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Sarah Champion

Member of Parliament for Rotherham

**Immediate release**

**06 May 2014**

**Now is the time to act on votes at 16, says Sarah Champion MP**

Having called a Parliamentary debate on Votes at 16, Sarah Champion MP told young people listening in the public gallery that she felt the time was right to open up democracy by giving the vote to 16 and 17 year olds.

Sarah Champion MP, who represents Rotherham, stated: “Sixteen-year-olds can legally become parents, but they raise their children in a society in which they cannot have a say. They can legally go to work and contribute to our economy but are not allowed a say in what our economic policy should be. Perhaps most starkly of all, we let 16-year-olds join our armed forces and thus represent our country, but do not respect them enough to give them a say in our defence policy.”

After the debate, Sarah commented: “voting at 16 isn’t just about the contradictions over whether or not young people are adults. It’s about showing young people that they are a welcome part of society and that their opinions matter, and it’s about making politicians more accountable to young people.

“Political engagement is at an all time low, and this is a great opportunity to get young people interested in politics for the future.

“Voting at 16 should be backed by better political education for young people, through their citizenship classes at school. We can teach politically neutral education, the same way we see with religious studies. This is about empowering young people to become active and engaged, and know that their voice counts.”

Toni Paxford, a member of Rotherham’s Youth Cabinet, said: “People sometimes forget that young people can contribute just as much as, or sometimes more than some adults. MPs should remember that Votes at 16 isn’t about what signals giving the vote sends, as much as the lack of appreciation you feel by not being given the vote.”

**ENDS NR025**

Notes to Editors

* For more information on the ‘Votes at 16’ campaign, go to [www.votesat16.org/](http://www.votesat16.org/)
* A history of the ‘Votes at 16’ campaign, including information on how the campaign has previously been raised in Parliament, can be found at [www.votesat16.org/about/campaign-history/](http://www.votesat16.org/about/campaign-history/)
* At 16, you can:
  + leave school to enter work
  + give full consent to having a medical treatment
  + consent to sexual relationships
  + get married
  + join the armed forces
  + change your name by deed poll
  + obtain tax credits and welfare benefits in your own right
  + become a member of a trade union or a co-operative society
  + become the director of a company
  + pay income tax and national insurance contributions

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