

CREATIVE DEMOCRACY & GENERAL ELECTION 2015 WHAT CAN YOU DO



We want creativity at the heart of society.

We want creativity at the heart of society. That's why it needs to be at the heart of the political debate going into the 2015 general election. Here's what you need to know, and some simple ideas about how you can take action.

01. Understand the timetable

Although the election isn't until 7 May 2015, we need to be working from now right up until election day to ensure the importance of culture is well understood by both politicians and voters in your local constituency.

Monday 30 March 2015

Parliament will be dissolved and writs will be issued in the UK's 650 constituencies. This marks the start of the formal election campaign period.

April TBC

Voter registration deadline (and deadline for voters to apply for a postal or proxy vote).

April TBC

Party manifestos published (although policy can be made up until the day the polls close).

April TBC

Televised leaders' debates.

Thursday 7 May

Election day. Polling booths will be open between 7am and 10pm. Counting begins once the polls close.

Friday 8 May

Counting continues and first results announced.

There is no single central place to find out who your local candidates are, although this website will tell you which constituency you live in and who all your local representatives are:

www.writetothem.com

A useful guide to the seats in the 2015 election, giving constituency data and profiles, can be found here:

<http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/2015guide/>

02. Tell everyone you know to register to vote

You can't take part in the Creative Democracy if you aren't registered to vote! All the information you need is available online at:

www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

In June, the voter registry system changed to make every individual responsible for registering themselves. Previously, you received a letter from your council asking you to confirm who lived in your household, now all you need to do is fill in the form at the above link. It has 11 simple questions (one of which is your National Insurance number) and takes less than five minutes to fill out – the **What Next?** team have personally tested this!

You can also register to vote by post. A form is available via your local Electoral Registration Office, or you can download it from:

bit.ly/votepost

There is no need to re-register if you already are (you will already be registered if you were living at your current address the last time you voted).

Top tip:

If you work with people or communities who don't have access to the internet, why not print off some forms and make them available in your foyer?

03. Host a hustings or election event

Hustings are public meetings at which political candidates, in an election can address voters. They can be particularly helpful in helping undecided voters listen to individual candidates' policies in more detail.

Holding hustings can boost your profile locally, show the candidates that there is a significant level of support for an issue, and provide an opportunity to quiz candidates on their stance. However they do take planning and work, and need to comply with simple Electoral Commission rules, which can be found here:

bit.ly/electionevent

Ideally hustings will be held in the core April campaigning period, but candidates will be very busy at this time so make sure invites are issued early, and that the event is well publicised. You will need an independent chair person and time to decide what issues

will be addressed. All candidates should be invited (even the ones you're not so keen on...). The format is typically a standard, chaired question-and-answer session, but feel free to consider more creative approaches. If this seems like too much work to take on, try organising the event in partnership with other local organisations or individuals, this is the best way to ensure maximum attendance and support anyway.

You may also want to consider holding screenings and parties around the televised leaders' debates with some discussion afterwards, hold a community discussion event, or introduce a political strand into your existing work or programming.

Top tip:

Make sure invites are issued early!

04. Raise the importance of creativity in all your media and public speaking opportunities

The first rule of communications is repetition. It is only when you are sick of saying something that people really start to listen.

We need as many people as possible to understand that creativity is important to society, and that it is an issue worth voting on. Between now and the election, try to mention this as often as possible in public and to the press.

Top tip:
Why not spread the word with social media channels?

An example quote might be:

“ Creativity is vital to society. It enhances almost every aspect of our daily life, from the music on the radio to the design of our smartphones. It impacts on the vibrancy of our local area, our children’s education and the kind of jobs we all do. Investing in culture doesn’t only produce excellent art, it also creates informed and engaged citizens, promotes good mental health and personal wellbeing, increases community cohesion and regeneration, and raises our profile overseas. Culture is the engine driving the growth of Britain’s creative industries – the fastest growing section of the economy – and is responsible for a huge proportion of our tourism and export earnings. ”

05. Make contact with local politicians and candidates – and invite them to see your work

For most politicians, seeing is believing. Our most effective political work happens when politicians and candidates come face-to-face with artists and art.

If you work for an organisation, invite MPs and councillors in to see how your organisation works or to see a show. If you have the time and capacity, invite the other general election candidates in too (after all, they may soon become your MP). If you are an individual artist or freelancer, write to them to ask about their stance on creativity, or work through your local **What Next?** to see if they will address a meeting. Don’t be put off if at first they can’t make time to see you. One **What Next?** member recently spent 18 months persuading an MP to pay them a visit, in the end the visit was a great success.

Time, charm and persistence often pay dividends. Treat them like you would a high-level donor and don’t be afraid to repeat the obvious about your organisation and creativity more generally.

Top tip:
You can find your local candidate’s contact information via their websites

You can find your MPs’ contact details on the Parliament website:

www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/

or via this website:

www.writetothem.com/

06. Make art about it!

ABOUT WHAT NEXT?

What Next? is a national alliance of artists and cultural organisations.

It includes Artistic Directors and Chief Executives of cultural institutions of all shapes and sizes; strategic bodies; academic institutions; projects; networks; membership organisations; individual artists; and established and emerging companies and practitioners.

Members meet regularly in local 'Chapters' to share their ideas and information and to agree collaborative action. It is open to anyone to get involved. There are currently more than 20 **What Next?** Chapters operating across the country. Each Chapter is different and reflects its local surroundings: some meet weekly, some monthly; some are run by young

professionals just starting in their careers, and some are led by volunteer audience members. Some chapters attract 50 participants per meeting, and some have in-depth discussions with five members.

What Next? is a movement, not an organisation. We are not formally constituted and don't have a hierarchical structure. Each Chapter chooses its own direction and area of interest to pursue, and when we can, we act together. However, we are all fundamentally concerned with creating better, more interesting, more effective conversations about arts and culture - with politicians, decision makers, and with the ever-expanding millions who value and take part in the cultural work that happens day-in, day-out, up and down the country.

Contact details

What Next?

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UK Theatre

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Cog Design

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This guide has been created by the What Next? Young Vic Chapter with support from UK Theatre and Cog Design.