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SCOTTISH SWEET SIXTEEN

For the first time in a UK political vote, individuals who turn 16 on or before 18th September 2014 are eligible to vote in the forthcoming Scottish independence referendum.

Shot in the personal privacy of homes and bedrooms as well as public spaces and parks, Scottish Sweet Sixteen introduces us to a number of young people of voting age in Scotland and the spaces they spend time in.

These adolescents share their views on being 16 in Scotland today and what, if anything, having this vote means to them. It's a transitional time, between youth and adulthood. Some describe the referendum as motivating them to become interested in politics for the first time in their lives. Others are unsure and nervous of how to vote, uncertain of what to think or of whether they will vote at all.

Each individual I photographed for this project spoke to me in detail about their views on the referendum, voting, politics and about being 16 in general. Extracts of interviews with each participant are here for you to read. I'm grateful to each and every one of them for taking the time to talk to me, for sharing their views and for giving such considered and thoughtful contributions to this project.



Stacey, 16

"I've had a chat about Independence and the Referendum and I understand what it is, it's about Scotland being its own country. But it's complicated. I do want to vote, I do want to learn about it, because it could make Scotland a different place.

At 16 we're just starting to come into the world and be old enough. We're young adults now and I think we should be able to make that decision. You can get married at 16, you can go to the doctor without an adult, you can do quite a lot when you're 16.

I've got my own room, I get more privacy, I like listening to music and stuff. I like Capital FM, they make good jokes and they're quite funny. I feel I have more independence than when I was younger - that's good. I like having more freedom, more space.

I don't go to school anymore, I left. Now I'm 16 though, I can do training activities which are for 16's and over, like canoeing, learning to cook, arts and crafts and photography. I like the idea of learning about childcare, I'm going to go and work in a nursery soon. I like kids, working with under 5's would be good. I think I'd like to work in a nursery when I'm older, I've just started training for hairdressing, I enjoy the responsibility.

I take a lot of photos I've got an ipod and I just got a camera. I take a lot of of self portraits. It gives me freedom. It helps me express myself.

I've had a hard upbringing that's why I'm here. I've been in 3 different foster homes and I've been here the longest, I've been here 1 year. People here say I'm good at drawing. I've drawn lots of stuff, but I don't think I'm that good. I find drawing relaxing, it takes my mind off other things. I did art at school. It's creative, it's interesting, it's different. Photography is good too, I can express myself. My friends used to do it - that's how I got into it, I thought I'll give it a bash, so I tried it. It's creative, it's something different. I go outside sometimes, or just take them in my room. I've got lots of effects I can use."



Neil, 16

"I'm really excited about voting, there's nothing that's been so important for our generation. It's our first time voting and we are the generation that's going to live with Independence, if it happens, for the longest time. That's a really exciting thing. It's different from having the vote in a general election, which could change afterwards.

It's going to be really interesting to see how giving 16 year olds this vote will effect things after the referendum. Will it make any difference to how young people feel about politics in the future, and about how the world effects them? It might make no difference. I don't know.

I talk to my family, some young people might be influenced by their parents but I'd say I've definitely got different views from mine. I do trust what they think but I want to show them that I'm capable of making my own decision.

I play in a jazz band, I also play the saxaphone in something called The Sax Pistols. Music for me is a hobby. Since I started playing the sax I've met lots of people, it's really helped my confidence.

I think I'm going to vote yes, I don't think voting yes is something that's easy, or that anyone is thinking by voting yes everything will be perfect. It's something bigger than going to the ballot box on the day. It's about looking to the future and saying this is what we want. I think the only chance people in Scotland have to shape their society in Scotland is to vote yes.

It's right that 16 and 17 yr olds have a vote in the referendum. I always hear the argument that we're too immature and we won't be able to make the right decisions but you can find that at any age. There are so many younger people that I'd trust with political decisions over older people.

A lot of young people are interested in the referendum, we are really well connected, we're always talking, social media and the internet plays a big part in that, it allows us to talk easily and openly about issues. Things get resolved when people ask questions, share their opinions and talk to each other. That conversation encourages me to go out, find new information and do my research. I think we're going to be a really strong generation."



Charlotte, 16

"It's a privilege to have this vote now that I'm 16. Especially for something so close to me, in my country where I live, it's important for me to have my say.

I had no idea about politics before the independence referendum, I wasn't interested. I didn't have that much exposure to politics, I never really watched the news or read the newspaper. Then my

Dad became more involved, my friends started to have conversations about it. I decided to inform myself and found it was something I felt really strongly about.

I have a lot of yes badge on my school tie, partly because I'm passionate about independence, I'm voting yes and I want people to know that. Also by wearing these badges on my tie I can offer them to people. They draw quite a lot of attention. A lot of people ask me why I have so many, and sometimes I get negative responses. I don't get fazed by it at all. I just try to have conversations with people, give them information, talk to them fairly about independence. I feel sometimes that I have to complete that duty.

I feel independence is vital for our country, it's an opportunity to really make a change, to take a stance. It's so important for my life, for the people around me and for my future. It just seems so close, so personal, for my family, and that's why it's important to me, that's why I'm so happy to be able to take part in this vote.

When I joined debate club at school I became a bit more informed about things that are going on. It can get quite heated and it can get quite playful, it's fun. I have a lot of friends there, the teachers are very nice. It's also nice to talk to people and discuss where I stand on certain topics, to explore feelings about things in the world, and in my country.

I've just finished my 5th year exams, I'm going into 6th year, starting Advanced Highers, things like that. I'll be thinking about university soon.

The best thing about being 16 is the fun of it, the friends I have, the fun of being young. The exams are the worst thing, they can get very stressful."



Rachel, Carys & Lindsay, 15 & 16

“At this age we’re still in-between being adults and kids, we can still act like kids but we’re also mature in some ways. Some teachers talk to us as if we’re more like adults and there’s some that talk to us like kids. Being 16 means feeling like a young adult I guess.

We definitely talk about voting and the referendum. Lots of adults might say that we’re too young to vote and too immature, but I think that quite a lot of 16 year olds are just as capable of making decisions as a lot of adults. We’re learning all the time. We’re not immature, it’s unfair to talk about all of us that way. The majority of the people I know are quite capable of making an informed decision.

Being 16 means having a bit more freedom and still not too much responsibility. Being able to spend time with friends and not having to have a job yet, that’s what makes being 16 fun.

The worst thing can be at school, with people putting horrible things up on the internet about you. Twitter and social networking sites can make it harder, other people get involved. It’s important to ignore that, although it, but it can be hard. I do think about what people think of me, how they perceive me. Girls always judge each other so much. I do feel quite aware of what I look like and how I dress, even walking from the house to the shops I feel I have to spend time getting ready, in case someone sees someone from school.

I think we’re all quite easy going, but we’re not irresponsible. We’d never do anything that was dangerous or that would get us in trouble.

16 is a big landmark in life. This is a big decision for this country. I think the teenagers who will vote in the referendum will be the ones who have strong opinions and have made a decision. The others probably won’t vote at all. I will vote.”



Maarja, 16

"I'll be applying to university before I'm 17, I'll be going to university before I'm 18. I am looking forward to exercising my right to vote. I haven't made a decision on how I want to vote yet. My dad is quite strongly on one side but the rest of my family are on the other.

I'm glad they extended the vote to 16 year olds so I can vote. But it does worry me too. I think people need to

research it properly before they go ahead. Not just listening to their parents. I think whatever happens will be such a big effect on the affect of Scotland for the rest of our lives so we should vote.

Most people I know are perfectly mature enough, but a lot of people haven't looked into it. My school did have a number of debates which was interesting, it's good to get a conversation going. I'm still undecided though and it's hard to get proper conversation going. A lot of people in my school are quite set on voting No. I say well at least you should look into it.

Estonia where my mum is from, is a small independent county, after the Soviet Union collapsed it became independent and they're doing quite well. I go over there and I like it, it seems to work pretty well.

I quite miss being 8 yrs old, my brother seems to have it pretty good, he gets his bag packed, he doesn't notice if we're late, he gets his dinner made for him.

At 16 you have to decide what you want to do for the rest of your life, that began at 12 when you're choosing your standard grades. I think I felt ready at the time I made those decisions, I don't feel ready anymore. You don't have much opportunity to be silly and have fun really because you have to get everything organized.

I'm always looking for an excuse to be a bit silly, working on films and acting is a great fun thing to do. I am usually the only one of my friends really willing to properly go on the camera. I'm not a very solitary person, I'm a bit of an extravert."



Eddie, 16

“The independence referendum is a really important thing for me, it got me into politics, I've joined a political party now. It's had a real effect on my life.

I probably first got interested in politics when there was a meeting for Yes Scotland in Musselburgh, I found that pretty interesting so I got involved, there weren't many people my age there.

When you're 16 you can work, you can get married, if you can work you're paying taxes and if you're paying taxes you're contributing to society. I think a person who pays their taxes should be allowed to vote, they're doing their bit for the country.

I'd like to get a job as a politician. People say politicians are out of touch with society, I feel I'm more in touch, I'd like to be a voice for the people.

I feel involved in the referendum. I think you have to go out of your way to be engaged really, try your best. I went to some rallies and meetings and I feel pretty strongly about the independence referendum. It's something that will effect the country in a massive way.

I talked to a few friends to see what people were thinking. Most are quite negative, they think the opposite of what I'm thinking. The majority of the young people I know are either really involved like myself or probably not really that bothered, sort of disengaged from the whole conversation.

I talk about it with friends at school, a lot of people aren't interested. You get some people that care and some that don't that's just how it is.

Before this, I was into more teenage things like football, etc, going out partying, I wasn't into politics, the referendum got me into politics. This feels like an in-between time, between being an adult and being a child. I feel I'm treated with more respect now, especially in school, I'm considered more of an equal by the teacher, I'm more mature, taken more seriously, given more time to discuss my opinions. I'm turning into an adult.”



Millie, 16

"I think it is really important for sixteen year olds to have the opportunity to vote in the referendum. It affects our future - in many ways more than our parents generation.

Usually, however, when you vote in an election, the results last for 4 years and there is potential for change. It's a daunting idea that my first vote could have permanent consequences.

I feel that by voting for independence we could be letting ourselves in for a lot more problems, financial problems etc. We don't know what's going to happen, it could really be the wrong idea. We just don't know, for me it seems an unnecessary risk.

I've noticed the conversation about independence a lot more recently lately. I was at a music festival in Dunbar in the summer and people had Scotland flags outside their tents. I feel that everyone voting yes is very vocal about it, whereas those who are voting no are quite quiet about it.

At school no one's really talking about it, with my friends we tend not to because we've realised it can cause arguments, so we avoid it. Everyone gets overly passionate about it.

It would be a bad thing if 16 year olds didn't have this vote though. After all, it's our future. We're the ones who are going to have to deal with the consequences, in ten years when things are probably changing the most as a result of this vote, it will be affecting us, and our lives and we should have a say. I think it's really important we get the vote.

A year ago I wasn't all that interested in politics, it was quite unappealing to me. I didn't feel I played any part in it and therefore just felt I wasn't involved. I didn't have a say. The referendum made me realise how little I knew so have been watching the news and reading more lately. It does make sense that this has politicised a generation. It's definitely made me more interested in the world and what could happen."



Craig, 16

"I think it's quite a radical move to introduce voting to this younger generation, we're being trusted to make an informed decision. I think a lot of young people might think that change is a good thing, and want something new.

I don't talk with friends too much about the referendum, a bit at school, but outside of school not at all really. I

talk to a few others who would vote no if they could, but they're too young. I try and tell some friends that it might not be as bad as it sounds if we went independent.

I think that it is generally true that some young people aren't interested in politics and having this vote, but I believe there are lots of exceptions. There are some who really care and are clued up. It's as simple as reading a newspaper or watching the news, or Reporting Scotland, things like that. I know about it through talking with my parents. I don't really want to stay in a country which doesn't want to make it's own decisions and be in control, I've thought about it that way.

I'm passionate about BMX, it's so social, it's changed me as a person. I've become more outgoing and less shy. It gives me exercise and gets me out of the house in the fresh air, it also gives me a perspective on life. If I wasn't doing BMX I wouldn't have anything to do. I live and go to high school in Biggar, when I leave school I'd like to move closer in to the city centre, get an apprenticeship or something like that. Lots of BMX people like to do hands on work, so moving here would be a good start, a stepping stone to the next step.

As for young people having the vote, I've seen a few interviews with young people, some say that they don't think young people can think for themselves, but I'd say the same is also true of some older people. I've done my reading."