A Generation Together?

What do millennials want from Brexit?
About Brexit Watch

Brexit Watch is a project aiming to build bridges between policy makers and young people around the politics and process of leaving the EU. Through the project we monitor public debate and key policy announcements on Brexit, scrutinise these according to young people’s values and priorities, and identify opportunities for young people to influence the decision making process on Brexit.

See more online at www.covi.org.uk/brexit-watch/
Foreword

Usually, at the start of a report like this, we’d ask a politician or a leading expert on Brexit to write few words. They’d say a couple of paragraphs about the need for younger generations to be active and involved in political decisions, and probably something about the importance of ensuring the ongoing Brexit negotiations stand the test of time so that younger generations can support the terms of the UK’s future relationship with the EU. Perhaps they’d emphasise that Brexit must be a compromise between different interests and that politicians need to work together across partisan divide to make this compromise happen.

None of this is wrong. But rather than have the view from the politicians preface this report, we want to crowdsourcing the views of younger citizens around the UK – because Brexit represents the most important political, constitutional and economic shift in our lifetimes and everyone should be involved in leading that discussion.

Contribute to our ‘living foreword’ at:
ww.covi.org.uk/brexit-watch
Author’s note
Caroline Macfarland, co-author

“WTF?! Those massive %&!!*s! Why would we %*&^^ing want to %&^@* ourselves? What a %&*!ing embarrassment – the rest of the world must think we’re absolute &!!%-ers.” Like many other millennials, that was my response when I woke up the day after the EU referendum, repeated like a mantra for the rest of the day and regularly over the next few weeks whenever I saw friends and colleagues (and sometimes muttered randomly at strangers in the street too).

But as the initial shock/ disappointment/ incredulity wore off, I started trying to pick out the silver lining in the Brexit-shaped cloud. And here’s where I got to: Brexit could be a generational opportunity for a game-shift in British politics. Surely, given that it was the most profound political shift in a generation and that it could take at least a decade to implement, the Brexit ‘project’ would inevitably need to look to the long-term first and represent the views of younger generations. The process too, would need to be based on the goal of re-uniting what was seen as a starkly divided country. The vote had been a decision between the status quo and the ‘unknown’, not a democratic mandate for a particular type of Brexit or set of negotiating priorities with the EU, so there would be countless opportunities to have a say in the changes that will come. We
also had a country that was sick and tired of negative, fear-driven political campaigning, and political elites that were knocked for six by a result they didn’t predict. And a younger generation that had just experienced the political version of the ice-bucket challenge: a sharp shock and a sudden call to action to get involved with politics or face the consequences. So perhaps, things could only get better? And perhaps, this could pave the way for a breath of fresh air into political debate, new forms of public diplomacy, and inclusive, positive conversations about what we wanted to achieve together as a country.

Unfortunately it seems that I was overly optimistic about some of the opportunities which the politics and process of Brexit could provide. British political debate has continued to be based on very binary defining lines, with many individuals and organisations still identifying as ‘Remainers’ and ‘Leavers’ rather than articulating shared aspirations for the Britain that they want to live in. The debate on Brexit is still monopolised by politicians, economists and academics – with no concerted effort by the government to broker a more inclusive political dialogue and respond to public interest with accessible factual information. Not a day has gone by in the last two years without Brexit making the headlines – but the news stories continue to cover personality politics and ‘power battles’ amongst politicians, rather than solid analysis of the negotiations and how this might affect our everyday lives. All this has led to what is commonly known as ‘Brexit fatigue’ amongst people of all ages, even those who would usually take an interest in current affairs.

Younger generations remained concerned about Brexit. However, the language, mechanisms and tone of the prevailing debate are not conducive to deliberative engagement and there is very little by way of specific, tailored materials that aim to increase political and economic literacy and meaningful participation.

The effects of an inaccessible debate are particularly off-putting for millennials who in all other walks of life can find easily accessible and relevant information – whether that’s the calories in our avocados, the effects of meat consumption on the environment, or the ways we can exert influence on the tax paid by our coffee shops, as well as a range of less clichéd examples.

There’s no denying these are complex issues, and the pace at which the developments in Brussels and in Parliament are happening mean that even the experts struggle to keep up, let alone translate what’s going on for the rest of us. One of the main reasons why there is such a lack of accessible knowledge and information available to the public is because of the uncertainty associated with Brexit – even those directly involved in the negotiations and decisions do not yet know what will be agreed.

BUT, there’s still time to step up and make the most of the opportunities to reshape political dialogue on Brexit. This report’s publication comes just two weeks’ after the UK Government outlined its negotiation objectives at the Chequers summit and subsequently published the latest White Paper on Brexit, the most detailed official account of the sort of relationship the UK could have with the EU after leaving.

Until now, speculation and uncertainty have been the main fuel for the public debate on Brexit. With just months to go until the terms of the UK/ EU deal are put to the European Parliament and the UK Parliament, now is the time for the debate to shift from vague assumptions about what Brexit may entail, to focusing on what the Government’s plan will mean practically for the lives and prospects of citizens, not least younger generations.
This is not simply an exercise in communication, but reconciliation. It is a vital part of rebuilding trust in a system in which so many segments of the population, for a series of different reasons, are disappointed. And there's still time to think about what we need to do in order to ensure that instead of rolling our eyes every time the word ‘Brexit’ is mentioned, we all play our part in participating in and scrutinising the decision-making process.

We need policymakers to be starting conversations, rather than second-guessing the answers. Without interactive public dialogue – perhaps in the form of a government consultation, or citizen’s juries, or maybe even something a bit wacky like Brexit picnics across the country – there will always be people who feel that the end result is beyond their control, and therefore much weaker legitimacy of the Brexit process and outcomes, whatever they may be.

However, the onus to do this does not just lie with the politicians. There are a number of campaigns which call for politicians to ‘listen’ to young people, but which fail to inform and educate policymakers about young people’s views and priorities in rigorous and analytical terms. Without proactive ideas presented in policy terms, what do politicians have to listen to? Civil society organisations and campaigning groups have a responsibility to shift the dial away from divisive, binary debates and towards a better understanding of young people’s concerns and how they could be addressed by specific policies in creative and aspirational ways.

This report aims to encourage that understanding of what millennials – and those even younger – want from the UK’s future relationship with the EU and the rest of the world. We hope to provide a resource that will help policymakers think about how Brexit could capture the interests of younger generations, and something which will also help young people understand the issues that are at stake. It is only through a more practical understanding of Brexit, coupled with interactive public dialogue, that we might restore public confidence in the decisions that are being negotiated and agreed on our behalves.
Politicians could agree and communicate common principles for managing the Brexit process, focusing on transparency, consultation and consensus. Trust and confidence in politics would be vastly improved if people believed that Government was being as transparent as is reasonably possible, listening to a range of diverse views and seeking to represent a broad constituency base – rather than resisting Parliamentary scrutiny and arguing that Ministers alone have the authority to act on the nation’s behalf.

- Nick Yandle

Too often do governments assume they know what’s best for the young people in our society, and it’s this ‘one size fits all’ approach that only further disillusions those losing faith in our modern political system.

- Connor Tomlinson
The short version...

As the UK negotiates its exit from the European Union, a key consideration, for both the current and future governments, is the lived experiences of younger generations living in the UK in a post-Brexit world, and their needs and priorities.

This report does not seek to claim that these experiences and priorities are more important than people of other age groups. However, the political and media debates often focus attention on the ‘intergenerational divide’, rather than understanding the clear coherence within the millennial generation on what they want to see in Brexit Britain.

Although youth charities and various campaigning groups have called for younger people to ‘have a voice’ in the Brexit debate, it is often unclear what this voice is saying in policy terms. The views of young people are sometimes seen as shorthand for anti-Brexit campaigns, or otherwise the main focus seems to be the levels of political literacy amongst young people.

We therefore want to provide a comprehensive and comparative picture of the attitudes and priorities of young people and young adults as Britain negotiates its exit from the EU. We draw on a number of key themes and findings from nine major pieces of research published since the EU referendum, including seven studies that are independent of Common Vision’s own work. A number of complementary themes emerge such as:

1. **Young people are well-informed and want to play their part.** Young people have a strong understanding of the complexities Brexit and its potential implications, and want their perspectives to be reflected in the Brexit negotiations.

2. **The importance of a strong economy for jobs and living circumstances.** Across the research young people and young adults identified concerns relating to needs that interface with a strong economy; young people felt that decent jobs and affordable housing were important priorities for Brexit Britain.

3. **A strong commitment to an internationalist outlook.** The majority of young people are positive about the effects of globalisation on their own lives and support collaboration with other countries.

4. **Freedom to travel, work and study abroad.** Young people are concerned at losing freedom of movement rights and opportunities and want Brexit negotiations to preserve EU membership benefits, including the ability to work and study abroad, and the Erasmus exchange programme.

5. **Immigration produces mixed opinion, but is a lower concern overall than for older age groups.** Young people are less concerned about immigration than the UK population as a whole. Underlying economic concerns mean that for some young people immigration is a cause of poor job prospects. While for others, immigration is an important part of freedom of movement and brings positive benefits to the UK.

New studies also drill deeper into the reasons behind voting and how attitudes have evolved since the referendum. They show
that it is not enough to equate the millennial vote to remain with ‘cosmopolitan’ values. Younger people are pragmatic when weighing up the benefits of EU membership, perhaps more so than was previously appreciated. 18-34 year olds were much more likely to say that the impact on them personally would be a motivating factor in their vote – at 33% compared to 24% for 35-54 year olds and just 16% for 55+ year olds. Millennials appreciate the EU for facilitating jobs and trade, and providing opportunities for migration for work and education purposes. There are clear opportunities for Brexit Britain to reflect these priorities.

In Chapter two we explore how the public debate on Brexit has impacted younger people’s participation in politics, and trust in political institutions and elected representatives. Numerous media reports, academic studies, and informal consultations have noted the sentiments of disappointment and frustration which younger people felt about the referendum result, which many interpreted as being disproportionately swayed by older generations. There were also a number of ‘logistical failures’ in the referendum, not least that that young people who were 16 and 17 at the time of the referendum were unable to vote on a long-term political project which would generate economic and social impact for decades to come.

The aftermath of the referendum and ensuing political debates on Brexit have been shadowed with uncertainty over the legitimate process in which to exit the EU, not to mention the different interpretations of why people voted in the way they did and what should happen next. We ask how this has affected younger people’s ongoing interest in the Brexit process, and attitudes towards politics in general. Various studies have found that post-referendum, many young people feel a sense of political powerless and negativity about the future. Trust in political establishments and politicians remains low. It seems the failings of the referendum campaign have not resulted in different approaches to political discourse or public engagement and young people continue to be confused, uninspired and frustrated with the tone of media reports and the information cited by politicians. When Common Vision conducted a number of workshops for young people across the UK last year, we heard multiple times that unhelpful phrases such as “Brexit means Brexit”, “the best deal for Britain”, or “no deal is better than a bad deal” do not help engage people or increase understanding of the process.

Yet, this does not mean that young people are not interested Brexit. Many of the studies found that they want to be consulted throughout the Brexit process. Government and other policymakers have an opportunity to step up to this challenge. We reiterate our previous suggestions for an open and deliberative public consultation to rebuild trust and legitimacy in the decision making process.

We urge to politicians and media to transition from political rhetoric and discussing personality politics, to sharing practical information about how Brexit will affect our everyday lives. Chapter three aims to kick start this conversation. We recap on the priorities set out in the Government’s July 2018 White Paper on the UK’s future relationship with the EU, and compare this with the research on younger generations’ perspectives and priorities on issues including job prospects, the ability to travel, work and study abroad, the environment, and funding for public services. Other issues such as immigration figures and national sovereignty are of lower importance to younger generations than to older people, and so we also indicate how the negotiations around these issues can account for trends and attitudes over the long-term.
We hope this report helps policymakers who wish to represent younger generations in the Brexit negotiations understand the spectrum of interests and the common perspectives which young people share. We also hope it provides useful information for young people who want to engage with the public debate. Of course, much more work needs to be done to restore confidence in the decisions that are being negotiated by the UK Government, and agreed by the UK Parliament, on the behalf of all people in the UK. This report is intended to help that dialogue and we invite comments, suggestions and policy ideas from millennials around the UK in response.

Clarity, transparency and honesty. Those three words are what every UK citizen needs from our government. Clarity in understanding how the EU Treaties operate and full knowledge in knowing that the UK cannot demand from the EU what it is not entitled to. Transparency in engaging with Parliament and the British public as to what the UK is asking from the European Union and honesty as to the realistic expectations we should approach the negotiating table with.

- Tumi Atalagbe

Democracy is a process that doesn’t just stop because of single referendum. The government will be making some of the most important decisions in recent history and negotiating with some of our most precious rights. The binary question that was put to us on 23rd June could not possibly capture the breadth and nuance of views of the British Public and we should not allow the government to use it as a blank cheque. It is part of democracy that we hold them to account.

- Jessica Sargeant
1. Introduction

It is now over two years since the EU referendum, an event which highlighted some key generational differences in public attitudes towards the EU. These differences, underpinned or compounded by other factors such as attitudes towards migration, identity and levels of education, were already the subject of commentary and speculation for a number of months leading up to and after the vote in June 2016.

Common Vision studied these attitudes from January to June 2016, which resulted in our July 2016 report, A Generation Apart: Were young people left behind by the EU referendum? We analysed the reasons behind these differences and made recommendations for the ensuing Brexit process. We were able to draw from various studies that millennials care more about global issues such as environmentalism, human rights and humanitarian aid. As a generation with no memory of a world before globalisation, and for whom multiculturalism, feminism, the gay rights movement and the green movement have been positive forces, millennials are less aligned with traditional notions of sovereignty, and more comfortable with migration – key issues for older voters and thus a key focus for the pro-Brexit campaigners. These we found, were some of the reasons for the generational differences in voting patterns which have since been debated at length.

A familiar rallying call now over-used by campaigners, academics
and politicians is the fact that younger generations “will have to live with the consequences of Brexit for longer than older people.” This in itself doesn’t mean much. By and large, younger people have always had to live with the future – however uncertain – for longer.

It is more notable that the propensity of millennials (and those even younger) to have favoured Remain is, we found in the 2016 report, the result of a series of cohort trends – that is, attitudes which are unlikely to change with age. This was a key issue behind the feeling that older voters was viewed to have disproportionate influence on the outcome.

Our 2016 report was, to our knowledge, the first published study after the referendum to examine the motivations behind the voting behaviour of younger people. At the time we noted the obvious caveat is that young people – of any definition - are not a homogenous group and there are of course differences within and between age cohorts.

Since then, a number of different studies have been published. Much of our earlier analysis is strongly supported by this research, but new layers of complexity are revealed, some highlighting the differences between millennials and the reasons for these. We have reviewed these studies in order to draw thematic insights about young people attitudes towards the Brexit process and political engagement in general, and perspectives towards key issues outlined in the Government’s negotiating priorities for the UK’s future relationship with the EU.

Methodology

Over the course of 2017 and early 2018 Common Vision ran a series of eight discursive events with young people aged 16-35 in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, London and Sheffield. These helped generate qualitative insights about the concerns and questions which participants voiced about leaving the EU. However, it is worth noting that we found these events tended to attract people with an existing interest in Brexit. Indeed, at our MILLENNIFEST events in 2018 a number of young people actively chose not to partake in the Brexit discussions. Many young people are, for the most part disinterested, in the decision to leave the EU – possibly because the public debate doesn’t respond to their interests.

We also conducted public polling, carried out by Opinium Research. These used a sample of UK adults from different age groups (weighted to reflect a nationally representative audience) in order to compare the differences between generations in their answers.

In addition to our own research, we conducted a desk review of other studies, specifically focusing on seven external pieces of research carried out with young people and young adults since the EU referendum. We triangulate and provide an overview of the key themes across the research from youth organisations Undivided, Shout Out UK, British Youth Council, UCL, the Intergenerational Foundation, a partnership between the British Council and Demos, and a partnership between LSE, campaigning organisation My Life My Say, and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for a Better Brexit for Young People. The Brexit Watch Sparknotes section at the end of this report provides a summary of key themes from each study.
It is worth noting that all these studies involved slightly different age groups, some drawing on insights from young people aged 11 onwards. Common Vision defines millennials as the age cohort born between 1981 and 2000, currently aged between 18 and 37. Other sources may use other definitions, for example the Pew Research Centre in the United States recently revised its definition of millennials to refer to people born between 1981 and 1996. ‘Young people’ is a separate term, often used to describe people under the age of 30, whilst polling tends to use segmentations of people currently 18 to 24, and 25 to 35. Although there is no exact science to generational analysis, it usually stands to reason that attitudes held by one generation or age cohort are most closely reflected by the nearest other age cohorts. This is why we have used studies that involved people between the ages of 18 and 37 but which may have reached beyond this specific age group. Where we are referring to a specific age range we will make that clear.

2. Responses to Brexit

Let’s scroll back to that fateful week in June 2016. One of the hottest media topics the day after the referendum centred on data showing that despite the overall vote to leave the EU, the majority of younger voters had voted against this decision.

According to a study¹ published by Ashcroft polls, 73% of 18-24 year-olds and 62% of 25-34 year olds voted Remain. Whereas a majority of those aged over 45 voted Leave, rising to 60% of those aged 65 or over. Our own figures from polling conducted after the referendum, put the percentage shares for Remain at 73% for 18-24 year olds and 59% for 25-34 year olds.

Numerous media reports, academic studies, and informal consultations have noted the sentiments of disappointment and frustration which younger people felt about the referendum result. This is not simply because a majority voted against the decision to leave. The feeling that older voters had a disproportionate influence on an outcome that would influence the long-term futures of younger generations came against a backdrop of heightened media and public interest in the circumstances and experiences of millennials, often cited as the first generation who are economically
‘worse off’ than their parents at the same age.

Another major criticism from young people is that those aged 16 and 17 at the time of the referendum were unable to vote. While this reflected the same rules as General Elections, many felt that as leaving the EU is a long-term political project which would generate economic and social impact for decades to come, it should have been a decision in which younger citizens should also participate.

Many people of all political persuasions have criticised the way in which the referendum was constructed and the uncertainty that has ensued over the legitimate process in which to exit the EU, not to mention the definition of the ‘will of the people’ in voting to leave.

But of course, this story did not start – or end – on the 23rd of June 2016. It is clear that two of the major points of contention that have arisen since the referendum could have been avoided by a more thorough process in advance.

The first is whether the referendum was ‘binding’ and what the process would be to implement the result. It is the lack of clarity around process that led to the court case that eventually was taken to the UK Supreme Court, in which Gina Miller and Dos Santos contested the Government’s right to start the Brexit process without formal agreement from Parliament.

How did the referendum happen in the first place? The Conservative manifesto of 2015 had contained a commitment to holding a referendum, which the new Conservative Government pursued after its election. In December 2015 Parliament passed the act to hold a referendum, with MPs having voted in favour of the decision by 544 to 53 votes, with only the Scottish National Party opposing it. The legislation required a referendum to be held before the end of 2017, but did not contain a requirement for the UK Government to implement its results, or set a time limit for implementation. Unlike the 2011 referendum on an Alternative Voting system, it was a consultative referendum that would not automatically lead to new legislation. The same act also defined the referendum question itself, and stipulated that there would be a ten-week official campaigning period.

Many Parliamentarians, political pundits and other commentators did not expect the result of the vote, but this does not excuse the fact that the process itself was not constructed or implemented in a way that would be most conducive to public engagement in the campaigns, or point towards a specific direction of travel in the scenario where the UK voted to leave.

The Electoral Reform Society has called for more thorough scrutiny of any parliamentary Bill introducing a referendum, lasting at least three months, and recommended that this also involve a wider citizens’ consultation. They have also advocated a minimum of a six-month regulated campaign period to allow for more deliberation and better communication of the issues.2

This brings us to the second major failure of the referendum process: The nature of the campaigns and communication of the information.

Whilst it is fair to say that most people were thoroughly tired of the referendum debate after ten weeks, the short time frame meant that attention was focused on the antagonistic messages which achieved quick headlines, whilst alternative, often more positive initiatives were launched relatively late in the day and received far less media coverage. Just 16% of people said the public debate around the referendum was optimistic in tone. Our 2016 analysis of over 4,300 news headlines in the three months before the vote found
that 57% of online news headlines contained at least one negative word compared to just 26% containing at least one positive word. In the same headlines, the issues that mattered most to millennials were barely referenced compared to immigration and non-specific references to the economy. The campaigns also focused heavily on personality politics: David Cameron’s name was mentioned in headlines more frequently than jobs, healthcare, housing, pay and human rights combined. The referendum therefore was not clearly distinctive from the terms of a general election where political leadership is the main question.

On a similar note, a study by the LSE in association with My Life My Say notes that participants repeatedly mentioned that the content and tone of media coverage and political speeches during the campaigns eroded confidence and trust both in media and political parties.

The extent to which the campaigns would be ‘accountable’ for their claims has also been a major point of contention. The now infamous claim on the Brexit ‘battlebus’ that “We send the NHS £350 million a week – let’s fund our NHS instead!” has been contested as an example of Vote Leave ‘misleading’ voters. While nominally the UK does contribute £350 million to the EU, this figure does not take into account the rebate that was secured by the Thatcher government in 1985, neither does it account for the fact that much of this money returns to Britain, in the form of EU grants and spending projects, such as funding for science.

The Electoral Reform Society has recommended that in future, an official body – either the Electoral Commission or an appropriate alternative – should have the power to intervene when misleading claims are used by official campaigns to sway public choices.

What does all of this mean for younger generations faith in the Brexit process, and politics in general?

It was clear that the EU referendum result initially caused anger, disappointment and frustration amongst many young people. The LSE study found that a significant majority of young people in the study expressed “bemusement, anger, and resentment at the choice to leave the EU, which was made – in their view – primarily, though not exclusively, by older generations.” In over half the focus groups at least one respondent identified the shorter life span of older generations as the reason for their anger at the referendum, on the basis that they will live with the outcomes of Brexit longer than young people.

But given the downward trend in participation in elections over the last decade, was it also the ‘wake up call’ that younger people needed to engage with conventional politics? An increased turnout from young people in the general election of June 2017 would seem to suggest that this is the case.

However, the UCL study found that while there was a surge in turnout from younger people at the election, there was also a general sense of political powerless to reverse or influence the course of Brexit. Researchers inferred that this may end up reinforcing, rather than reversing, the disengagement of young people.

In 2016 Common Vision’s poll with Opinium asked voters for their motivations behind voting in general. Under 35s were much more likely to say they voted in order to have their voice heard, compared to over 35s who were more likely to say it is important to vote as the duty or responsibility of a citizen. This suggests that young people may be more easily deterred from political engagement if they feel
there is no chance of exercising influence over the result.

More generally, Brexit has provoked widespread uncertainty and a sense of hopelessness about the future of the UK for many young people. The British Council/Demos study found that 41% of young adults think that the decision is pulling people living in the UK further apart. Four in 10 respondents think the UK will have less influence in the world as a result, compared to one in five who said the opposite.

British Youth Council’s research with young ambassadors found that young people felt that the world around them is changing for the worse and that they are not well-equipped to deal with these changes. They referred particularly to increasing mental health issues, a rise in hate crimes and right-wing extremism, and a lack of opportunity for young people. Brexit was seen as a problem rather than an opportunity.

Meanwhile, trust in the political process and in politicians also remains low. When asked to score trust in political institutions in the British Council study, the average young adult scored local councils 4.7 out of 10, the UK parliament 4.1, and UK government 3.9. Just 37% of those surveyed believe that British politics today reflects the issues that matter to young people, with 54% thinking it does not.

One of the reasons for this ongoing distrust may be because the failings of the referendum campaign have not resulted in different approaches to political discourse or public engagement. In our direct consultations with young people we have heard that the public debate on Brexit has been limited and uninspiring, causing confusion and frustration amongst people who wish to understand political developments. The tone of reporting on Brexit is often negative and only serves to further polarise different views and perspectives. Unhelpful phrases such as “Brexit means Brexit”, “the best deal for Britain”, or “no deal is better than a bad deal” do not help engage people or increase understanding of the process, and as a number of facts and figures cited in the media have been contested or disproved, it is often hard to know what sources to trust for reliable information or how to separate fact and opinion.

Yet, this does not mean that young people are not interested in the Brexit process. Contrary to some myths in public perception, young people have a strong understanding of Brexit and its potential implications, and want their views to be reflected in the Brexit negotiations.

In depth focus groups and interviews conducted as part of the LSE/MLMS research found that young people in the study demonstrated a “critical understanding of the questions at the heart of the Brexit outcome and aftermath, often referencing their knowledge of and opinions about specific aspects of EU membership that effected them as citizens.” The research found that although young people in the study were distrustful of existing political and media institutions, most remained committed to the civic sphere.

Undivided’s movement of 13-29-year olds in 2017 highlights the level of engagement in Brexit discourse. The movement’s Youth Manifesto reached 4.4 million online participants, and resulted in over a quarter of a million votes and thousands of policy ‘demands’. 9,000 young people submitted demands or voted (offline or online), while 3,555 young people attended events (including 1,643 young people in schools). The action research made a key recommendation for “ongoing consultation with UK 13-29-year-olds throughout all Brexit negotiations”, with “an official and regular channel for experienced, strategic and representative young advisors to inform
policy and long-range planning both within the negotiations and in the wake of Brexit.”

It is clear that young people want to be actively consulted throughout the process of leaving the EU. In the aftermath of the referendum and the 2017 election Common Vision called for the Government to hold an extended public consultation process on the sort of deal and negotiating process that people of all backgrounds, ages and political stripes would like to see. We recommended that to account for the political behaviours of younger people, the process should be conducted online, for an extended period, and seek to encourage deliberative rather than binary decision making. An example of precedent here is the 2012 public consultation on same sex marriage, which solicited 228,000 responses and 19 petitions over 13 weeks.

Despite campaigners from a range of factions suggesting otherwise, the 2016 referendum asked voters for a decision on whether or not to remain a member of the EU, not the explicit nature of how and in what manner we should leave. In theory at least, this allows for opportunities to shape a genuinely constructive, consultative Brexit, drawing on the lessons that no vote can ever really uncover the complexities of opinion and circumstance across the country nor provide a public mandate for a future Brexit deal.

Could this be happen via a second referendum? Although the final UK/ EU deal will be put to UK Parliamentarians in the autumn to approve, there is a growing campaign for a ‘People’s Vote’ which “seeks to ensure that the government’s Brexit deal is put before the country in a public vote so that we can decide if a decision that will affect our lives for generations makes the country better or worse off.” Polling would show that younger generations are more likely to support a public vote on the terms of the future UK/ EU relationship that older people. However, our anecdotal insights from events with millennials around the country suggest that many, especially outside of London, are wary of a second referendum. This mainly because of the experiences in 2016 of adversarial, negative public debate, and the uncertainty around what would happen if the public does vote against the proposed deal with the EU. It is likely that another referendum which does not delay the timescales set out by the UK Government and the EU would have to be undertaken in a similarly short timeframe as the last one, and given other polling has showed that many pro-Remain and pro-Leave voters have become more entrenched in their views, it may inevitably be as polarised and divisive a debate as before.

Regardless of whether there is another public vote or not, now that the Government has outlined a detailed plan for the future relationship with the EU, we are hopeful that there may still be opportunities for a formal consultation process with younger people and the electorate more generally, as a first start to rebuilding trust in the political process as a result. We would hope that this would be led by the department for Exiting the EU or the Cabinet Office.

*A GENERATION TOGETHER? WHAT DO MILLENNIALS WANT FROM BREXIT?

Source: Guardian/ ICM poll, January 2018
Regardless of whether there is another public vote or not, now that the Government has outlined a detailed plan for the future relationship with the EU, we are hopeful that there may still be opportunities for a formal consultation process with younger people and the electorate more generally, as a first start to rebuilding trust in the political process as a result. We would hope that this would be led by the Department for Exiting the EU or the Cabinet Office. Although MPs are already engaging with constituents on Brexit, there may also be an opportunity for a structured commitment from all MPs to hold a tailored series of Brexit surgeries in their constituencies in the run up to the Parliamentary vote.
Two years on: What do millennials think now?

From the studies we have reviewed, and through our own qualitative conversations, the current sentiments held by millennials towards Brexit can be summarised as follows:

Restless ‘Remoaners’

(We mean it in a nice way!) Continue to be angry and frustrated by the referendum result, because of a strong personal European affiliation, alongside the belief that the economic consequences of leaving the EU will impact on their lives and prospects. Are actively involved in campaigns and pressure groups for a soft Brexit or a ‘People’s Vote’ on the final deal with the EU. This group are more concentrated in London and Scotland.

Loud Leavers

Voted to leave in the referendum for three main reasons: Out of support for a ‘global Britain’ that trades with non-EU countries, or because they feel negatively affected by immigration, or because they see the EU as undemocratic and would like to see laws made by the UK Parliament. Their views may be influenced by family members over peers.*

Bregretful Brexiteers

Voted to Leave but has since changed their mind because of the campaign’s disputed facts, or a belief that the economic consequences of Brexit will negatively affect their lives. They may be Labour voters, and could have also been influenced by the strong opinions and judgement of their peers following the referendum.

Covert Converts

Voted to remain in the EU but have since adapted their views to (quietly) support some form of Brexit. This may be because of Brexit fatigue and the feeling “we should just get on with it”, or because they envisage further political upheaval if the UK were to reverse the decision to leave. According to YouGov polling data that were gathered shortly after the general election, 61% of Britons aged 18–24 now either support Brexit wholeheartedly or believe that the referendum result deserved to be respected even if they don’t personally support Brexit. One in five said they wanted a second referendum, a smaller proportion than in older age groups.5

Disinterested and disengaged

The vast majority of young people that we consulted expressed confusion and a sense of uncertainty about what to predict from Brexit, and who to trust for useful information. The UCL study found that young people who were disinterested in Brexit often had little interest in politics in general, lower educational qualifications, or expressed more immediate challenges in their lives, such as trying to find employment and housing, or deal with health problems. From Common Vision’s own experience, we found it challenging to engage with diverse groups of young people on the topic of Brexit. Most young people who attended our discussions were self-selecting and as such had strong views one way or another.

*The Intergenerational Foundation’s analysis found that one-third of millennial voters who favoured Leave were predominantly motivated by concern over immigration and a strong sense of British national identity. Shout Out UK’s research found that the few young people who are pro-Brexit are usually either deeply critical of freedom of movement/immigration, or see the European Union as an undemocratic, neoliberal institution that furthers the power of private capital.
3. Priorities for the negotiations

As discussed in the previous chapter, general uncertainty about the practical implications of Brexit and the potential terms of the deal with the EU, and the media focus on personality battles between Government Ministers has not led to a positive sense amongst younger people, of what Brexit will mean for their lives and prospects.

However, there is clear opportunity to begin to have a more informative public dialogue now that the UK Government has published its July 2018 White Paper on Brexit, the most comprehensive public communication to date of what our future economic and political relationship with the EU could look like.

In this chapter we look at some of the negotiating issues and seek to understand what the evidence about younger people’s preferences says about these, and how the Government should respond in its own priorities.

For a generation in which the majority voted against leaving, it is logical that millennials would prefer to retain strong ties with the EU. This was a preference noted in many of the studies we examined, including the work undertaken by the

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Already living in a debilitating state of financial vulnerability, it will be millennials who are hit hardest if the next Government fails to achieve extensive access to the European Single Market, and if we see the return of barriers to trade between the UK and Europe.

- Mark McGeoghegan

I am currently two months into a year spent studying in Seville, a sunny city in Southern Spain where the people are as warm as the climate. Every day I meet students from places as distinct as Hungary, France, and Finland. Five minutes of conversation and it becomes clear: these people are just like me! Yet, in the same moment, they are somehow unfathomably different. The richness of diversity is something I doubt I will ever fully appreciate. I am, however, conscious of the concrete benefits I continually reap… However Brexit plays out, we must remain vigilant against becoming entirely insular in our outlook, which I believe would be catastrophic for national prosperity, both economic and cultural.

- Abigail Smith
Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research (WISERD), who noted that three quarters of under-25s wanted to have a continued close relationship with the EU, either in the form of continued membership, associate membership or a close trading relationship.

But why is this? A lot of previous work, including our own 2016 report, has examined the reasons why young people were likely to prefer to remain in the EU on the basis of social attitudes and political identities. But what further studies have emphasised is that we must not underestimate the element of pragmatism which underpins young people’s preferences. The UCL study challenged the idea that young people’s attitudes towards Brexit were driven by ‘cosmopolitan’ ideals about international relationships, asserting that just as many of those who voted to remain did so because this was seen as having the least risk for negative impacts on their lives. The British Council/Demos study also cited the concerns raised about how Brexit would affect employment and education prospects and future plans.

Common Vision’s polling with Opinium found that young remain voters were more than four times as likely as older remainers to vote based on pragmatism and the impact on everyday lives (‘best for me or my family’). Whereas young leave voters are more likely to vote based on what is right or wrong, than if you are older. While the younger age cohorts are more socially liberal, even those millennials who are less committed to open and socially liberal policies voted remain because of the perceived economic consequences of Brexit.

Source: Opinium Research, Sept 2017, base: 2,009
While this prioritisation of personal lives and circumstances could be described as ‘self-interest’, we would interpret it as a pragmatic approach to Brexit. This reveals an opportunity for the way in which political leaders may be able to shape, and publicly communicate, Brexit developments in order to restore positivity amongst younger people.

The next section recaps on the Government’s stated negotiating priorities as outlined in the July 2018 White Paper on the UK’s future relationship with the EU. We explore what this means for the concerns, preferences and priorities of millennials.

Trading deals and job prospects

A strong narrative comes across from the studies we reviewed: young people see trade with the EU as crucial to their future job prospects. Many companies based in the UK have suppliers or customers in the EU, and the ease or difficulty with which a business can trade across borders affects its profitability and therefore the number of employees it hires and the salaries it pays. If tariffs or additional are applied to those cross-border transactions, or if delays are caused to the supply chain process, UK businesses would have to amend their operations.

The Government has split its proposal for a future trading relationship into goods and services in order to take into account that free-trade on services is tied into rules around the migration of people to perform those services.

A free trade area on goods is positive for jobs

On goods, the White Paper proposes a ‘facilitated customs arrangement’ with the EU which takes into account the fact the 48% of goods exported from the UK presently go to Europe, while our imports from the EU are worth more than the rest of the world combined.

“[T]he Government is proposing the establishment of a free trade area for goods. This free trade area would protect the uniquely integrated supply chains and ‘just-in-time’ processes that have developed across the UK and the EU over the last 40 years, and the jobs and livelihoods dependent on them, ensuring businesses on both sides can continue operating through their current value and supply chains. It would avoid the need for customs and regulatory
checks at the border, and mean that businesses would not need to complete costly customs declarations. And it would enable products to only undergo one set of approvals and authorisations in either market, before being sold in both.”

In line with millennial priorities, we welcome the idea that the proposed relationship would look similar to the single market in relation to goods. Shout Out UK’s research identified that young people are worried about the UK’s broader economic future post-Brexit, recommending that the UK should remain, as far as possible, in the European single market, and work hard to foster good economic and trade relations with Europe.

The principle of having no tariffs on imports from the EU to the UK, and vice versa, would help limit the damage to the current business relationships between UK businesses and the EU, and also reduce the risk of price increases for products originating from Europe – from food imports such as cheese and Prosecco, or things like machinery parts and construction materials. No checks on goods at the border would avoid the expenses of additional waiting times for businesses to conduct their operations.

The White Paper proposes a way of imposing tariffs called a “facilitated customs arrangement”, that would aim to “remove the need for customs checks and controls between the UK and the EU as if they were a combined customs territory, which would enable the UK to control its own tariffs for trade with the rest of the world and ensure businesses paid the right or no tariff”. In principle, this would mean that the UK collects its own tariffs on imported goods only intended for the UK. If imported goods are eventually intended to transit to the EU, the UK would collect EU tariffs at UK borders and send this money to the EU. The complexity of this scheme has already generated criticism from politicians and others.

Limited arrangement for services presents a threat to jobs in some service sectors and their supply chains

Another main point of criticism is the different treatment of services, on which the White Paper says the UK “would strike different arrangements”. This reason for this is because existing arrangements where both goods and services are exchanged freely, such as the examples of Norway and Iceland who are both members of the European Economic Area (EEA), mean that freedom of movement also exists (crudely, because people deliver services). The Government has shown preference for a deal that allows the UK to operate outside of these rules.

This proposal presents a threat to jobs. ONS figures show that in 2016 the UK exported £106 billion in services to the EU and the four European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. Beyond this potential threat to the existing customer base of businesses who directly provide services to EU countries, many companies rely on the interplays between goods and services, for example manufacturers who also provide maintenance or refurbishment services, or the service providers whose clients may trade in goods.

If avoiding freedom of movement is the key reason not to have a free trade area on services, then the majority of millennials would disagree with this 'trade off'. This can be inferred from our autumn 2017 polling conducted by Opinium, which found that millennials are more likely prefer to have ongoing close economic ties with the EU, seeing curbing immigration as a lower priority.
On the other hand, if we assume the White Paper’s proposals on trade may be accepted by the EU, there are two broad positives for millennials.

**Clarity for businesses and hiring plans**

Firstly, the proposals, to an extent, give clarity on negotiating priorities and help reduce the unpredictability about the future of the UK’s economic relations with the EU. When businesses can’t plan ahead, they often adopt a wait-and-see approach, and delay hiring for new roles or investing in new projects. This is true of international companies operating in the UK as well as British-owned businesses.

The uncertain economic climate since the EU can be seen to have affected recruitment, including graduate recruitment. The Highfliers study of graduate recruitment market has shown that before the referendum, the top graduate employers had planned to recruit over 22,000 new graduates in 2017, their biggest intake yet. But by January 2017, the uncertainty about the impact of Brexit meant that employers’ recruitment targets for 2017 had been reduced significantly, with employers in eight out of 13 key industries and employment areas hiring fewer graduates in 2017 than the year before.

This downward trend may be avoided in future by more clarity about what businesses can expect. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the sectors with the most graduate vacancies in 2018 all relate to the service industry (with the exception of the armed forces), with accounting and professional services, engineering, banking, investment banking and law all in the top eight. Under the proposed arrangements in the White Paper, financial services will have less access to EU markets than they do presently, through the loss of the pan-EU ‘passport’ to operate. It is as yet unclear whether services in general will be able to recoup the losses from EU trade through new international agreements, but even if this is the case, is will inevitably take time.

**Potential trade deals with other countries could lead to new employment opportunities**

The second area for optimism is that that the proposed trade agreement leaves room for other international trade deals beyond the EU. Younger generations are very much in favour of a global outlook for the UK – the British Council/ Demos study found that 67% of young adults say they have an international outlook and would like to seek new cultural and employment experiences both at home and abroad. 57% of those surveyed said they are positive about the effects of globalisation.

Research from the World Economic Forum pointed to the top demographic and socio-economic drivers that would affect the future of work as the rise of the middle class in emerging markets...
(by 2030 Asia is expected to account for 66% of the global middle-class consumption) and the growing trend in remote and flexible working.\textsuperscript{10} It may be that future trade deals can tap into this potential customer base for British firms further, as well as allowing the (online) service economy to have more favourable arrangements with other English-speaking countries. There needs to be careful consideration and analysis of whether these relationships would be more beneficial than the current access to EU markets.

**National sovereignty**

All EU member states have to follow the same standards and regulations in areas such as food safety and pharmaceuticals, as well as broader rules about trade within the EU and beyond it. One of the key narratives in the referendum was the idea that leaving the EU would be an act of ‘taking back control’ by the UK of the rules and laws that are currently made at an EU level. Of course, the UK as an EU member state has helped shape these laws, but it pools its national sovereignty with that of other countries in order to make collective decisions that affect all EU countries.

By leaving the EU, the UK will lose its place in the European Council, its representation at the European Commission and all of its 73 MEPs who currently sit in the European Parliament and vote on EU laws.

Another point of contention around sovereignty is the European Court of Justice, the body which interprets and enforces EU law to make sure it is applied in the same way in all EU member states. Based in Luxembourg, it settles legal disputes between national governments and EU institutions. It oversees the rules of the single market and ensures that member states, and other countries who sign certain treaties with the EU, uphold their commitments.

(NB. The European Court of Justice is not the same as the European Court of Human Rights, which is based in a different city and separate to European Union membership.)

**Collaborating on rule-making is necessary in order to share economic opportunities**

In 2017 the UK Government announced that it would seek to end the jurisdiction of the ECJ in the UK, meaning that UK markets would not be subject to the rules and regulations of the EU. This is another commitment which underpins the Government’s desire to leave the single market and the customs union, which as EU institutions, are subject to rulings by the ECJ.

However, the July 2017 White Paper suggests departure to the purest interpretation of this principle and proposes an arrangement where that the future trading relationship is governed by a ‘common rulebook’ for goods and agricultural produce. These common standards are intended to ensure that manufacturers and farmers in different countries have a level playing field in terms of their production rules and standards (on areas like chemicals, waste and safety), and help achieve the goal of ‘frictionless trade’ i.e. the checks at borders.

The White Paper also confirms that the UK will seek involvement in European standards agencies such as the European Aviation Safety Agency, the European Chemicals Agency and the European Medicines Agency (in return for a financial contribution), so that businesses only have to go through one set of checks to access both the EU and UK markets. These agencies are governed by EU rules and so would be bound by decisions made by the European Court of Justice.
For millennials, national sovereignty has consistently been a low political priority than for older generations, perhaps because of a feeling that global co-operation is important to address modern challenges, but possibly also as a result of distrust in national political institutions.

Our polling on the role of the European Court of Justice after Brexit found that almost half (48%) of over 55s think that a priority for the negotiations should be removing all ECJ jurisdiction over the UK after Brexit, while just 12% of under 35s believe this.

That said, many millennials have expressed a keen interest in the democratic implications of Brexit – one of the main drivers for young Leave voters was that they saw the EU institutions as bureaucratic and too far removed from voters in the UK to be easily influenced. The White Paper accepts that the UK would not have any voting rights in the way the agencies operate. And while the proposals concerning the ‘common rulebook’ on goods-related trade is that if the EU decides to change the rulebook in the future, the UK Parliament can decide whether to accept these changes – many have interpreted this scenario as negative given that the UK would have to choose between rules set by the EU or potential harmful changes to trading arrangements.

Funding for public services

Our research with Opinium in June 2017 showed that both young and older groups agree that ensuring the UK’s public services are well-funded as Britain leaves the EU is a top priority.

Yet, although the effects of Brexit on public services has been a consistent feature in the media, the EU does not have a remit over the way that public services operate, or sets the tax revenue which the UK government raises. However, proponents of Brexit have suggested that the money saved from the UK’s contributions to EU membership would result in more funding for public services. As the net UK contributions to the EU only amount to 1% spending, funding for public services will be less reliant on this ‘rebate’ than the health of the economy overall. The Office for Budget Responsibility has recently rejected the idea that a ‘Brexit dividend’ would contribute to increased government spending on the NHS, implying that increased spending our need to be raised from tax rises. It reported that “Brexit is more likely to weaken the public finances than strengthen them over the medium term.”

The economy has implications for public spending levels

If the future trading deal with the EU – and other countries too – result in a stronger economy, this could increase taxation revenues and allow more spending on public services. On the other hand, if it
weakens economic growth and productive capacity, then this would lead to reduced public revenues. In a similar way, Brexit may affect inflation, the exchange rate and the likelihood of businesses to offer salary increases, thereby impacting on the taxation revenues raised from individuals.

To this extent, the health of the UK’s public services may be reliant on the UK’s future economic relationship with other countries, but the policy and spending decisions which are made are already firmly in the remit of the UK government and will continue to be so after the UK leaves the EU. For millennials, the call to action is simple: national and local elections determine the decisions made on public service funding.

**Immigration into the UK**

Before and since the 2016 referendum, immigration has been seen as one of the key drivers for those who supported the Leave vote, and reducing migration figures from the EU was a key message of the official Vote Leave campaign.

The Government’s July 2018 White Paper emphasises that freedom of movement – that is, the ability of EU citizens to come into the UK without time or visa limitations and vice versa – will come to an end. “We will remain an open and tolerant country, and one that recognises the valuable contribution migrants make to our society. However, the message from the public before and during the referendum campaign has been clear: leaving the EU must mean control of the number of people who come to the UK from Europe. We want to see net migration to the UK fall to sustainable levels.”

In practice, this means rules around EU migration will be set by Parliament in future. The White Paper hints at an immigration where certain sectors will be able to access workers from the EU, although full details are due to be published in a separate White Paper in the autumn, and it is not clear whether the EU will accept these proposals.

In line with the majority of younger people’s views on immigration, we would also call for more open government communications of the economic benefits of immigration, and proposals on how to safeguard these benefits through innovative solutions involving regional immigration models or working visa schemes for EU nationals.

**For most young people, immigration is viewed as beneficial rather than a threat to jobs or British culture**

Younger generations view immigration as generally beneficial for society compared to older people (although it is worth pointing out that in the two polls Common Vision conducted with Opinium in January and June 2017, reducing immigration was seen as a lower negotiating priority than public services, jobs, education and other priorities amongst all age groups).

Why is this? Millennials have grown up in a globalised world and are more frequently exposed to rapid exchange of information across borders. As a cohort they are more likely to live in cities and cosmopolitan areas, and are educated to a higher level than other generations, meaning that migration may be seen as less of an economic or cultural threat.

Perhaps because of these reasons as well as others, millennials also perceive the ideas of Britishness and national identity differently to
older generations. Our September 2017 survey found that younger generations are more likely to relate to Britishness as a ‘civic’ identity - the belief that that Britishness can still apply to those who have been born elsewhere but have made the UK their home - as opposed to an ‘ethnic’ identity.

Meanwhile, young people also are more likely to hold a personal affiliation or identity with Europe. The Catch-EyoU study, which looked at European identity across member states at the end of 2016 and early 2017, surveyed 800 young people in the UK, and compared this with information from partner institutions in the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden. In total the project gathered responses from almost 10,000 people under the age of 30. Researchers found that more than 50% of UK respondents showed some kind of positive identification with the EU across all socio-economic groups. It may be that the Brexit debate has caused young people to be more conscious of their personal affiliation with the EU.

“Many young people, it would seem, do not draw much of a distinction between being ‘British’ and being ‘European’. Indeed, there is, undoubtedly, a feeling amongst many young people that the European Union was some kind of sign of international solidarity – and in leaving the EU, we have thus turned our backs upon brothers, sisters, friends and allies.” - Shout Out UK report

Furthermore, it is an evident priority for young people that any curbs on immigration should not result in negative messages about existing migrants in the UK. The UCL study found that Brexit is having a clear effect on the personal identity of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Shout Out UK received many submissions expressing fear and worry about the increased levels of xenophobia
and racism that have occurred since and before Brexit. The LSE focus groups found that young people were worried about the effects of Brexit in respect of social justice and social cohesion, with specific reference to concerns over rising intolerance, discrimination and racism. In over a quarter of focus groups, young people said that post-Brexit, the UK should “enact policies that are inclusive and multicultural, and that prioritised a socially just approach to migration and cultural exchange.”

Travel, work and study abroad

Perhaps largely due to their current life stage of being within education or early in their careers, many of the studies we reviewed have shown that younger people are concerned about the opportunities to travel, work and studying abroad in EU countries.

On travel, the White Paper proposes “a new framework that respects the UK’s control of its borders and enables UK and EU citizens to continue to travel to each other’s countries, and businesses and professionals to provide services – in line with the arrangements that the UK might want to offer to other close trading partners in the future.” It also calls for “reciprocal visa-free travel arrangements to enable UK and EU citizens to continue to travel freely for tourism in the future, maintaining the close links between the people of the UK and the EU.”

Preserving Erasmus+ exchanges

One of the current educational opportunities which the UK accesses through EU membership, Erasmus+ is the EU-wide scheme which allows UK young people to study, work, volunteer, teach and train in the EU, in exchange for hosting EU participants in this country. It is clearly in young people’s interests that the UK government should preserve the current education opportunities with the EU that have been available to previous generations, including protecting of the Erasmus+ scheme. UnDivided’s survey found that across remain, leave and non-voting groups, protecting Erasmus funding received a 90% consensus between respondents.

In December 2017 the Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed that the UK will continue to be part of Erasmus+ up until at least the end of 2020, which is the current programme ends and future involvement will be subject to a separate agreement.

There are already non-EU states which are part of the Erasmus programme including Iceland, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Turkey. These countries pay into the Erasmus budget and participate in the scheme, but they have less influence on the direction of the programme.

The July 2018 White Paper specifically mentions that “The UK and the EU should continue to give young people and students the chance to benefit from each other’s world leading universities, including cultural exchanges such as Erasmus+,” and also proposes a “UK-EU youth mobility scheme to ensure that young people can continue to enjoy the social, cultural and educational benefits of living in each other’s countries.” The paper points to the potential for other youth mobility schemes to be developed with non-EU countries.

Of course, as with all the proposals in the White Paper, this is subject to agreement from the EU and will no doubt be dependent on other things. In 2014, when Switzerland voted in favour of limiting immigration through quotas in its 2014 referendum, this meant the country wasn’t able to sign up to the EU’s principle of the free movement of people and led to it dropping out of Erasmus+
participation. This could be a sticking point for the UK in future negotiations. However, the strength of the UK’s higher education sector could make possible an agreement that is independent of free movement negotiations. Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example, do not have full freedom of movement with the EU and are still full members of Erasmus+.

Looking further to non-EU countries, where may also be opportunities to widen access to other schemes, for example in the form of apprenticeship exchanges. Future trade deals with non-EU countries present opportunities to address concerns, expressed via the Undivided campaign and British Council focus groups for example, that more needed to be done to give young people not in university education the opportunities to live and work abroad.

Other issues

We are aware of a number of other issues over which younger generations have expressed concern, but on the whole it remains to be seen how these will be addressed. On the environment, the July 2018 White Paper reiterates the Government’s previous commitments to maintain “high environmental standards” with a new statutory body to monitor this.

“UK regulators propose establishing cooperation arrangements with EU regulators to ensure that authorities on both sides can take appropriate, consistent and coordinated action to prevent non-compliant products from reaching consumers or patients, or harming the environment.”

However, the proposals are still vague and do not adequately address the concerns expressed by campaigning organisations and the United Nations\textsuperscript{13} that environmental standards could slip after Brexit. As we have already discussed, if a trade deal with the EU was contingent on following its environmental standards, young people would largely favour this rather than seek to retain ‘sovereignty’ over these rules.

**Human rights** is also an issue which appeals to many young people’s interests and priorities. We have not interrogated this in depth within this paper because of the Government’s commitment not to leave the European Convention on Human Rights until, at least until after Brexit. However under the UK Government’s proposals, another set of rules, the Charter of Fundamental EU Rights, will become part of UK domestic law following the UK’s official exit from the EU. This means that Parliament will be able to change them, and has led to concern that these rights may be at risk. This might change depending on the EU’s willingness to separate rights from a trade deal. Again, generational differences in the importance of national sovereignty apply here.

The need to avoid a **Northern Ireland border** with the Republic of Ireland has been notable in some of the studies with young people we reviewed. This was agreed by both parties early on in the UK/ EU negotiations, as a pre-condition for any future trade deal. The White Paper’s proposals on the arrangement on goods seeks to enable this to happen. “[T]he free trade area for goods would see the UK and the EU meet their shared commitments to Northern Ireland and Ireland… [and] avoid the need for a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, without harming the internal market of the UK – doing so in a way that fully respects the integrity of the EU’s Single Market, Customs Union, and its rules-based framework.”

Finally, both the UK and the EU negotiators have cited the
importance of collaboration on security, which falls in line with millennials’ expectations of international co-operation on a range of issues. As stated in the White Paper, “Europe’s security has been and will remain the UK’s security, which is why the Government has made an unconditional commitment to maintain it.” The paper commits to “participation by the UK in key agencies, including Europol and Eurojust… accepting the rules of these agencies and contributing to their costs under new arrangements that recognise the UK will not be a Member State”.

3. Conclusion
(...or is it?)

The referendum in 2016 was the start, not the end of the Brexit process. Although political rhetoric and media reporting often gives the impression that the UK has already cut off ties with the EU, the terms of our future relationship are yet to be agreed. With this challenge of uncertainty comes opportunities – opportunities for political leaders to find solutions that achieve compromise and rebuild public trust, opportunities for consultative dialogue that helps people understand the Brexit process and feed into the decisions that are made, and opportunities to shape a Brexit that stands the test of time for future generations.

Although youth charities and various campaigning groups have called for younger people to ‘have a voice’ in the Brexit debate, it is often unclear what this voice is saying in policy terms. The views of young people are sometimes seen as shorthand for anti-Brexit campaigns, or otherwise the main focus seems to be the levels of political literacy amongst young people. We want to shift the terms of the debate to look at the practical ways in which young people’s priorities and perspectives can influence the Brexit process.

By reviewing nine major studies from academics and NGOs
which explore young people’s attitudes towards Brexit, we have found a number of clear and consistent messages. These messages should form the backbone of the UK’s negotiations with the EU, as well as the aspirations for future international relationships beyond the EU.

1. Young people are well-informed and want to play their part. Young people have a strong understanding of the complexities of Brexit and its potential implications, and want their perspectives to be reflected in the Brexit negotiations.

2. The importance of a strong economy for jobs and living circumstances. Across the research, young people and young adults identified concerns relating to needs that interface with a strong economy; young people felt that decent jobs and affordable housing were important priorities for Brexit Britain.

3. A strong commitment to an internationalist outlook. The majority of young people are positive about the effects of globalisation on their own lives and support collaboration with other countries, even if this means a ‘trade off’ with national sovereignty.

4. Freedom to travel, work and study abroad. Young people are concerned at losing freedom of movement rights and opportunities and want Brexit negotiations to preserve EU membership benefits, including the ability to work and study abroad, and the Erasmus exchange programme.

5. Immigration produces mixed opinion, but is a lower concern overall than for older age groups. Young people are less concerned about immigration than the UK population as a whole. Underlying economic concerns mean that for some young people immigration is a cause of poor job prospects. While for others, immigration is an important part of freedom of movement and brings positive benefits to the UK.

Of course, more general political literacy is still crucial. It is a common misunderstanding that leaving the EU will lead to the abolition of all EU laws in the UK. Whereas what will actually happen is that current EU rules and regulations – covering environmental law, employment rights, and other issues - will be carried over into UK law. The power to change or remove these laws will fall to UK politicians. As such, there is no ‘end date’ to the Brexit process, and political engagement becomes ever more important.

However, there is a clear risk that the current Brexit process, and the way that it is conveyed in the media, will lead to a generation of citizens who feel disempowered and disengaged from political leaders and institutions. It falls to politicians, civil society organisations and young people themselves to ensure this does not happen.
It is clear that Theresa May and her team will not be able to produce a Brexit that satisfies an entire generation of young people. However, to appease the majority it is clear that she must produce a ‘soft’ Brexit that minimises the impact on the economy and citizenship rights to fulfil young Brits’ principle demands. Despite underlying differences, young people want a Brexit that maximises future opportunities, and this must be produced to limit further political disengagement.

- Sam Winter

It is unfortunate that immigration has unfortunately by politicians and the media become a poster for the failure of the UK economy and the EU as a project and led to the Met Police to report an increase in hate crimes. Politicians on both sides must unify all sections of the UK in a more positive vision of the future and make a positive case for immigration.

- Courteleigh Smith

It’s already clear that leaving the EU does not mean Britain abandoning its responsibilities to Europe and turning our back to the world.

- Usaama Kaweesa

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UCL (May – September 2017) Being young in Brexit Britain.


End notes

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3 Ibid

4 www.PeoplesVote.co.uk


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7 Ibid


Sparknotes

Summary of studies on young people’s attitudes towards the EU and perspectives on Brexit
Research

Common Vision (July 2016) A Generation Apart? Were younger people left behind by the EU referendum?

Methods

Desk review of existing attitudinal studies on young people’s political and social preferences; polling of 2,005 UK adults of all ages by Opinium Research; sentiment and keyword analysis of over 4,300 news headlines in the three months leading up to the referendum.

Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research (WISERD) (March - September 2016) Should we stay or should we go? Young people and the EU referendum

Public polling in association with YouGov and filmed interviews with under-30s to understand young people’s attitudes to EU and assess the impact of Brexit on their political engagement.

Shout Out UK (October 2016) Brexit: A Youth Perspective

Between July and October 2016 Shout Out UK collected contributions from young people across the UK, asking what they would want to see happen if they had a direct line with the Brexit negotiating team.

Key findings

- The public debate in the lead up to the referendum focused disproportionately on issues which older votes are more likely to care about, such as immigration and national sovereignty. When the media headlines did cite issues which appeal to millennials such as economic issues, they did so in a negative and abstract way, covering issues such as business and investment rather than the impact on jobs, prices and public services.

- Millennials are more likely to believe that Brexit would result in a weaker economy, fewer job prospects and diminished international influence.

- Voting logistics could be improved in future to mirror the engagement mechanisms which millennials use in other walks of life.

- Young people are the most supportive generation of EU membership because of a combination of factors including their experience of the EU during their formative years, their relationships with domestic political institutions, and their access to education.

- As a result, young people want a close continued relationship with the EU.

- Young people felt that present opportunities for movement, residence, education and work across the European Union for all young people now and in the future, should be secured.

- Current rights and protections under EU laws should be preserved

- Young people want the UK to build open, just and positive international relationships with both EU and non-EU countries.

- The government should focus on creating a strong economy so that there are decent jobs and affordable housing for young citizens.

WWW.COV1.ORG.UK/BREXIT-WATCH A GENERATION TOGETHER? WHAT DO MILLENNIALS WANT FROM BREXIT?
Research
Common Vision and Opinium
(January, June and September 2017)

Methods
Three separate polling and online interviews carried out with 2,007/2,004/2,009 UK adults of all ages by Opinium Research on behalf of Common Vision. Samples weighted to reflect a nationally representative audience.

Key findings
- As at January 2017 six in ten (57%) 18-34 year olds say they are either not very confident or not at all confident that the UK’s exit from the European Union is being negotiated in a way that best suits their interests. This compares to just 28% who say they are either somewhat or very confident.
- The three most important priorities for 18-34s (as at June 2017) were the quality and availability of UK jobs, ensuring the UK’s public services are well-funded, and access to good quality education for British students.
- Generational differences in the EU referendum were largely mirrored in attitudes towards immigration (with younger age groups more likely to see immigration as beneficial for society) and attitudes to British identity (with younger age groups more likely to define Britishness as a civic, rather than ethnic identity).
- Young remain voters were more than four times as likely as older remainers to vote based on what they see as best for their own personal circumstances as opposed to being ‘best for the country’ or ‘the right thing to do’. Young leave voters were more likely to have cast their vote based on ‘what is right or wrong’ than older leave voters.
- Young people, even those affiliated with a leave vote, support a Brexit that retains opportunities to live, work and study abroad.
- Young people are especially concerned about education opportunities, studying abroad and university research.
- There are concerns that once Britain leaves the EU, environmental standards will be at risk. 93% of respondents do not want the Government to abandon the UK’s climate change commitments.
- There are divided views about immigration and what to do about it, though young people are less concerned about immigration than the UK population as a whole.
Research
British Youth Council (July 2017)
The UK Young Ambassadors: Enabling all young people to engage in an Inclusive, Diverse and Well-Connected Europe

Methods
Online survey of 1,000 young people aged between 11 and 25 in the UK, and focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews involving over 500 young people.

Focus groups comprising between 6 to 10 young people in the 11 to 30 age range, and a short survey conducted in July and August 2017 with 3,288 UK citizens aged 18 to 65+

Key findings
• Young people engaged felt that the world around them is changing for the worse and that they are not well-equipped to deal with these changes. They referred particularly to increasing mental health issues, a rise in hate crimes and right-wing extremism, and a lack of opportunity for young people.

• Brexit is viewed as a problem rather than an opportunity. Many young people highlighted concern and uncertainty for their future.

• Young people in the North East of England were predominately concerned about local issues and job opportunities. Young people in Wales were concerned about the future of Welsh language and culture if Wales were to lose European funding streams. Young people in Northern Ireland were concerned about the land border with the Republic of Ireland and the effect this would have on the Good Friday Agreement and the economy and employment.

• Young people are worried about the implications of Brexit particularly in relation to economic pressures they face including housing, jobs, and education.

• Young people are concerned at losing rights and opportunities and want Brexit negotiations to preserve EU membership benefits, including freedom of movement and the Erasmus exchange programme.

• Young people engaged had strong understanding of Brexit and its potential effects, and they referred to a lack of political knowledge among citizens, and a mistrust at political and media institutions.

• Young people are worried about the effects of Brexit in relation to social justice and social cohesion.
Research

Being young in Brexit Britain. Young people’s attitudes towards and aspirations after the Brexit referendum

UCL (May – September 2017)

Researchers Dr Avril Keating and Dr Laila Kadiwal interviewed 73 young people around England aged between 16 and 29, including university students, sixth formers and further education students, young people in their first jobs, as well as those struggling to find work.

Methods

Intergenerational Foundation

(October 2017): Generation Remain: Understanding the Millennial Vote

The report analyses data from the British Election Study using regression models and latent class analysis to identify the variables which led to the likelihood of millennials preferring to remain in the EU.

Key findings

While some young people voted Remain for ‘idealistic’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ reasons, another strong motivation for voting Remain was because they viewed this as a ‘safe’ option that would not have a negative impact on their lives.

Most young people were uncertain about the implications of Brexit and have not changed their long-term aspirations or goals because of it. It may have affected short-term travel and education plans for some.

Many young people were completely disengaged from the Brexit debate. Others felt powerless that they could not do anything to change the result.

Intergenerational Foundation

(October 2017): Generation Remain: Understanding the Millennial Vote

British Council and Demos (November 2017): Next Generation UK

This study included a nationally representative survey of 2,000 18–30 year olds conducted by Ipsos Mori; focus groups with 80 young adults in locations across the UK; social media analysis and a stakeholder roundtable.

The study found that:

- People were more likely to have voted Remain if they belonged to an ethnic minority, were educated to a university level, lived in Scotland, had a very strong European identity or had a household income of £60,000+ per year. The millennial age group disproportionately contains people within these groupings meaning that age itself is not the main factor, it is their similarities in circumstances and attitudes that were the drivers behind their voting preference.

- 67% of young adults say they have an international outlook and 57% are positive about the effects of globalisation on their own lives. But young adults are pessimistic about Britain’s future place in the world post-Brexit, with 4 in 10 survey respondents saying the UK will have less international influence, compared to 1 in 5 who think the opposite.

- Many participants expressed concern about the practical impacts of Brexit on their lives and future prospects, including constraining opportunities to work and study in other countries.

- Many young people want to engage with more international experiences, with 56% wanting to work abroad in the future.
About the authors

Caroline Macfarland, Director, Common Vision

Caroline founded Common Vision in 2013. She was previously a special adviser at the Big Lottery Fund, one of the founding team members of the foundation Power to Change and managing director of think tank ResPublica. Caroline is a board member of the UK Cohousing Trust and a British Council Hammamet Fellow. In 2015, she was named one of Management Today’s 35 women under 35.

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Chris is a researcher with over ten years experience of project management, policy development, and research and analysis. His current interests include: sport and culture, health and wellbeing, localism, and education and leadership. Chris is founder of Live Projects Ltd and also Director of Freedom Works UK, a social enterprise providing training and mentoring to employees and entrepreneurs.

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About Common Vision

Common Vision (CoVi) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank launched in 2014. We explore issues which require long-term, intergenerational solutions and which require solutions to reach beyond conventional partisan debates or sector-driven interests. We use creative and crowdsourced methods to promote civic engagement and policy understanding beyond a politically active minority, and to build a vision of society based on the common good.

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