

Young voters expect sympathetic hearing at federal election

Phoebe Wearne - The West Australian on May 26, 2016, 5:54 am



Politicians hoping to tap into the WA youth vote on July 2 face an uphill battle.

Just 8 per cent of young West Australians believe politicians understand or are aware of the issues that affect them, according to a new Youth Affairs Council of WA survey of people aged 25 or under.

The survey, completed by 350 people from across the state, also found that less than 5 per cent of young people “strongly agreed” that politicians talked about issues that mattered to them.

A further 40 per cent of respondents “agreed”.

The results question assumptions that the majority of young voters are disengaged, with 87 per cent of respondents enrolled to vote and 68 per cent actively interested in politics.

About 15 per cent were either not enrolled or unsure if they were unrolled, of which 11 per cent said they were unlikely to enrol to vote in the future.

More than 70 per cent of respondents support compulsory voting, while a third want the voting age in Australia to be lowered to 16.

Harrisdale resident Courtney Lyon, 18, enrolled to vote online a few weeks ago and is waiting to hear more from political parties on mental health and youth facilities before she heads to the ballot box.

But she said there was a need for politicians to engage with young people by speaking to Year 12s at school and letting them know what was ahead so they could become more interested in voting.

“Not many young people know much about it because they finish school and are like ‘oh, I have to vote now’ and there’s a lot of reading involved,” Ms Lyon said.

“It would be great if politicians actually listened to young people. They don’t talk to us, so how are they meant to help us?”

YACWA chief executive Ross Wortham said the young people surveyed had many good ideas about how to engage them in the democratic process.

He said the most common suggestion was that politicians needed to demonstrate to young people that they cared about them, would listen to their concerns and would take them seriously.