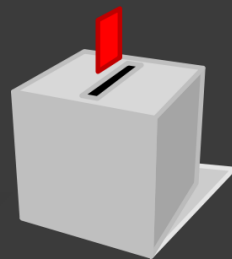




# Candidate Hub:

a manifesto on voter apathy

Voter apathy in the United Kingdom is an ever-increasing feature of our once highly-regarded democracy.<sup>1</sup>



Low election turnouts due to voter apathy are a cause of concern in the UK. General Election turnouts have fallen from 77.7% to 65.1% between 1992 and 2010, with the projections for 2015 looking worse again.<sup>2</sup>

Low turnouts are indicative of failing democracies and result in unequal representation. In the UK, there is a genuine disconnect between people and the policies that affect their lives. This cannot be allowed to continue.

1 - <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/apathy-alienation-how-disengaged-four-in-ten-voters-reject-all-parties-8940389.html>

2 - <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/nov/16/uk-election-turnouts-historic>



## Candidate Hub

In 2012, the Manchester Central by-election attracted a turnout of only 18%. Although by-elections are expected to have low turnouts, due to a lack of public awareness and media attention, 18% is the lowest turnout for any election in Post-War Britain.<sup>3</sup> This result follows the constituency's general election turn-out of just 44.3% in 2010, the lowest in the UK.<sup>4</sup>

There has obviously been some disconnect between the people of this constituency and the parties and candidates vying to represent them. The Guardian interviewed some young people in the Manchester Central constituency to inquire about their lack of participation, one respondent replied that he wouldn't vote because he didn't "know much about politics".<sup>5</sup> The problem might not be solved easily, but more has to be done.

3 - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-20346068>

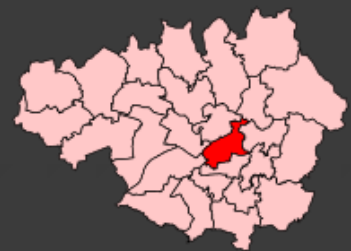
4 - <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN01467/elections-turnout>

5 - <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2013/dec/26/voter-apathy-manchester-central-video>



## Candidate Hub

A worry with the Manchester Central by-election is that if only 18% of the population vote, the MP could easily be elected by less than 10% of the electorate. If that's the case, then it's as good as election by sample data. The constituency in question is usually considered a Labour safe seat, and that was the result of the election. Nevertheless, approximately 12.5% of the electorate actually elected their member of Parliament. This definitely does not imply a successful or representative democracy.



In the last months of 2013, Russell Brand became the poster-boy for voter apathy. His assertion that the electorate should not vote is worrisome, but it is hard to disagree with some of the points he makes. It is worth voting, and even less than optimal changes have their merit once achieved. One solution would be a reconsideration of the voting mindset.



## Candidate Hub

There are two quotes from Russell Brand in his interview with Jeremy Paxman that particularly stood out: “It’s not that I am not voting out of apathy, I am not voting out of absolute indifference” and “The apathy does not come from us, the people, the apathy comes from the politicians that are apathetic to our needs”.<sup>6</sup>

This suggests numerous problems with the system, but one of the more reparable is the relationship between our MPs and the electorate. If we know more about the candidates before going into a polling station, we are able to pick those who sound the most perceptive to our needs. We can encourage candidates to be in-touch with our needs simply by creating a level of engagement with voters that transcends typical Party Politics. Voter apathy allows MPs to become lazy and detached, which should be undesirable to all.

<sup>6</sup> - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YR4CseY9pk>



## Candidate Hub

This lazy detachment became the subject of the 2011 documentary, 'ToryBoy The Movie' in which a Labour supporter turned Conservative candidate stood for the safe Labour seat of Middlesbrough in the 2010 General Election.

### TORYBOY THE MOVIE



In the documentary, John Walsh, the candidate and filmmaker, found that many of the constituents had never heard of their incumbent Labour MP, let alone met him. There was total apathy towards him as a person, but also no desire in the slightest to change parties. This suggests that the Labour Party failed the constituency by not properly scrutinising their candidate.



## Candidate Hub

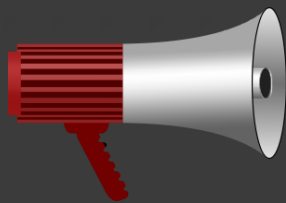
If constituents were presented with more vivid depictions of their candidates, then there would be a change in the way people vote. Surely it's better to have a committed representative in Parliament than an empty seat, regardless of party. In this case, parties may reconsider the candidates that they choose for their 'safe' seats, and be more active in providing strong representation.

This misrepresentation or even lack of representation is a major cause of voter disinterest, but there appear to be numerous others.<sup>7</sup> People surveyed by the Guardian/ICM poll have become disillusioned by their MPs. Of the reasons mentioned, at the very least there should be improvements on the extent to which politicians say what they believe. Voters should also be able to distinguish between different candidates as individuals, even if their parties appear similar, or unrepresentative.

7 - <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/26/fury-mps-not-voting-poll>

## Candidate Hub

Many constituencies have plenty of candidates outside of the 3 biggest parties, and they often hold views that differ from those of their more mainstream competitors. These candidates are ignored either because they are considered a 'wasted vote' or because they haven't been able to express their views to the electorate.



Candidate Hub could change this. In a non-Proportional voting system, it's difficult to consider lesser known parties or independent candidates as viable choices. This attitude is wrong due to its self-perpetuation. If presented as candidates rather than parties, in a logical format, people may be able to reconcile this 'wasted vote' syndrome with the idea that other candidates may better represent their ideals. The same applies to loyal voters voting against their party for a stronger candidate.



## Candidate Hub

Candidate Hub will also offer a more equal platform to all candidates, regardless of campaign funding. We are aware of the high cost of producing and mailing electoral literature which has often been created by the party and thus is not entirely representative of the candidate anyway. We are also aware that it is not easy to compare candidates in this way. Presenting information about candidates for every UK constituency in a single place would be preferable, and lead to a more democratic society.

This is our idea.





## Candidate Hub

Candidate Hub will be the first site in the UK that aims to not only list every candidate, but also to contact them, to obtain a short biography, and to ask them questions that represent the political climate in the UK and individual constituencies.

Every constituency will have its own page, with the candidates profiles in a vertical layout, each having their own section. In order to eliminate bias, the order of the candidates will be randomly generated for every load of the page. The site will be optimised for mobile devices due to the changing way in which information is consumed.

A picture of each candidate will be shown where possible, as well as a paragraph by the candidate describing themselves, and highlighting past experience. Contact details will also be provided. Our most important feature though, will be the questions.



## Candidate Hub

We will start the process by asking every candidate across the candidate a set of 6 questions. These should help the electorate gauge the candidate's ideals in relation to their own as well as laying out broad aims in Parliament for the 5 year term.

After this process is complete, we will ask for questions from constituents that they would like to ask all of their candidates, perhaps about the local area and plans in that respect.

This should then let the electorate discover something about how engaged the candidates are with public opinion and how their ideas of progression of the area differ from their own.

We hope that all candidates will be eager to answer these questions. It is the ideal opportunity for them to present themselves to voters and highlight the reasons they think they should be elected MP.



## Candidate Hub

For those candidates who refuse to answer our questions, or ignore us completely, we will mark their profile with an X, to highlight their reluctance to present their views to their public. We will stress the importance of not copying answers from party literature to all candidates.

All answers will be 150 words or less to make the information digestible, but not too limited. Answers may be amended, but the amendment can only consist of an additional 50 words, with the original answer remaining to promote honesty and transparency.

Candidate is a completely independent and neutral organisation, the only politicians we disapprove of are inactive ones.

For any questions or suggestions about any of our manifesto, contact [info@candidatehub.co.uk](mailto:info@candidatehub.co.uk)  
Candidate Hub.