see which society could register the most students to join. This was very successful, and led to the Union increasing society membership as well as registering students to vote. The prize for the students who encouraged the most sign-ups was free tickets to the end-of-year society dinner."

Cambridge

"CUSU liaised with the 58 student committees in colleges and, using data obtained from our local authority, used a 'voter registration' league table to incentivise local campaigns. This was largely successful, with many committees organising door-knocking campaigns with local volunteers."

Who

Societies, sports clubs, academic departments and other groups on campus

When

Make use of existing upcoming competitions or rivalries or theme new ones around topical or seasonal events.

Where

Depends! You could set a specific time and place for people to compete for registration numbers, or just let them use their imagination.

Alternative ways to do it might be competing to provide the most volunteers, do the most lecture shout outs or craft the best registration-related resource to be used in the campaign.

Why

Competitions within existing contexts can help students have a sense of ownership over taking part.

Prizes can also often be relatively cheap compared to other ways of carrying out registration campaigns.

If you frame it in a way that resonates with or incentivises students, registration contests can tap into competitive enthusiasm and quickly reach a lot of people that you might otherwise struggle to register.

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Workshops & Debates

Workshops which inform about and discuss changes to voter registration can increase understanding, engagement and gain you volunteers.

Debates work really well to capture student interest in a specific issue and contextualise voter registration around it. They're also easy to scale up or down according to your needs.

Going into the fast-forwarding of IER and threat of boundary changes in depth may help with recruiting volunteers, and generally widen understanding around the current need to keep students on the register.

Alternatively, using a local or national issue that could get students fired up to use their voice in 2016 would emphasise the need to get registered before the full IER transition.



Derby College ran tutorial sessions about voting and voter registration, informing students of their ability to register to vote before reaching voting age and discussing the current issues affecting young voters.

Incorporating registration into a learning context worked really well for them as an FE union and enabled them to reach a lot of students quickly and effectively,

"We produced tutorial resource packs to be run during tutorial sessions across the college... we worked well with three personal coaches to pull together a pack that was universal and suitable for all levels of learners".

Lancaster and Cumbria co-hosted a highly successful Question Time event which promoted the marginal nature of their constituency seat and encouraged students to think about the potential impact of students turning out to vote.

"The campaign through its very nature emphasized the marginal nature of the Lancaster & Fleetwood Parliamentary Constituency ... The event was a great success with a variety of questions being asked of the candidates on a range of topics. We also recorded the event so students could watch it in their own time to hear what their candidates had to say to win over their votes... it encouraged students to think about the election more widely and the potential impact their individual vote could have on the national outcome."

Landrillo Menai *"Tutorial packs were sent out across the grwp and were delivered wherever possible... We were delighted with the number of learners who engaged in the activities. Many of them had limited understanding of the democratic process. The majority of students we engaged with were not aware that they could register to vote at 16 and 17"*

Plymouth *"We held 3 general election debates. 2 with the PPC's and one with an all student panel. These generated large amounts of interest, which surprised some people as they saw & generalised students as apathetic."*

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Who

SU Officers and staff, engaged students, student societies – especially political societies, relevant academic staff

When

Early if possible. Workshops and debates are both amazing to establish a context for the urgent need to get people on the register, but more registration activity probably needs to follow.

Try using them to recruit registration volunteers!

Why

Workshops and talks are good for making sure the issues around IER are understood, as a lot of students have no idea that the changes exist, let alone how seriously it could affect them!

Debates almost act in the reverse direction, demonstrating the importance of voter registration changes by beginning with a big issue.

If you're holding them as an open events, a major use of workshops and debates might be to give existing engaged students the push they need to get involved in registering less engaged parts of the population.

If you're feeling clever, both can also be a way to incorporate voter registration into other priority campaigns that your union is already working on this year.

Keep in touch – let us know how you are getting on with your voter registration drives! campaigns@nus.org.uk

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