

## VOTE BLOCKED

By Darren Lynch, S6

DISAPPOINTED staff and pupils at Notre Dame slammed a controversial decision by the House of Lords NOT to allow 16 and 17-year-olds a vote in the upcoming EU Referendum.

In recent votes, such as the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the upcoming Scottish Parliament elections, 16 and 17-year-olds were given the right to vote for the first time, and were praised for their enthusiastic engagement in the process.

The recent changes appeared to signal an important turning point for young people, and were widely praised for helping to create a whole new generation of politically charged teenagers getting involved in the decisions which affect their lives.

However, the House of Lords voted against an idea put forward to extend the right to vote for 16 and 17-year-olds to also include voting in the EU Referendum.

Voting for 16 and 17-year-olds appears to be a privilege reserved only for Scottish elections, with the Conservative Party at Westminster in no hurry to change the nationwide minimum age to vote to 16. This is despite numerous calls from other parties such as Labour and the Lib Dems to lower the limit. These parties have argued that the impact of this Referendum is predicted to last long into the future, and it would therefore make sense to allow the next generation to have their say.

Polls conducted by the Electoral Commission after the Scottish Referendum showed that 75% of people aged 16-17 voted – more than the number of 18-34 year olds.

Notre Dame's Head Teacher, Mr McGovern, can see clear benefits to allowing 16 and 17-year-olds a vote on Britain's membership of the EU. He commented: "It is only fair young people have representation as they will be here longer."

He added: "16 to 18 year olds participated admirably in the Scottish Referendum and it is only right that they are allowed to vote in EU Referendum."

Politically-minded pupils within the school have also raised their concerns over the Lords' decision to bar youngsters from taking part. First Year Simon McDonald, aged 12, commented: "Everyone should have their say as it is going to affect them."

Deputy Head Boy, 17-year-old Kenneth McClure, misses out on the EU vote by just a few weeks. He declared: "If I was 18 a few weeks earlier, I'd be able to vote. I'd vote to stay in the EU. I'm annoyed that I'm being deprived of the vote when I know that I'm more politically engaged than a lot of people who do have the vote.

"The age should have definitely been lowered to 16 after events such as the Scottish Independence debate at the Hydro showed thousands of young people are clearly engaged in politics."