



# Gordon Who?

By Adam Goodger, Deputy MYP Birmingham

**I**n an age where teachers threaten to strike more frequently, prisoner meals cost more to make than school dinners and an economic depression seems forever on the horizon, one might think that taking an interest in politics would be more important than ever. However, sadly the voting turnout for this country seems to be as low as ever. So why is it that nowadays no one can be bothered with politics? And why is it that more and more young people seem to be asking "Gordon who?"

For years the universal test of awareness (or ignorance – whatever the case may be) has been whether a child can name the current Prime Minister. So why is it that so many young people only seem to be able to say "I dunno, Tony Blair ennit?". It has been over a year since we have

ceased to be governed by the New Labour poster-boy and so surely every young person in Britain should have now realised this Ministerial switchover? I am sure that more of them can tell you when the digital switchover will be than realise when their country has changed leaders!

**Who knows what the exact job of a Prime Minister is?**

I do not think that it is a lack of interest towards the issues. The proof is in the thousands of those same young people logging on to

vote for the UKYP elections and for many of the votes and petitions since, not forgetting the wealth of young people involved in this organisation. They know the issues and want to see change; it is just actual politics itself, and the wider concerns, effects and influences that they seem to harbour a certain ignorance or even apathy towards.

It seems to be the fundamental knowledge required to make an informed and effective judgment on these more delicate issues is absent. This renders the world of politics inaccessible by placing it beyond the understanding of the voter of tomorrow; and therefore insufferably boring!

Who knows what the exact job of a Prime Minister is? How does Parliament work? Who makes the laws? What do MPs do? Why

## Are young people engaged?

In 2007-2008, the UK Youth Parliament surveyed 9,200 young people across the UK to ask them, "Are you engaged?". We wanted to know how young people felt about lowering the voting

age. However, what we found was something very different, bringing into question the value of, and opportunity for, political engagement by young people in the UK. Of 9,200 young people surveyed across

the UK:

- \* Over a third feel that politics doesn't affect them;
- \* 60% haven't or aren't sure whether they've been taught about government and politics in school;

should I vote? What do the Parties stand for? This is the fundamental knowledge I'm talking about. No one is telling them the answers to these questions early on and so they lack the ability to understand an issue in its entirety.

This is an alarming prospect. With a Government already using stealth tactics to bring in policies such as Iraq and ID cards, will there be a time in the future when no one will know the gravity of such issues, or even know how to stop them? I say thank goodness that organisations such as the UK Youth Parliament are there to get young people involved in politics and engage them in the issues!

But who's to blame? Perhaps the education system is letting us down. There has been calls from many politically influential people such as David Cameron for more citizenship lessons in schools to revolve around British history and politics. Should parents be the ones to make sure their child is as aware of the current Prime Minister as they are of "Don't talk to strangers"? But would the parents know themselves? I think there is a need to simply get people talking about politics and making it as basic as their ABCs.

There should therefore be more schemes such as UKYP, which get young people passionate about politics so no-longer shall I hear the answer to "Gordon who?" be "You know: the President!"

- \* 70% of all young people feel that their local council does not value the opinions of young people;
- \* Over half of 16-18 year olds do not believe the voting age should be lowered to 16.

For full details of the report go to: [www.ukyp.org.uk/Are\\_You\\_Engaged.pdf](http://www.ukyp.org.uk/Are_You_Engaged.pdf)

# Bigger, better, more diverse: UK Youth Parliament elections smash the half million barrier!



For the first time ever, over half a million young people took part in the UK Youth Parliament elections – a massive increase of over 50% year on year. Candidate numbers also shot up, and the percentage of black and minority ethnic MYPs, and those with a disability, also increased significantly.

In total, 565,802 took part in the 2008 elections, while a total of 1,625 young people stood for election. Of those who voted, 50% were aged 15 to 16. Overall, one in four of this year's MYPs are from ethnic minorities. This compares very favourably with adult MPs, where just two per cent of MPs are from ethnic minorities. As in most years, the male-female MYP ratio was approximately even.

Andy Hamflett, Chief Executive of the UK Youth Parliament, welcomed the news, "This is an

astonishing year-on-year increase", he said. "I cannot thank enough the Local Authority youth workers and young people who yet again have given masses of their time to make the UKYP elections such a success. Who says young people don't want to vote? Who says they aren't interested in politics, decision making or community development? These figures would tend to suggest otherwise."

This fantastic news comes not long after UKYP has launched Project Engage, which will provide new tools and resources to help involve young people not in formal education to learn about democratic structures and to register to vote. Funded by the Electoral Commission, the project runs for two years and will hopefully help to increase voting numbers still further in future years.