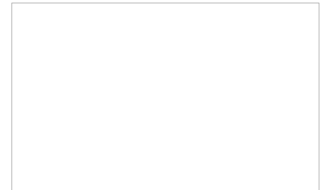


Mencap and the ‘Get my vote campaign’

There are 1.5 million people in the UK with a learning disability, and while people with a learning disability have the right to vote, less than 20 per cent voted in the general election in 2005. [Mencap](#) is a leading UK charity that works in partnership with people with a learning disabilities. Policy and Campaigns Officer [Mark Gale](#) looks at Mencap’s ‘Get my vote’ campaign launched earlier this year with the aim of helping to enable those with learning disabilities to have the opportunity to vote.

In May 2008, research conducted by United Response revealed that fewer people with a learning disability may be taking part in the democratic process than previously thought. Only 16 per cent of their respondents voted in the 2005 general election. Research commissioned by the Department of Health relating to the 2001 general election suggested a figure of 31 per cent and in a recent Mencap study, 45 per cent of people said the reason they didn’t vote was because they didn’t understand what the parties were talking about.



In response to this, for the general election in 2010, learning disability charity, [Mencap](#) launched the ‘[Get my vote](#)’ campaign (inspired by Mencap Cymru’s earlier [Partners in Politics](#) work) to make sure people with a learning disability had the opportunity to get their voices heard. Mencap’s campaign called for the main political parties to make their manifestos and information more accessible.

As part of the campaign to explore the challenges faced by many people when voting, Ismail Kaji, Mencap’s campaign assistant spoke to Jeremy Paxman about the government’s duty to make information clear so people can vote. He commented: “The right to vote is a very important right that people have died for. I think that it’s important that everybody votes and when I say everybody, I mean everybody.” When asked if he always understood politicians Jeremy added: “No, of course not! Sometimes I don’t think they understand themselves! I spend a lot of time in this (political) world so I am probably more used to the jargon than some people and even then I don’t understand them some of the time.” [Click here to listen to the podcast.](#)

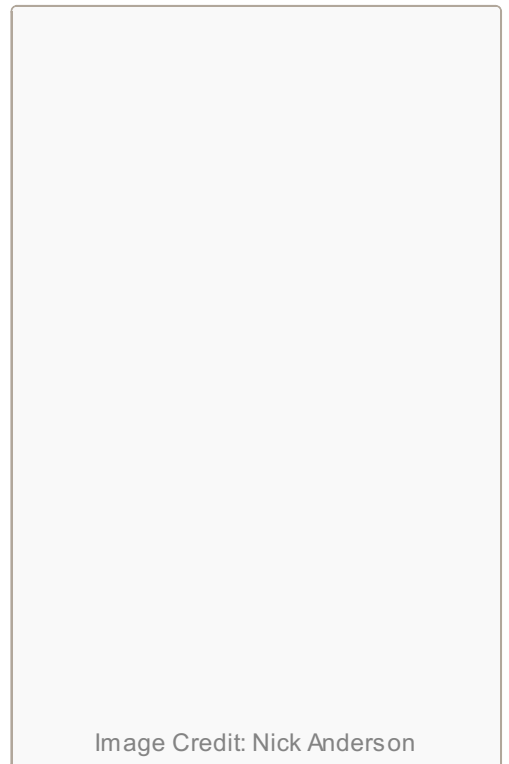


Image Credit: Nick Anderson

Overall the ‘Get my vote’ campaign was very successful leading up to the Westminster elections in May 2010, with a high level of engagement with MPs and parliamentary candidates. The biggest campaign win was that all three main political parties (and two smaller parties) commissioned learning disability charity Mencap to produce their manifestos in easy read format to reach these potential voters. As a result of the campaign, people with a learning disability learned about the political process and the number of people with a learning disability voting doubled from 16% to 31% (from a survey of over 1100 people with a learning disability) as compared with previous elections.

In addition to these successes, Mencap has also ensured 145 MPs from across the political spectrum signed [EDM 383](#), which called for local authorities, political parties and central government to produce accessible material in relation to electoral matters, and called on all prospective parliamentary candidates to make their election material easily accessible for people with a learning disability. In addition to this, 56 MPs in the new parliament have supported the accessibility agenda giving a good basis on which to engage these MPs.

Whilst we can be proud of the success of the ‘Get my vote’ campaign, and the positive response we had around election time, politics and the democratic process is about more than just elections and we will be looking to work with all political parties to ensure that they continue to reach out to people with a learning disability.

About Mencap

Mencap supports the 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK and their families and carers. Mencap fights to change laws and improve services and access to education, employment and leisure facilities, supporting thousands of people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want.

Mencap are also one of the largest service providers of services, information and advice for people with a learning disability across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. See www.mencap.org.uk for more information.

You may also be interested in the following posts (automatically generated):

1. [Why you should vote NO to the Alternative Vote on 5 May](#)
2. [Suppose UK voters accept the Alternative Vote in the May referendum... but then don't use AV to signal multiple party preferences?](#)
3. [A disgraceful referendum campaign has obscured the real case for AV](#)
4. [Some Australian state elections using the Alternative Vote show that voters are casting fewer second preferences, or even none at all. Would the same happen in the UK?](#)