



# Open Up!

Report of the Speaker's Commission  
on Digital Democracy

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# Foreword

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Over the past 25 years we have lived through a revolution – created by the birth of the world wide web and the rapid development of digital technology. This digital revolution has disrupted old certainties and challenged representative democracy at its very heart. With social media sources such as Twitter, blogs and 24/7 media, the citizen has more sources of information than ever before, yet citizens appear to operate at a considerable distance from their representatives and appear ‘disengaged’ from democratic processes. The jargon and practices of the House can be alienating and the sheer weight of information about politics, now available, can act as a wall, keeping the citizen out of the mysterious world of Westminster.

An important part of the work for the individual holding the office of Speaker is to be a champion of democracy, an advocate for the House of Commons and a public catalyst for participation in politics. As Speaker I have tried to encourage greater participation in politics from the widest possible range of people. Hence, I established this unique Commission to consider the challenges and opportunities for our democracy that digital technology presents. Over the past year the Commission has heard a range of voices and actively sought the views of people outside the traditional political infrastructure.

I hope that you will find this report informative and thought-provoking, and see that the Commission has tried to set out the start of a roadmap for improving and opening up the workings of the House of Commons.

I would like to thank all the members of the Digital Democracy Commission for their energy and commitment over the last year and everyone who was involved in our inquiry via social media, participating in events, suggesting ideas and giving evidence.



# Summary

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## Key targets and recommendations

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The Commission has outlined five key targets and a number of recommendations which are a route map for the House of Commons to meet these targets:

**By 2020, the House of Commons should ensure that everyone can understand what it does.**

**By 2020, Parliament should be fully interactive and digital.**

**The 2015 newly elected House of Commons should create immediately a new forum for public participation in the debating function of the House of Commons.**

**By 2020, secure online voting should be an option for all voters.**

**By 2016, all published information and broadcast footage produced by Parliament should be freely available online in formats suitable for re-use. Hansard should be available as open data by the end of 2015.**

# Recommendations

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## 1. By 2020, the House should ensure that everyone can understand what it does

To map out how it will reach this target, the House of Commons should develop a new communications strategy with the aim of:

- increasing public awareness of the role of Parliament and MP, and
- increasing public participation in the work of Parliament.

It should build on previous experience to focus on what works and what is most cost-effective. (Recommendation 1)

The House of Commons should take action, during the 2015-16 session, to make parliamentary language and communications easier to understand. This should include:

- simplifying and clarifying parliamentary language, including procedural terms;
- developing digital tools such as jargon busters to help readers understand parliamentary language and processes, including the law-making process;
- clarifying and simplifying online and printed communications; and
- the wider use of aids for people with disabilities and sensory impairments such as British Sign Language translations and subtitles for video material to help the hard of hearing to engage with Parliament. (Recommendation 4)

The House of Commons should pilot a new procedure for amending bills so that amendments can be written, debated and voted on in plain English. (Recommendation 5)

The Commission recommends that Parliament's website should use more infographic and visual data to help provide alternative methods of accessing content and to improve transparency. While the Commission acknowledges the need for intellectual rigour in parliamentary reports and other publications, lengthy documents can act as a barrier to citizen engagement with democracy, particularly for those with learning difficulties, special needs or just limited time. For example, the Register of Members' Financial Interests could be transformed into a more accessible document for voters by the use of icons to represent data. (Recommendation 2)

The Commission recommends that improving the search function on the parliamentary website should be a priority for the new parliamentary digital service. (Recommendation 7). It should also provide tools to help people track Parliament's activities on specific issues. These should be easy to find and register for. (Recommendation 9)



The House of Commons should make more real-time information available online, including details of who is speaking in debates. It should also experiment further with live social media coverage of what is said in debates. (Recommendation 10)

The Commission recommends that the current restrictions on members of the public taking mobile electronic devices into the House of Commons chamber and Westminster Hall debates are removed. (Recommendation 11)

The House of Commons should formally adopt the principles set out in the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness. (Recommendation 34)

The Commission encourages the Department for Education to improve the provision of political education within schools using digital means. (Recommendation 3)

## 2. By 2020, the House of Commons should be fully interactive and digital

The House should experiment with new ways for the public to:

- put forward questions for ministers (Recommendation 19), and
- contribute to different stages of the law-making process, primarily by digital means. (Recommendation 17)

Select committees should make greater use of social media and online advertising to reach out to new audiences and raise awareness of their work. They should also experiment with using digital to involve people more in committee work. (Recommendation 16)

Parliament should step up its work to build links with community organisations and services to help ensure that the digitally excluded are given local support to engage with Parliament online. (Recommendation 20)

As part of its new, professional communications strategy the House of Commons should, in 2015-16, pilot and test new online activities, working with national and local partners, to target and engage specific groups who are not currently engaged in the democratic process. These target groups could include, for example: 18-25 year olds not at university, people with learning difficulties, homeless people and people living in communities with very low voter turnout. (Recommendation 12)

The House of Commons should take further steps to improve active involvement by young people. This might include:

- encouraging young people to participate in the e-petitions system, and
  - youth issue-focused debates which involve young people and MPs.
- (Recommendation 13)

The Digital Democracy Commission recommends that Parliament should seize the opportunity that restoration and renewal work provides to improve facilities to assist MPs in their work for the public and ensure the fabric of Parliament is fit for the future. (Recommendation 28)

The new parliamentary digital service should identify tools to help increase the volume and quality of interaction between MPs and their constituents. It should involve MPs and constituents in the development of these tools to ensure that an increase in communications is manageable by everyone involved. (Recommendation 14)

The Commission acknowledges the work on cyber harassment and security that has been conducted by others, but recommends that:

- the political parties urgently review what measures they have in place to support candidates at the next General Election who may be subjected to abuse of digital technology in the form of cyber harassment;
  - the House urgently reviews measures to support MPs subject to cyber harassment;
  - this review is carried out in tandem with the ongoing work regarding improving cyber-security to ensure that MPs can carry out their duties effectively, efficiently and in the sure knowledge that the confidentiality of their constituents is protected.
- (Recommendation 15)

During the next session of Parliament the House of Commons should move to record votes using MPs' smart identity cards but retain the tradition of walking through division lobbies. (Recommendation 29). It should also pilot an electronic version of the practice of 'nodding through' MPs who are physically unable to go through the division lobbies, which would enable MPs who are unwell, or have childcare responsibilities, or a disability, to vote away from the chamber. (Recommendation 30)

Parliament, working with the Government and other stakeholders, should introduce, by the end of 2016, a new set of online tools for drafting, amending and publishing legislation which are easier to use, and provide open data about bills and amendments. (Recommendation 6)

The House of Commons should identify more areas where a digital-first approach can lead to service improvements as well as increased efficiency. (Recommendation 27)

By the end of 2015, Parliament should have in place a strategy to ensure that it has the skills it needs to meet the target of being digital and interactive by 2020. The strategy must ensure that the Head of Digital has sufficient means to recruit and retain staff with the specialist digital skills that Parliament needs. (Recommendation 33)

### 3. The 2015 newly elected House of Commons should create immediately a new forum for public participation in the debating function of the House of Commons

We believe the public want the opportunity to have their say in House of Commons debates; we also believe that this will provide a useful resource for MPs and help to enhance those debates. We therefore recommend a unique experiment: the use of regular digital public discussion forums to inform debates held in Westminster Hall. This innovation might be known as the “Cyber Chamber” or “Open House.” If at the end of the next Parliament it has been successful, it could then be extended to debates in the main House of Commons chamber itself. (Recommendation 18)

### 4. In 2020, secure online voting should be an option for all voters. (Recommendation 26)

The Speaker’s Commission wishes to encourage increased efforts in voter education and recommends a fresh, bold, look at the national curriculum in this regard. (Recommendation 21)

The Commission strongly encourages the political education bodies and charities to consider how to make available and publicise trustworthy information about candidates and their policies, including by means of voter advice applications. (Recommendation 22)

The Digital Democracy Commission also notes a clear indication from a range of comments received that the profile and knowledge of the Electoral Commission needs to be improved, as it is a vital source of information to voters, with a website that is an Aladdin’s cave for those wishing to participate in the UK’s political process. (Recommendation 23)

The DDC recommends that the Electoral Commission should consider how best to establish a digital election ‘results bank’. (Recommendation 24)

The Commission fully endorses the draft Political and Constitutional Reform Committee recommendation that “the Government and the Electoral Commission should examine the changes which can be made to provide more and better information to voters, and should actively support the work of outside organisations working to similar goals.” (Recommendation 25)

5. By 2016, all published information and broadcast footage produced by Parliament should be freely available online in formats suitable for re-use. Hansard should be available as open data by the end of 2015.

All parliamentary information in the public domain should be made available to the public as downloadable data in formats which make them easy to re-use. Hansard and the register of MPs' interests should be made available as open data by the end of 2015, followed by bills. (Recommendation 31)

We recommend that Erskine May, the definitive guide to parliamentary procedure, should be freely available online by the time the next edition is produced. (Recommendation 32)

Parliament should make its audio-visual coverage of debates and committees freely available for anyone to download and re-use without unreasonable copyright restrictions by the end of 2015. (Recommendation 8)



# 1 Introduction

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The Commission started by looking at how Parliament could use digital technology to work more effectively and in a way that people expect in the modern world. We also considered how digital could enhance the voting system, as this is a fundamental part of the UK's system of representative democracy. We asked people to tell us their views online or in person and we heard from a wide a range of people. They included not just experts, MPs and interest groups, but members of the public—people of different ages and backgrounds and people with varying levels of interest in politics and the work of Parliament.

One message that resonated very clearly was that digital is only part of the answer. It can help to make democratic processes easier for people to understand and take part in, but other barriers must also be addressed for digital to have a truly transformative effect. As the Democratic Society put it:

“[T]echnology in itself is not a panacea and it will not effectively correct poor existing practices...we need to look beyond new digital tools to existing processes that do and do not work, and then critically explore how technology can help us to make democracy work better.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Barriers to engaging with Parliament

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As people told us about their experiences of voting, contacting their MP or finding out about Parliament—or why they do not do those things—some of the barriers to getting involved became clear. These included:

- lack of understanding about politics and Parliament
- jargon and unclear language
- difficulty finding information about Parliament and its activities
- feeling that Parliament is not relevant
- feeling that participating will be pointless and that politicians do not listen
- lack of opportunities to be involved with Parliament

It is imperative that these barriers are addressed if every UK citizen is to have equal access to democracy in the UK. We already know that some people are more likely than others to take part in activities such as voting, signing an e-petition, or trying to influence political decision-making.<sup>2</sup> For example, women, people from lower socio-economic groups, young people and the less educated are less likely to be politically engaged.<sup>3</sup> This means that some groups are having more of a say than others. So, taking action to address the barriers we have outlined will not only make Parliament more accessible, but might also help to increase the diversity of people who are politically active.

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1 Digi058 [Democratic Society]

2 Hansard Society, *Anti-Politics: Characterising and Accounting for Political Disaffection*; Digi084 [Professor Charles Pattie]

3 Hansard Society, *Anti-Politics: Characterising and Accounting for Political Disaffection*; Digi084 [Professor Charles Pattie]

## Key points people have made to us



We care about  
issues not politics



Speak in  
plain English



Stop  
broadcasting  
at us



To take part in Parliament  
you need to understand it



We don't have time  
to read everything



Go to where  
people are



We want  
genuine dialogue



Tell us what's  
going on

Figure 1: What people have said to the Commission

## 1.2 Overcoming barriers

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Not everyone wants to vote or to take part in the political decision-making process, but people should not be prevented from taking part because they do not understand how to, or because they do not feel confident enough about their political knowledge. In our report we focus on how the barriers we have outlined could be overcome. The main areas we look at are:

- improving public understanding about politics and Parliament
- reducing jargon and making language easier to understand
- making it easier to find out what's going on in Parliament
- relating Parliament's work to people's lives
- reaching out to under-represented groups
- widening opportunities for genuine participation
- tackling digital exclusion
- ensuring the public have a good experience of engaging with Parliament
- elections and voting

We focus mainly on what Parliament could do, using digital technology, to achieve these aims. Where appropriate, we highlight the actions that other bodies could take to increase access to democracy. We also discuss how to ensure that people who are less able to take advantage of digital are not left behind as democracy becomes more digital. Finally, we outline what a fully digital Parliament might look like, and highlight some of the tools and skills that will be needed to bring it into being.

Parliament is made up of two independent bodies, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Although our recommendations are addressed mainly to the House of Commons, we hope that they will also be of interest to the Lords, and we know that many members of the House of Lords follow digital developments closely. We have often referred to Parliament rather than the Commons because digital services will better meet the needs of the public, as well as being more efficient, if information about both Houses of Parliament is fully integrated and available in the same place.



## 2 Improving public understanding about politics and Parliament

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Without a basic knowledge of Parliament and politics, citizens will have difficulty in engaging with them at the most fundamental level. If you do not know what Parliament and MPs do, you might not see any reason to vote. As one younger person put it, “to care about politics you need to know about it.”<sup>4</sup>

Some of the people we heard from knew a lot about Parliament, but others knew very little. Some told us that they had no idea what MPs did. Others understood that MPs are elected to Parliament to represent their interests, but had little understanding of what this meant in practice or what the day-to-day work of an MP involves. People also confused Parliament with Government, not realising that they have very different roles.<sup>5</sup> Some of those who had the least knowledge about these issues reported having very low levels of engagement.

Young people in particular were seen as a group who may not engage with the democratic process because they did not know enough about politics.<sup>6</sup> For example, one younger person said that they didn’t know anyone their age who had a clue what politicians talked about or did and that this made it difficult for them to vote.<sup>7</sup>

The Commission was struck by the effect that this lack of understanding has on our democratic system, with many citizens feeling disconnected from MPs and Parliament. We welcome the ongoing work to increase public understanding of Parliament, particularly

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4 Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014

5 Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014; Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014

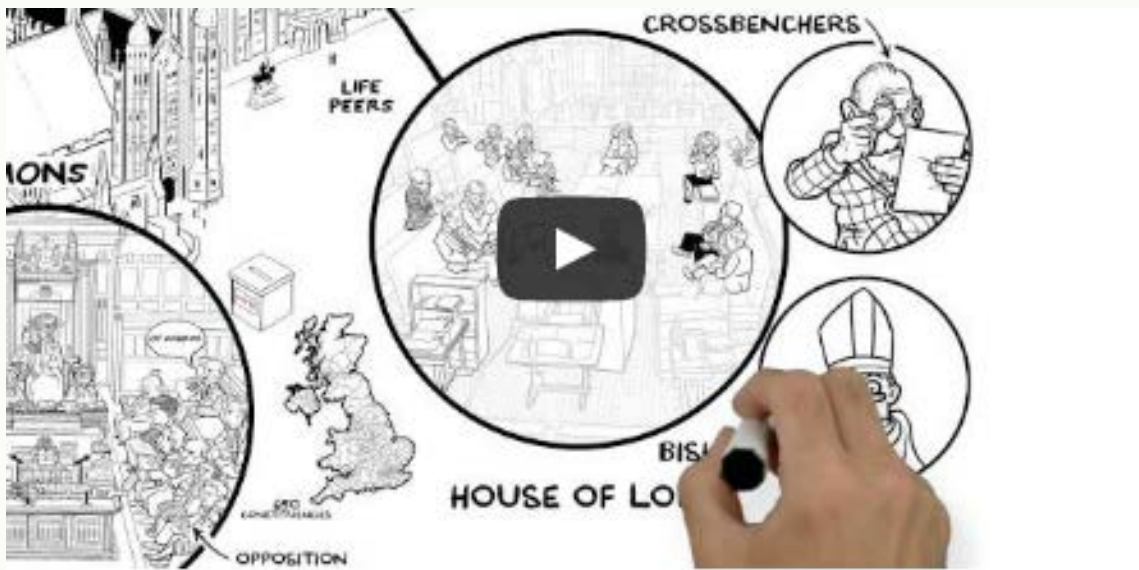
6 Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014; Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014; Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014

7 Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014

through its outreach and education work.<sup>8</sup> However, very few of the community groups and individuals we talked to were aware of this. We strongly believe that more progress needs to be made on raising public awareness of:

- Parliament and how it works,
- the role of MPs, and
- ways in which the public can engage with Parliament.

This would help to show how Parliament and politics can be relevant to citizens' lives.



Video by Parliament's Education Service: how Parliament works in 90 seconds

We are setting Parliament the challenge of ensuring that by 2020 everyone can understand what it does. Achieving this goal would go a long way towards ensuring that no one is prevented from participating in democratic processes such as voting because of a lack of understanding.

1. **By 2020, the House should ensure that everyone can understand what it does. To map out how it will reach this target, the House of Commons should develop a new communications strategy with the aim of:**
  - **increasing public awareness of the role of Parliament and MPs and**
  - **increasing public participation in the work of Parliament.**

It should build on previous experience to focus on what works and what is most cost-effective.

## 2.1 Updating online content

The parliamentary website has a key role to play in raising awareness about Parliament and MPs, but the way information is presented needs to be more accessible. People are becoming more used to accessing information in bite-sized chunks, infographics or video format, and they should be able to do this on the parliamentary website.<sup>9</sup> This would be particularly helpful for people with learning difficulties. One group said:

“People learn and understand information in different ways - not everyone can read lengthy documents. Different media needs to be used so that everyone can understand such as short digestible videos.”<sup>10</sup>

2. **The Commission recommends that Parliament’s website should use more infographic and visual data to help provide alternative methods of accessing content and to improve transparency. While the Commission acknowledges the need for intellectual rigour in parliamentary reports and other publications, lengthy documents can act as a barrier to citizen engagement with democracy, particularly for those with learning difficulties, special needs or just limited time. For example, the Register of Members’ Financial Interests could be transformed into a more accessible document for voters by the use of icons to represent data.**

## 2.2 Political education

Young people told us that better political education in schools is one of the main things that could improve their understanding of Parliament and politics. Some said that the political education they had received at school had not been very useful and that they lacked the basic information they needed to understand and engage with Parliament.<sup>11</sup> One group recommended that political literacy courses covering issues such as how laws are made and how government works should be provided alongside citizenship education to help prepare young people for “their voting age responsibilities upon leaving formal education.”<sup>12</sup>

We welcome the fact that Parliament’s new education centre will increase the number of school visits it receives to 100,000 a year in 2016. Parliament should continue to work in partnership with schools and other organisations to support political education by providing visits and resources.

3. **The Commission encourages the Department for Education to improve the provision of political education within schools using digital means.**

9 Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014; NIACE London roundtable 10 September 2014; Roundtable Leicester 4 September 2014; Chesterfield roundtable 30 June 2014; Secondary students roundtable 18 July 2014

10 NIACE Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014

11 Stockport roundtable 11.08.14; Roundtable Leicester 4 September 2014; Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014

12 Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014

### 3 Reducing jargon and making parliamentary language more accessible

The jargon used in Parliament can make it harder for people to understand and engage with its activities and processes. These processes need to have names to help users to refer to them, but parliamentary language can be intimidating.<sup>13</sup> One group gave examples of jargon that people outside Parliament are unlikely to understand:

“The average person has no idea of the difference in significance between an adjournment debate, a back bench committee debate and a ten minute rule bill.”<sup>14</sup>



Parliamentary Language by Alex Mitchel ([www.alexmitchel.com](http://www.alexmitchel.com))

Making parliamentary language more accessible will be central to opening up Parliament. Digital tools such as jargon busters could help people to understand complex parliamentary

<sup>13</sup> Chesterfield roundtable 30 June 2014; Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014

<sup>14</sup> Edinburgh roundtable 16 June 2014

language. However, a more fundamental approach would be to make parliamentary language simpler.<sup>15</sup>



One group also suggested that there should be greater use of British Sign Language translations and subtitles, for example against parliamentary debates, to help the hard of hearing to engage with Parliament.<sup>16</sup>

4. **The House of Commons should take action, during the 2015-16 session, to make parliamentary language and communications easier to understand. This should include:**
  - **simplifying and clarifying parliamentary language, including procedural terms;**
  - **developing digital tools such as jargon busters to help readers understand parliamentary language and processes, including the law-making process;**
  - **clarifying and simplifying online and printed communications; and**
  - **the wider use of aids for people with disabilities and sensory impairments such as British Sign Language translations and subtitles for video material to help the hard of hearing to engage with Parliament.**

## 3.1 Language and law-making

The language used in draft laws, or bills, and the law-making process can be particularly complex, and this is a barrier to understanding.<sup>17</sup> Laws and the law-making process should be as accessible as possible, because we should all be able to understand how laws affect us.<sup>18</sup>

We welcome the work that the Cabinet Office is doing, through its Good Law project, to improve the quality of laws. It has been working to reduce unnecessary complexity in the way laws are drafted and to present Acts of Parliament in more accessible ways online.

<sup>15</sup> Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014; Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014; Gov Camp Cymru 26 September 2014, Brighton roundtable 17 September 2014

<sup>16</sup> NIACE London roundtable 10 September 2014

<sup>17</sup> Digi006 [Elliot Hughes]; Digi002 [Nottingham university student union]; Lyndsay Hope on web forum, 18 March 2014; John Flood on web forum, 21 March 2014; Terence Eden on web forum, 20 March 2014; Digi017 William Perrin; student forum on making laws

<sup>18</sup> Digi005 [Paul Robinson]; Digi008 Jordan Milton; Digi002 [NUS Notts]; Nick Booth, on web forum, 7 March 2014; Shane McCracken on web forum 19 March 2014; Terence Eden on web forum, 20 March 2014; Sailesh Patel on web forum 30 March 2014; John Sheridan (National Archive), oral evidence to the Commission on 18 March 2014; Digi003 [Involve]; Digi019 [Argyro Karanasiou, Centre for Intellectual Property Policy & Management, Bournemouth University]

Even MPs, with their close involvement with the law-making process, said they found it challenging at times to make sense of the legalistic language in draft laws and amendments.<sup>19</sup> When they consider draft laws in detail, they suggest ways that the law could be amended to make it better, and these proposed amendments are also written in complex language. Full Fact said that a plain language description of what each amendment does should be published alongside the amendments to help the public understand what MPs are voting on.<sup>20</sup> This is already done for some amendments but is not compulsory and we hope to see it quickly become the norm.<sup>21</sup>

A more radical approach would be to change the way that amendments are written and debated. They could be written in plain English, and this would enable MPs to focus on the effect of the amendment rather than on technical drafting. Amendments could be voted on in the usual way, with technical drafting then being provided by legal experts.<sup>22</sup> We are attracted by this suggestion but we also recognise that it would be a radical departure from the current system. Careful consideration and piloting would be required before it could be taken forward.

**5. The House of Commons should pilot a new procedure for amending bills so that amendments can be written, debated and voted on in plain English.**

Even with improved drafting, laws can only be simplified so far, so digital tools to help readers make sense of complex language in bills and other legislative documents would be of significant value to law-makers and citizens. We received many suggestions for ways that digital tools could help to simplify legal language. A popular proposal was for plain English annotations or jargon-busters to help people understand bills.<sup>23</sup> A more interactive idea was that citizens should be able to tag, highlight and discuss aspects of legislation.<sup>24</sup>

Developing digital tools to keep tabs on changes to the law and cut through the complexity of legal language would be easier if the software used to draft bills and amendments was geared up to support this kind of task. There is currently a project under way to introduce a more joined-up, digital-first drafting system, which we strongly support.

**6. Parliament, working with the Government and other stakeholders, should introduce, by the end of 2016, a new set of online tools for drafting, amending and publishing legislation which are easier to use and provide open data about bills and amendments.**

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19 MPs' roundtable 15 July 2014

20 Digi035 [Full Fact]

21 House of Commons Procedure Committee, Explanatory statements on amendments, 6 February 2013

22 Oral evidence to the Commission on legislation, 18 March 2014.

23 Digi008 Jordan Milton; Digi006 [Elliot Hughes]; Sailesh Patel on web forum 30 March 14; Nick Booth, on web forum, 7 March 2014; Digi019 [Argyro Karanasiou, Centre for Intellectual Property Policy & Management, Bournemouth University] ; Digi016 [Mark D. Ryan and Gurchetan S. Grewal]; Digi017 William Perrin

24 Digi086 [Cristian Vaccari, New Political Communication Unit, Royal Holloway, University of London]

# 4 Making it easier to find out what is going on in Parliament

A range of people including citizens, organisations, professionals and lobbyists need to access a variety of information from Parliament. As people become more and more used to accessing information online, they increasingly expect to be able to do this in different ways, for example by watching a short video or accessing raw data. Balancing these competing demands and meeting people’s growing needs is an ongoing challenge for Parliament.

## 4.1 The parliamentary website

The parliamentary website is a primary source of information about Parliament for members of the public. Figure 2 shows the top five things that people are looking for when they visit the parliamentary website.

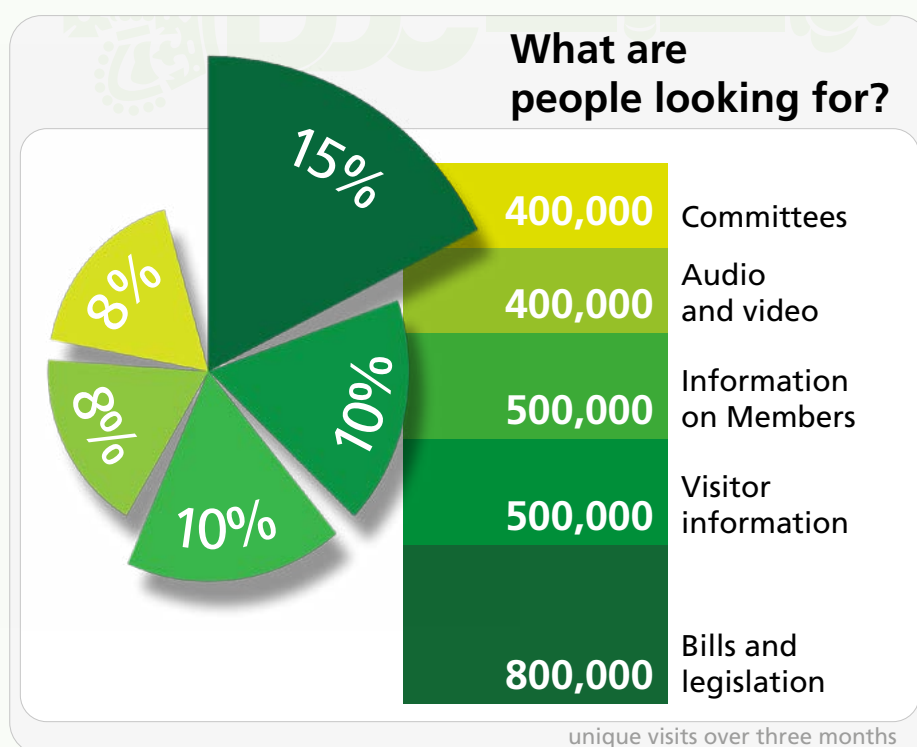


Figure 2 What are people looking for

It should be easy for people to find the information they want about Parliament, whether this is basic information about visiting Parliament or more detailed information about specific issues. Those who visit the parliamentary website will expect the search function to help them find what they are looking for, but this has been flagged up as a key weakness.<sup>25</sup> Lord Kirkwood said:

“[W]e are about to appoint a digital director, and I think one of the first questions he will ask is, ‘Why can’t I just find out anything I want by going into the search engine and typing ‘the Dogs Act current update’, press the button and watch it all unfold?’ ...Google is still better than our parliamentary search engine by a mile.”<sup>26</sup>

7. **The Commission recommends that improving the search function on the parliamentary website should be a priority for the new parliamentary digital service.**



Figure 3: Parliament website throughout the years

## 4.2 Audio-visual content

As the demand for video increases, broadcast footage of debates and committee meetings is increasingly valuable, but access to the footage of speeches in Parliament for MPs, broadcasters and the public is inadequate. It can be very difficult to find online and it takes days rather than minutes to make clips of speeches available for MPs to put on their websites. Instead, it should be easy for MPs to grab their speeches online shortly after they have finished speaking and embed the footage on their website. Members of the public should also be able to use audio visual clips from Parliament in a similar way.

The largest media organisations have limited access to high quality coverage but they currently have to choose in advance what they will cover, so they may miss out on a dynamic exchange between MPs and invited witnesses at a committee meeting.

25 MySociety, Parliament’s Online Services: A Strategic Review containing Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations, March 2014; Lord Kirkwood, Spoken contribution to the DDC on representation, 17 June 2014, Q13

26 Lord Kirkwood, Spoken contribution to the DDC on representation, 17 June 2014, Q13; For more information on the digital director, see chapter 12



Fortunately, Parliament has been investing to put up-to-date technologies in place. High-quality audio-visual footage of the full range of Parliament's activities will be available as a live feed or on demand after the event. We believe that to take advantage of this technical advance, video footage should be freely available to use by the public and by media organisations without charge and without unreasonable copyright restrictions, so that people can see more easily the work that MPs and members of the House of Lords do on their behalf. It is also important that video footage is fully searchable, which means integrating Hansard reports of debates and other information with the audio-visual content.

8. **Parliament should make its audio-visual coverage of debates and committees freely available for anyone to download and re-use without unreasonable copyright restrictions by the end of 2015.**

At present television coverage of the House of Commons is a bit like looking down on a goldfish bowl due to the high position of cameras in the chamber. This gives the proceedings a somewhat detached quality, emphasising the divide between MPs and audience. The Speaker's Advisory Council on Public Engagement has urged the House to introduce new camera angles to give a more gripping television experience.<sup>27</sup> We support this and are pleased to note that a trial will take place after the election.

# 5 Relating Parliament's work to people's lives

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It is often suggested that people are not interested in political issues and that is why they do not vote or otherwise engage with politics. We do not agree. Some of the people we heard from said they were turned off by party or mainstream politics. But when we dug a little deeper, we found that they were interested in political issues, such as education and welfare. Even the most disengaged from the political process, including people who had never voted, could not be described as not caring. As Dr Andy Williamson put it:

“The public are not disengaged. They are disengaged from party politics; they are disengaged from adversarial politics; they are disengaged from wasting their time; they do not feel that they make any difference—but they are not disengaged.”<sup>28</sup>

We hope that opening up Parliament to the public and making it more accessible online will encourage more people to engage. But we are also aware that people who are not currently having their say on political issues are unlikely to start getting involved just because they can do it online. There will need to be other triggers to motivate them. For a start, they will need to believe that it is worth their while, so opportunities to engage must be genuine.

## 5.1 Linking to issues that people care about

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People's interest in politics tends to be linked to current affairs and issues that are of particular importance to them. We agree with the Hansard Society that Parliament could be better at identifying issues coming up that are likely to be of interest and “seeding links to relevant parliamentary content.” It told us:

“On the most topical issues of the day more effort should be made to curate material from across Parliament in order to create an essential ‘go to’ online resource hub for any person or organisation that is interested in it – e.g. phone hacking or House of Lords reform.”<sup>29</sup>

This kind of issues-focused approach could be applied more widely, so that it is easier for people to tune into what Parliament is doing on issues that they care about. For example, members of our student forum suggested that people should be able to sign up to receive alerts when Parliament is looking at particular topics—“like an rss feed for politics”.<sup>30</sup> Some alerts are already available, but there is an urgent need for more and better digital tools to help people to track Parliament's activities on issues that they care about.

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28 Dr Andy Williamson, Spoken contribution on representation, Q23

29 Digi089a Hansard Society

30 Student forum on engagement

9. We recommend that the new parliamentary digital service should focus on providing tools to help people to track Parliament’s activities on specific issues. These should be easy to find and register for.

## 5.2 Going to where people are

A key message that came through in our discussions with people was that Parliament needed to get better at ‘going to where people are’ to engage with them, by connecting with people in the digital spaces where they spend their time and in the way they like to connect. For example, many people, especially younger people, asked for more video and social media, pointing out that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are where people spend a lot of time.<sup>31</sup>

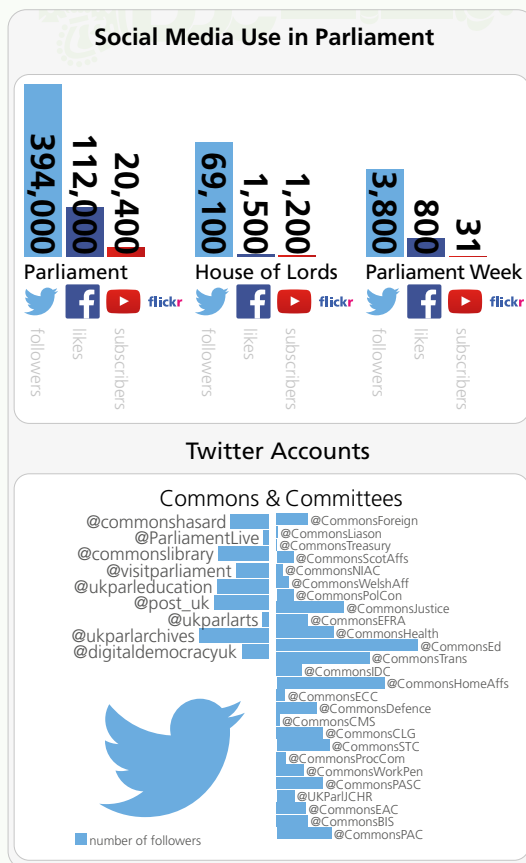


Figure 4: Social media use in Parliament

31 British Youth Council Birmingham roundtable 11 October 2014; Westminster University roundtable 19 May 2014; Digi026 Professor Christian Fuchs, Westminster University; Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 09.05.14; Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014; Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014; NIACE Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014  
NIACE London roundtable 10 September 2014

MPs and Parliament have been steadily increasing their use of social media, and parliamentary staff have been experimenting with the use of hashtags “to raise awareness of the breadth of subjects that are discussed in the Commons and...to help demonstrate the topicality and relevance of the work of the House in scrutinising government.”<sup>32</sup> However, much more could be done using social media—for example, by advertising in social media spaces—to increase people’s awareness of how Parliament’s work is relevant to them.

## 5.3 Increasing access to real-time information

A big advantage of social media is its ability to give people up-to-the minute information about issues they care about in a bite-sized and informal way. Parliament has been experimenting in this area with live tweeting of Prime Minister’s Questions and committee meetings, and we hope to see this experimentation continue.

10. **The House of Commons should make more real-time information available online, including details of who is speaking in debates. It should also experiment further with live social media coverage of what is said in debates.**



Another big advantage of social media is that people can respond to meetings and events in their own words. Up-to-the minute information about Parliament does not need to be one-way. Currently, members of the public who watch parliamentary debates are not allowed to use their phones. But people increasingly expect to be able to tweet and blog live from these kinds of events. Allowing people to take mobile devices in with them would allow them to do this. It might also help people to understand what is going on by enabling them to look up relevant documents, procedural rules and jargon. We note the guidance issued by the Liaison Committee in the Commons, which says that people attending committee meetings may use electronic devices as long as this is not obtrusive.<sup>33</sup>

11. **The Commission recommends that the current restrictions on members of the public taking mobile electronic devices into the House of Commons chamber and Westminster Hall debates are removed.**

32 Digi092 [James Thresher, Digital Outreach Manager]

33 Liaison Committee Guidance on the use of electronic devices in Select Committees October 2011

## 6 Reaching out to under-represented groups

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As we have outlined, some people are more likely than others to take part in democratic activities such as voting, signing an e-petition, or trying to influence political decision-making.<sup>34</sup> Those less likely to participate include women, people from lower socio-economic groups, young people and the less educated.<sup>35</sup>



**Digital Democracy** @digidemocracyuk · Jul 2

Comment from the floor: engagement can't just be from the 'usual suspects' it needs 2 b with ordinary people with ordinary lives #DDCEngage



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<sup>34</sup> Hansard Society, *Anti-Politics: Characterising and Accounting for Political Disaffection*;

<sup>35</sup> Hansard Society, *Anti-Politics: Characterising and Accounting for Political Disaffection*; Digi084 [Professor Charles Pattie]

## Participation Divide

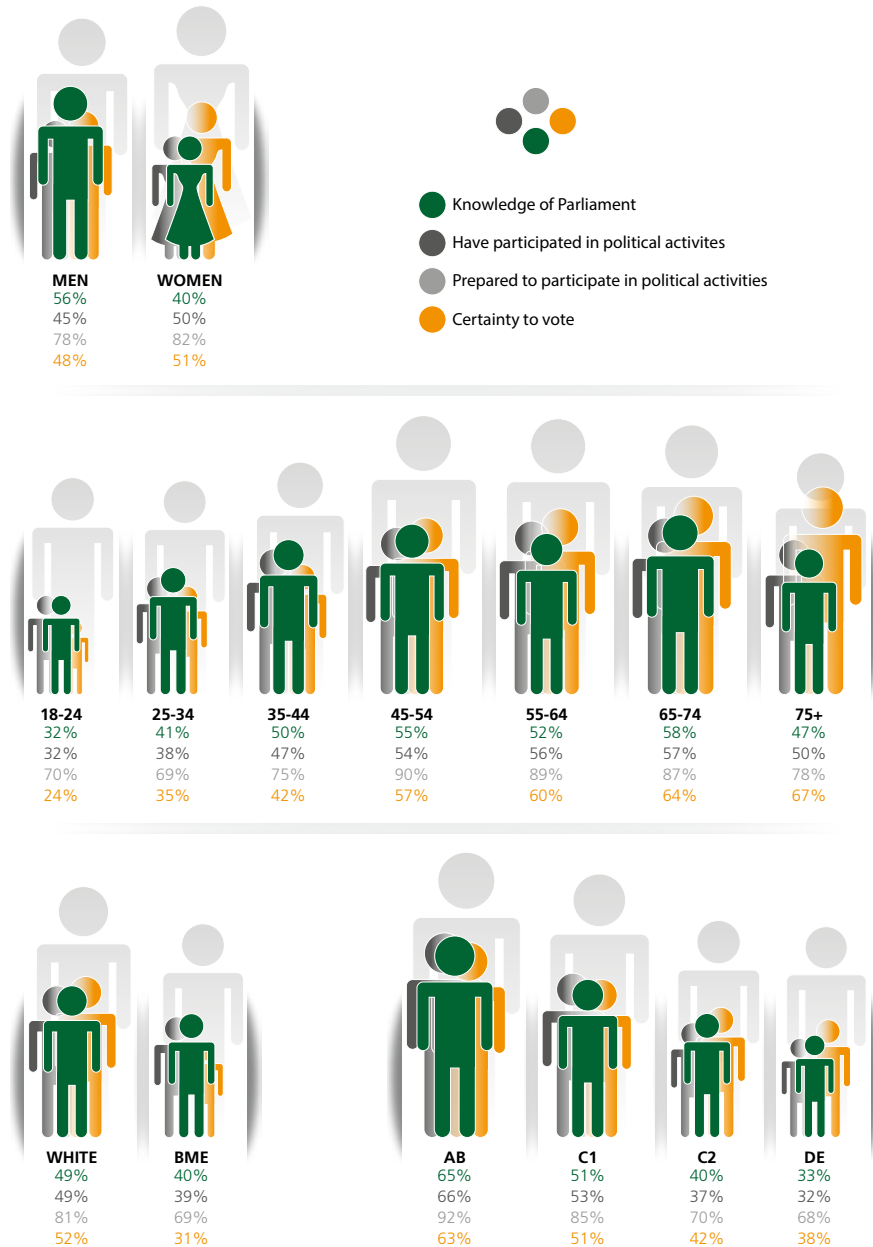


Figure 5 The participation divide. Breakdown by social class etc of people's knowledge of Parliament and likelihood to vote and take part in political activities. (source: Hansard Society, Audit of Political Engagement 11 2014)

The Commission sees the potential of digital technology to increase public participation with Parliament and the democratic process. However, it is important to ensure that it does not simply make it easier for those who are already engaged to have more of a say.<sup>36</sup> Professor Charles Pattie outlined the risk:

“Those already politically engaged are quick to adopt web technologies as yet further ways of engaging. By and large, those who are politically marginalised just do not. Far from being a potential ‘weapon of the weak’ or even just a leveller of the participatory playing field, it seems, web technologies in practice are far more likely to entrench existing inequalities in political access.”<sup>37</sup>

If Parliament is to avoid simply giving a louder voice to the politically engaged and tech-savvy, it must complement its digital engagement opportunities with strategies to reach out to groups who are less likely to engage.<sup>38</sup> This will involve looking at the barriers to involvement and helping people to overcome them. We have already set out how it might go some way towards doing this by helping to improve people’s understanding of Parliament and its activities. Some people also suggested that Parliament should present information in a more dynamic way, rather than sounding “as dull as ditchwater” if it wanted to engage with new audiences.<sup>39</sup>

The Commission understands that most people will not want to participate in parliamentary activities on a frequent basis, but we are convinced that people will be interested in getting involved when Parliament is considering issues that they care about if they think their involvement can make a difference. As one of the people we spoke to put it:

“A citizen’s relationship with Parliament might not be one they have all the time, but one they dip in and out of depending on what issues are being discussed and are affecting them.”<sup>40</sup>

The DDC also notes the importance of face-to-face interaction. Digital has the potential to widen participation on a large scale, but people are more likely to get involved when they are asked to do so in person.<sup>41</sup> One group suggested that democracy cafés—public spaces where people could go to talk about politics in a safe space and get help with going online—might be one way of encouraging people to get involved.

- 12. As part of its new, professional communications strategy the House of Commons should, in 2015-16, pilot and test new online activities, working with national and local partners, to target and engage specific groups who are not currently engaged in democratic processes. These target groups could include, for example: 18-25 year olds not at university, people with learning difficulties, homeless people and people living in communities with very low voter turnout.**

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36 Digi018 [Dr Andy Williamson]; Digi084 [Professor Charles Pattie]; Digi089a [Hansard Society]

37 Digi084 [Professor Charles Pattie]

38 Digi018 [Dr Andy Williamson]

39 Digi89b Britain Thinks and the Hansard Society summary of workshop ‘A listening Parliament?’

40 Edinburgh Roundtable 16 June 2014

41 Digi084 [Professor Charles Pattie]

## 6.1 Young people



Picture from Facebook roundtable event

The Commission is particularly interested in the role of young people in our democracy. We are aware that 18 to 24-year-olds are less likely to vote than other age groups.<sup>42</sup> We also share the concerns of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee that “there will be severe and long-lasting effects for turnout at UK elections, with consequent implications for the health of democracy in the UK” if a generation of young people continue not to vote as they get older.<sup>43</sup> Some of the young people we spoke to also share this concern. One group felt there was a vicious circle:

“Young people are not listened to because they are not voting in sufficient numbers, therefore their concerns are not perceived as important election winning manifesto items; politicians represent those from whom they are likely to garner votes.”<sup>44</sup>

There is a perception that young people are apathetic about politics, but that has not been our experience from our interactions with young people. Many of the young people we spoke to were interested in political issues, and some were also involved with local community groups and initiatives. The evidence we have seen suggests that young people are interested in issues that affect their lives, but they feel that party politics and Parliament

42 House of Commons Library Standard note Elections: Voter turnout January 2014

43 Voter Engagement in the UK: Political and Constitutional Reform Committee

44 Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014



are not relevant to them.<sup>45</sup> Kenny Imafidon, who has written about youth engagement with politics and Parliament, told us:

“Young people are not apathetic to politics they are just apathetic to party politics. Whenever young people are given the genuine opportunity to engage or influence decision-makers they always take it.”<sup>46</sup>

Brian Loader of York University told us that young people are “absolutely disillusioned and fed up with traditional mainstream politics”, and we saw some evidence of this.<sup>47</sup> One group we spoke to at a British Youth Council convention in Birmingham said that they were interested in engaging in political activities but felt that MPs and Parliament were inaccessible and were not interested in hearing from them.<sup>48</sup> Another group said they associated politicians with ‘Punch and Judy’ politics, and that the white, middle-class politicians they saw on television were not representative of the society they lived in.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the biggest barrier to engaging with Parliament and politics that young people experience is a lack of knowledge about political and parliamentary processes. That is why we are recommending that political education should be improved.<sup>50</sup> The way that information about Parliament is presented is also important. Kenny Imafidon told us that “the political system is presented in such a complex and boring way that it becomes a waste of time and energy to try and get to grips with”, and that, “engaging with Parliament and politicians feels impossible to most young people.”<sup>51</sup> We have already outlined how the use of video and bite-sized content could help to make information about Parliament and political issues more accessible.<sup>52</sup> It was also suggested that ambassadors such as youth organisations, respected celebrities, vloggers and young leaders could help to connect young people with Parliament and political activity.<sup>53</sup>

Social media and other digital channels were seen as a good way of connecting with young people because many of them spend a lot of time on these platforms.<sup>54</sup> Brian Loader outlined four key issues for politicians to consider when using social media to connect with young people:

“Top-down one-way communication channels between Parliament and citizens need to be re-assessed...Young people use social media to connect to each other and not to governments...or other traditional institutions. Communication channels therefore need to be co-constructed together with citizens if they are to be effective.

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45 Discussion with Kenny Imafidon, 11 October 2014; Dr Andy Williamson, spoken contribution on representation, Q24; Brian Loader, spoken contribution on engagement, Q74; British Youth Council Convention, Birmingham roundtable, 11 October 2014; Brighton roundtable 17 September 2014, British Youth Council Convention, Birmingham roundtable 11 October 2014; Secondary students roundtable 18 July 2014;

46 Discussion with Kenny Imafidon, 11.10.14

47 Spoken contribution on engagement, Q74;

48 British Youth Council Convention, Birmingham roundtable 11 October 2014

49 Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014

50 See chapter 2 for more on political education.

51 Discussion with Kenny Imafidon, 11 October 2014

52 Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014

53 Hardcopy or hashtag workshops October and November 2014; Discussion at the British Youth Council Convention in Birmingham, 11 October 2014; Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014; Kenny Imafidon discussion 11 October 2014;

54 Digi095 [Brian Loader, University of York]; Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014; Brighton roundtable 17 September 2014; Discussion with Kenny Imafidon, 11 October 2014; Hansard Society, Audit of Political Engagement 11

Young citizens can no longer be regarded as dutiful citizens...They are far less likely to be deferential and far more likely to be critical citizens whose respect and trust needs to be earned.

Neither should young people be regarded as a homogenous group. Their experiences as citizens are shaped by a range of factors including social class, gender, race, sexuality, geography and the like.

Increased use of social media for surveillance means that young citizens are increasingly sceptical about new media and the state.”<sup>55</sup>

Whichever channels are used, it is important that when Parliament and MPs engage with young people, they reinforce a positive message that Parliament is relevant to their lives and that their opinions are valued. One way of doing this would be by helping young people to see that they can have an impact on what Parliament does and on political decision-making.



Parliament's Education Service: Get your voice heard for young people

E-petitions can be a quick and easy way of participating in a democratic process that may have a political impact.<sup>56</sup> We think that Parliament should collaborate with schools, colleges and youth organisations to increase awareness of this avenue of campaigning and connecting with Parliament and politics. In chapter 7, we look at e-petitions in more detail and discuss forthcoming changes to the system that might increase their impact.

We also see potential to strengthen links between Parliament's day-to-day activities and some of its engagement work through competitions such as Lights, Camera, Parliament!

The Lights, Camera, Parliament! competition runs every year.<sup>57</sup> Last year's challenge to young people was to submit a short film about a new law they would like to see introduced. The winners, from Coombe St Nicholas School, made a film about labelling products with information about whether child labour had been used in their production.<sup>58</sup> Since then, Baroness Garden and Baroness Andrews have formally requested a question for short debate in the House of Lords on the subject.

More debates of this kind, linking issues that young people are interested in to Parliament's work, would help young people to see how Parliament is relevant to them.

13. **The House of Commons should take further steps to improve active involvement by young people. This might include:**

- **encouraging young people to participate in the e-petitions system;**
- **youth issue focused debates which involve young people and MPs.**

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<sup>57</sup> Parliament's Education Service competition: Lights, camera, Parliament!

<sup>58</sup> A new child labour law: video by Coombe St Nicholas School

# 7 Widening opportunities for genuine participation



Digital tools present significant opportunities for wider public engagement. However, these opportunities will succeed only if Parliament and MPs are prepared to listen to people's views and take them on board. Here, we outline different ways that the public can engage with Parliament and discuss how some of these could be opened up.

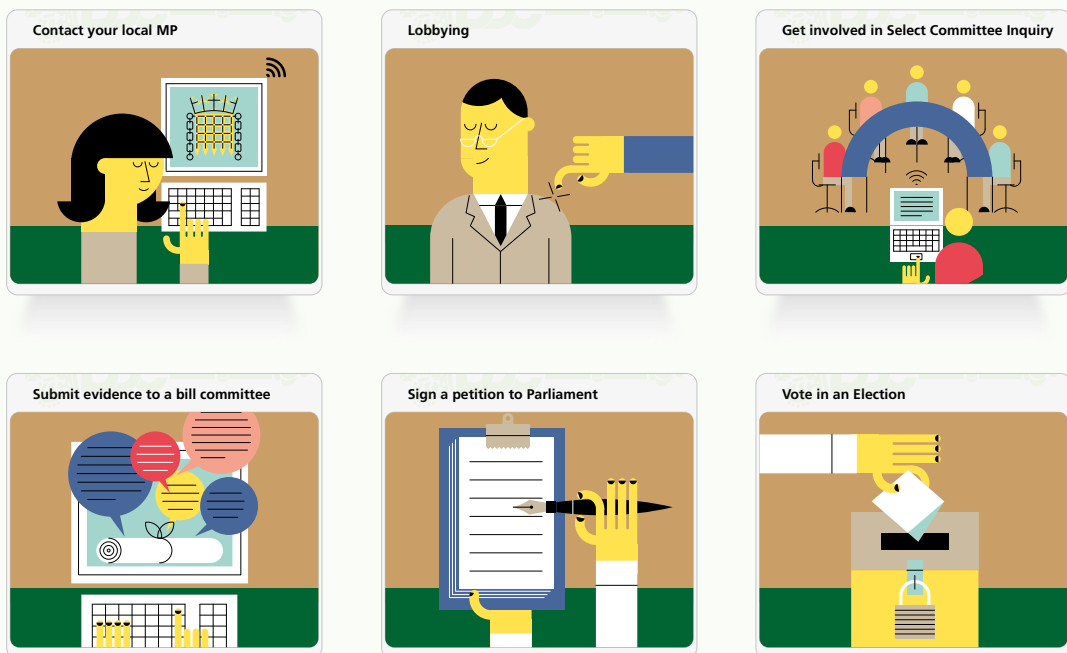


Figure 6: current opportunities to engage with Parliament

## 7.1 Contacting MPs



Parliamentary correspondence by Alex Mitchel ([www.alexmitchel.com](http://www.alexmitchel.com))

Everyone has a link to Parliament through their MP, who is elected to represent their interests. People can contact their MP about local issues, or problems they are having with housing or local services, for example. They can do this by letter, email or in person at constituency surgeries or in Parliament.

People can also contact MPs and Members of the House of Lords (Peers) to lobby them about an issue they are interested in that they want Parliament to take action on. This kind of correspondence is increasing, partly because of online campaigns by organisations such as 38 Degrees, which encourage large numbers of people to lobby politicians on particular issues. This is good because it means that more people are engaging with their MP, but it also makes it more difficult for MPs to respond to their constituents on a personal level. One MP highlighted the difficulty of hearing quieter voices amid the noise of hundreds of emails:

“I receive around 600 emails each working day. Amongst them are the quiet individual messages that need particular help. They matter most and there is the growing risk that they will be missed. I believe it is becoming more difficult for an active MP to read their own Inbox. Even a dedicated member of staff is not a completely satisfactory substitute for the person who is elected. One point is this: modern communication includes the inadvertent and little noticed separation of MP from constituent.”<sup>59</sup>

59 Peter Bottomley, online response on representation

We heard a range of views about how well MPs responded to constituents, including evidence from 38 Degrees that its members had had a broadly positive experience, but some very negative ones.<sup>60</sup>

Social media adds another dimension, with a growing number of MPs using it to connect with constituents in an informal way about the issues they are interested in. A recent report from Demos outlined the importance of social media in connecting with young people:

“The use of social media is a way to get the message across to young people, but politicians need to learn to use it more effectively, and the message needs to be right.”<sup>61</sup>



As new communications channels emerge, the pressure on MPs to keep up will increase. Digital technology has the potential to help Parliament and MPs to manage their communications better.<sup>62</sup> Document Direct suggested that a more efficient case-load handling system would give MPs more time to engage with their constituents.<sup>63</sup> We agree that if MPs were better supported in managing their digital communications, this would help them to respond more fully to their constituents. This in turn may help to ensure that constituents have a positive experience and are encouraged to engage with their MP or Parliament again.

- 14. The new parliamentary digital service should identify tools to help increase the volume and quality of interaction between MPs and their constituents. It should involve MPs and constituents in the development of these tools to ensure that an increase in communications is manageable by everyone involved.**

We acknowledge that cyber-security is a growing and current concern to MPs, who naturally wish to ensure the confidentiality of their work and of their constituents is protected. We also heard about another, less positive, side of digital communications—cyber harassment and trolling. The Speaker has had cases raised with him directly by MPs. The case of ‘women on banknotes’ campaigner Caroline Criado-Perez, championed by Stella Creasy MP, and the horrific abuse of the social media tool Twitter has been well reported. While freedom to campaign for causes and express opinions is vital in a fully functioning democracy, public figures, including MPs, are increasingly likely to be subject to cyber harassment.

- 15. The Commission acknowledges the work in this area that has been conducted by others, but recommends that:**

60 David Babbs, spoken contribution on engagement, 15 June 2014, Q44

61 Demos, Tune In, Turn Out, 29 December 2014

62 Digi004 [David Durant]; Digi038 [Document Direct]

63 Digi038 [Document Direct]

- the political parties urgently review what measures they have in place to support candidates at the next General Election who may be subjected to abuse of digital technology in the form of cyber harassment;
- the House urgently reviews measures to support MPs subject to cyber harassment;
- this review is carried out in tandem with the ongoing work regarding improving cyber-security to ensure that MPs can carry out their duties effectively, efficiently and in the sure knowledge that the confidentiality of their constituents is protected.

## 7.2 E-petitions



Another way that people can flag up to MPs and Parliament an issue that they are concerned about is by starting or signing a petition. People have been signing paper petitions for hundreds of years, but they can now do it online as well, on the Government e-petitions website.<sup>64</sup> Because e-petitions are accessible and easy to use, they can be a good way of raising issues of concern with the Government and Parliament. They tend to focus on very specific issues and can be shared easily, and this makes it easy to launch nationwide campaigns, particularly through platforms set up by organisations such as Change.org.<sup>65</sup>

However, some people doubted how much impact e-petitions had. Dr Andy Williamson said:

“[The e-petitions system] demonstrates some very limited successes but overall the ability of the public to achieve any real change through the process is low. The process as implemented does not lend itself well to a modern citizen-

64 E-petitions website

65 Change.org website

centric democracy; too many gatekeepers within Parliament are able to (and regularly do) disrupt it.”<sup>66</sup>

We support the recent recommendation by the House of Commons Procedure Committee for a new e-petitions system hosted on Parliament’s website, overseen by a committee of MPs.<sup>67</sup> Such a committee would have a much wider range of possible responses to both paper and e-petitions than exists under the current system, including:

- writing to the person who launched a petition
- asking them to come and speak to the committee
- referring a petition to another suitable committee to be discussed (for example, the Health Committee or the Home Affairs Committee)
- seeking further information from the Government about the issue raised by a petition
- putting forward petitions for debate.

We think these changes would go some way towards making petitions a more effective way for the public to have genuine engagement with Parliament and a greater chance of making an impact. However, it is important that there is better feedback available on what impact e-petitions have had—for example, whether they got a high number of signatures or triggered a debate in the House of Commons or a change in the law. This will help the public to see that they can have an impact, and will enable them to compare how effective different e-petitions have been.

## 7.3 Contributing to the work of select committees

Select committees look at what the Government is doing and how well it is performing. Most of them look at the work of particular Government departments—for example, Education and Health—but some are more cross-cutting, such as the Environmental Audit Committee. These committees work mainly by conducting inquiries into specific issues they are concerned about. When they do this they invite the public to give their views, and this is called giving evidence to the committee. Much of the evidence that select committees receive is from organisations, businesses and experts, although some members of the public also send in their views. A few of the people we spoke to had sent their views to a committee, but many of them did not know how to do this, and some had never heard of select committees.

We see great potential for using digital to strengthen links between Parliament and the public simply by raising awareness of select committee work and encouraging greater public involvement. We note that committees have already been using social media to encourage public engagement with their work. Many have Twitter accounts and some live tweet during oral evidence sessions, when people are invited to talk directly to the committee. Committee web pages also have icons that people can click on to share the page on social media platforms, including Facebook and LinkedIn.

<sup>66</sup> Digi018 [Dr Andy Williamson]

<sup>67</sup> Procedure Committee, E-petitions: a collaborative system, 4 December 2014



Some committees have also used hashtags to source questions to witnesses. For example, the highly successful #AskGove and #AskPickles hashtags were used to invite questions to Government Ministers.<sup>68</sup>

## The #AskPickles hashtag

The Communities and Local Government Committee asked people to suggest questions on Twitter for it to ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in an evidence session. Lots of people suggested questions, and some of those questions were asked. One of the questions led to a change in the law. The committee followed up by publishing a summary of the process and outcomes. The process was so successful that it was recently repeated, and the hashtag has also been a useful way of following up outcomes from the first session.

We commend this approach and would like to see further experimentation of this kind. However, we also note that while Twitter is a useful tool, it is not as widely used as other social media and therefore is not always the best medium for reaching out to new audiences. The Hansard Society flagged up the risks of placing too much emphasis on Twitter:

“[Twitter] has a far smaller reach than Facebook, less news is shared on it (although more news is broken) and in many ways, given the number of politicians, journalists, campaigners and lobbyists on the site, it replicates the traditional Westminster bubble.”<sup>69</sup>

As we have already outlined, many people who say they are turned off by politics are interested in specific issues. There is potential for matching people’s interests to select committee work and encouraging engagement in that way. One way of doing this is by forging links with online communities that share interest in an issue the committee is looking at. Some committees have been doing this successfully in conjunction with the parliamentary digital outreach team. See the case study below for one example of this.

## Case study - Defence Select Committee and Army Rumour Service<sup>70</sup>

Background: As part of its inquiry into Future Army 2020, the Defence Committee hosted a series of discussion threads on the Army Rumour Service forum—an unofficial forum for soldiers, veterans and interested others. This gave it the opportunity to hear the experiences of reservist and full-time troops who would not usually have their voices heard as part of a Committee inquiry. Across 23 threads on the forum, which discussed aspects of the committee’s inquiry, there were 45,614 views.

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68 Education Committee, Michael Gove answers #AskGove twitter questions; Secretary of State asks the public’s #AskPickles questions

69 Digi089a [Hansard Society]

70 Digi028 [Lucy Denton, Digital Outreach Team]

Result: The forum was referenced a number of times in the oral evidence sessions and in the committee's report, which said:

“During the course of our inquiry, the Army Rumour Service hosted a web forum to enable us to hear the views of interested parties on the Army 2020 plan which we used to inform our questioning of witnesses. The forum received 494 comments from 17 contributors. We are grateful to the Army Rumour Service for hosting this forum for us and to all those who contributed.”<sup>71</sup>

Feedback from forum users was predominantly positive, with one commenting:

Sarastro: I would suggest that the value of contributions here (and there is some) is that it offers MPs another source which helps them develop the deeper knowledge mentioned above, so that they might ask the difficult questions successfully.

This approach of building relationships is a good way of reaching out to people and involving them in select committee work. However, it is also resource-intensive and this places a limit on how much it can be used. We think this work should continue, but we would like to see other, less resource-intensive uses of digital to ‘go where people are’.<sup>72</sup> For example, select committees could experiment with targeted advertising in online spaces. They could also use tools to develop digital listening skills and tune into online conversations to get a better idea of public opinion.

16. **Select Committees should make greater use of social media and online advertising to reach out to new audiences and raise awareness of their work. They should also experiment with using digital to involve people more in committee work.**

## 7.4 Opening up the law-making process

One of Parliament's key functions is making laws. It does this by looking in detail at draft laws, or bills, that the Government wants to make into law. This process is broken down into several stages, which are outlined below in figure 8. When a bill has passed through all these stages—in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords—it becomes a law and is known as an Act of Parliament.

71 Defence Committee, Future Army 2020, 6 March 2014

72 See chapter 5 on Relating Parliament's work to people's lives for more on going to where people are.

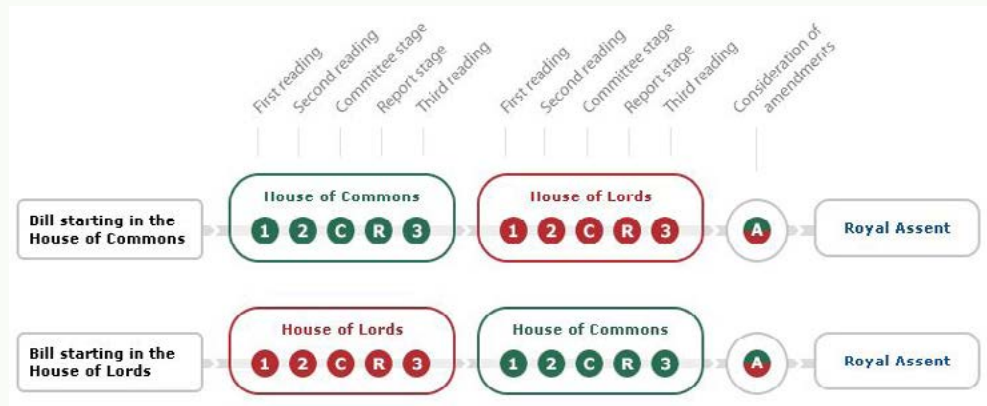


Figure 7: the passage of a bill through Parliament



Currently, opportunities for the public to contribute to the law-making process within Parliament are limited. The main way is by contacting an MP or Peer and raising any concerns with them, and so is quite indirect. Many of the people we heard from thought that Parliament should open up the law-making process to the public, and they suggested different stages where people could get involved:<sup>73</sup>

- at the very beginning, so that the public could suggest topics for bills
- policy development stage: when the government consults on its proposals through a document known as a 'green paper'
- pre-legislative scrutiny: when a policy is translated into a Bill but before it is issued officially in Parliament
- Queen's Speech: immediately after the Government has announced in the Queen's Speech which Bills it intends to issue that year

73 Student forum discussion on legislation; Digi003 [Involve]; Model Westminster roundtable, 12 August 2014; Digi004 [David Durant]; Digi005 [Paul Robinson]; Digi016 [Mark D. Ryan and Gurchetan S. Grewal, University of Birmingham]; Digi019 [Argyro Karanasiou, (Centre for Intellectual Property Policy & Management, Bournemouth University)]

- Second Reading: at the time the Commons or the Lords debates the overall principles in the Bill and votes on whether it should go on for further discussion, known as the Second Reading of the Bill
- Committee Stage: when MPs or Lords debate the bill in detail in a committee
- Post-legislative scrutiny: after the Bill has become law, the public could help to review how effective the new law had been.

We agree that Parliament should do more to open up the law-making process, which is one of its key functions, to the wider public. The easiest time for people to get involved is in the earlier stages, when the Government is still forming its policies and thinking about what it wants to put in draft laws. There is already some potential to do this, when the Government consults on policies, but these opportunities are not consistent. Some people have also suggested that they are not open enough and should enable more discussion between the public and policymakers.

By the time policy ideas have been written into draft laws, it becomes much more difficult for people to comment on and understand them because they are complex documents with lots of jargon and legal terms.<sup>74</sup> We have recommended that this language should be made more accessible. However, even with these improvements, the later stages of the law-making process will be more suited to more technical and specialised input.

Parliament has already experimented with public consultation between the second reading and committee stages. These experiments, known as public reading of bills, were successful in attracting interest, but less successful in having an impact on the bills being considered.<sup>75</sup> This was partly because it is difficult to amend a draft law once it has reached Parliament. By that stage, the Government has a firm idea of what it wants the law to achieve and is less likely to be persuaded that changes are necessary.

We believe that the best time to involve the public is in the policy development and pre-legislative stages, when the public could suggest technical and policy changes. However, we would like to see a period of experimentation at various stages of the law-making process with the aim of finding a way to achieve genuine public input.

17. **The House of Commons should experiment with new ways to enable the public to contribute to different stages of the law-making process, primarily by digital means.**

## 7.5 Contributing to parliamentary debates

As well as debating draft laws, MPs debate issues; some of which are national and others local or constituency-related. Currently, there is rarely any opportunity for the public to get involved in House of Commons debates, but digital technology could help to involve citizens. The House has already carried out promising experiments to set up online discussions, some in collaboration with partner organisations, linked to parliamentary debates and committee inquiries.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Oral evidence to the Commission on legislation, 18 March 2014.

<sup>75</sup> House of Commons Library standard note, public reading stage of bills, 19 March 2014

<sup>76</sup> Digi028 [Lucy Denton, Digital Outreach Team]

The House of Commons started to use a second chamber, known as Westminster Hall, in 1999 because of the limited time available for debates in the main chamber. Now, debates go on in both chambers at the same time, enabling MPs to discuss more topics. In the past year, topics debated in Westminster Hall have included zero-hours contracts, the A303, football club bankruptcy, badger culls, domestic violence, the humanitarian situation in Gaza and voting at 16. These debates tend to be more informal than those in the Chamber.

We believe that the debates in Westminster Hall provide an excellent and unique opportunity to experiment with opening up House of Commons debates to the public and create a direct link between what is being said in Parliament and the people it represents. People interested in the topic for debate should have the opportunity to discuss it online, before the House of Commons debate. MPs could contribute or simply observe. We believe this would help to inform their contributions and enhance the debate in Parliament. Currently, few people are aware of the existence of Westminster Hall debates, although they are part of the large amount of work which happens outside of the main House of Commons chamber, which is more often seen on TV. This new initiative would therefore not only open up House of Commons debates to the public, but also highlight more of the hidden work of Parliament. If successful, the forum could be used for debates in the main chamber.

- 18. We believe the public want the opportunity to have their say in House of Commons debates; we also believe that this will provide a useful resource for MPs and help to enhance those debates. We therefore recommend a unique experiment: the use of regular digital public discussion forums to inform debates held in Westminster Hall. This innovation might be known as the “Cyber Chamber” or “Open House.” If at the end of the next Parliament it has been successful, it could then be extended to debates in the main House of Commons chamber itself.**

## 7.6 Questions to Ministers and the Prime Minister

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Ministers regularly attend question time in the House of Commons to answer questions from MPs about Government policies and implementation. Once a week, in Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs), MPs have the opportunity to hold the Prime Minister to account. This is probably the most well-known parliamentary activity, as it is regularly shown on television. Many of the people we spoke to had seen it at one time or another, and some told us that they watched or listened to it regularly. People had differing views on how Prime Minister’s Questions reflects on Parliament, with some finding it engaging and others finding the robust exchanges off-putting. This chimes with what the Hansard Society recently found when it looked at people’s attitudes to PMQs:

“The survey results similarly reflected...disenchantment with PMQs amongst the wider public, with 67% of respondents agreeing that ‘there is too much party political point-scoring instead of answering the question’, 47% agreeing

that PMQs 'is too noisy and aggressive' and just 12% agreeing that PMQs 'makes me proud of our Parliament'.<sup>77</sup>

Some of the people we heard from thought that the public could be more involved with Prime Minister's Questions, for example by proposing questions for the Prime Minister. Professor Christian Fuchs suggested that there should be a YouTube channel, which he called 'QTube', on which people could propose questions.<sup>78</sup> People could then vote on the questions proposed, with the most popular questions being put to the Prime Minister, perhaps in a separate Prime Minister's Questions for the public. Other people suggested similar systems using Twitter or other platforms.<sup>79</sup> Realistically, this would be a supplement to, and not an alternative to, the traditional PMQs format.

This method of using digital media to source questions or ideas from the public, known as crowd-sourcing, has proved successful for select committees. The Commission believes that extending this approach would help to increase the accountability of Ministers to the public. We would like to see Parliament experiment further in this area, by crowd-sourcing questions for Ministers, or the Prime Minister, on a more regular basis and in the chambers of the House, rather than just in committees.

**19. The House of Commons should experiment with new ways of enabling the public to put forward questions for ministers.**

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<sup>77</sup> Hansard Society, *tuned in or turned off: public attitudes to PMQs*

<sup>78</sup> Digi026 [Professor Christian Fuchs]

<sup>79</sup> Brighton Digital Festival roundtable 17.09.14

## 8 Ensuring that the public have a good experience of engaging with Parliament

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It is important that when Parliament experiments with different ways of engaging the public, the opportunities are genuine and have the support of MPs. As the Hansard Society said, “if Parliament stimulates public interest and participation in a process, it has a responsibility to be responsive to that interest.”<sup>80</sup>

If people have a good experience of engagement, it will help to build their trust.<sup>81</sup> But if they have a less than satisfactory experience, it could put them off contacting their MP or engaging with the House of Commons in future. It could have a wider negative effect on their views of MPs and Parliament.<sup>82</sup> As our student forum on engagement said, “it is important that the citizens feel heard by their MPs and local representatives. If they feel that their engagement makes a difference they will be more inclined to engage.”<sup>83</sup> For some people, feeling listened to will be enough to give them a positive experience:

“Citizens need to know that showing up matters, even if the result doesn’t go your way, showing up does mean being heard.”<sup>84</sup>

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80 Digi089a [Hansard Society]

81 Digi067 [Change.org]

82 David Babbs, Spoken contributions on engagement, 15 June 2014, Qs 52-62; Response 570696341 to online questions on engagement and facilitating dialogue; Response 65761201 to online questions on representation;

83 Student forum summary on engagement

84 Digital Democracy event in Cardiff and Gov Camp Cymru, 26-27 September 2014

For others, this will not be enough. When someone contacts their MP or signs a petition, they usually want an action or decision to be taken as a result. A participant at one of our workshops described their expectations:

“It is about getting your views heard but then there’s the actions required afterwards which are just as important. You get your views heard but then often you just see them dissipated. We want to be able to see that our efforts have results.”<sup>85</sup>

If people do not get the outcome they were hoping for, they may be disappointed or frustrated by the process.<sup>86</sup> Researchers from Bournemouth University have identified a feeling among some citizens that “many consultation exercises are hollow and in actuality there is no-one interested in their opinions.”<sup>87</sup> This is likely to be more damaging than not encouraging people to get involved in the first place. However, it is not realistic to expect that every time someone takes part in the political process they will be able to get the outcome they want, as there will inevitably be many different views, which are not all compatible. Parliament needs to be clear about how people’s voices will feed into the process.



Digital interactive Parliament by Alex Mitchel ([www.alexmitchel.com](http://www.alexmitchel.com))

85 Digi089b [Britain Thinks and Hansard Society summary of workshop 'A listening Parliament?']

86 Digi063 [University College London]; Digi086 Dr Cristian Vaccari, Department of Politics and International Relations, Royal Holloway, University of London

87 Digi050 Media School Researchers, Bournemouth University



## 8.1 Using digital tools to engage with Parliament

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In section 11 below, we look at the possibilities for using digital tools for increasing engagement. However, we are mindful of this perceptive warning from Involve:

“Let the purpose, not the tools, be the driver. As with any effort to improve citizen engagement (whether digital or offline) it is critical to clarify the purpose first and then find the right tools to achieve it...the essential first step is to determine *\*why\** citizen voice is desired within a particular process, and what citizens add that actors already in the process don’t already bring.”<sup>88</sup>

One possibility is the use of online forums, but we were warned that it is not easy to use these with large-scale public consultations. For example, some experts said that although technology is “excellent at gathering information”, it is still not very good at large-scale deliberation.<sup>89</sup> One person said that public forums “can be a mess”, and suggested that it was better for the public to contact their MP if they wanted to comment on proposed legislation.<sup>90</sup>

One way to get around this is to factor in “substantial human activity” to support the process, for example by moderating online discussions and analysing the contributions received.<sup>91</sup> But the resource implications of this would place a limit on how many large-scale forums could be offered. Another route is to enable those who take part to manage the process themselves, debating ideas and voting on or rating the best ones, so that the most popular are given greater prominence:

“If tens or hundreds of thousands of citizens want to contribute different views, it isn’t possible for legislators to read and digest all the comments. The online fora must facilitate citizens debating with each other, so that the views that attract greatest consensus are promoted and these are the ones fed back to legislators.”<sup>92</sup>

We are confident that online participation by the public in the work of Parliament will be increasingly important, but we have deliberately set out a cautious approach to this, at least initially, to avoid early experiments being crushed by the weight of expectations. However, we expect there to be a need in the relatively near future for Parliament to build or better still adapt existing tools to support large-scale online participation.

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88 Digi003 [Involve]

89 Digi014 [Professor Chris Reed]; Dr Andy Williamson, spoken contribution on representation, 17.06.14, Q23

90 Digi008 [Jordan Milton]

91 Digi014 [Professor Chris Reed]

92 Digi016 [Mark D. Ryan and Gurchetan S. Grewal, University of Birmingham]

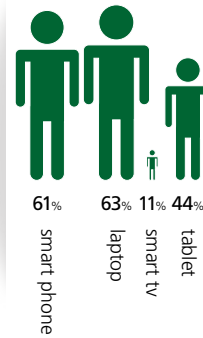
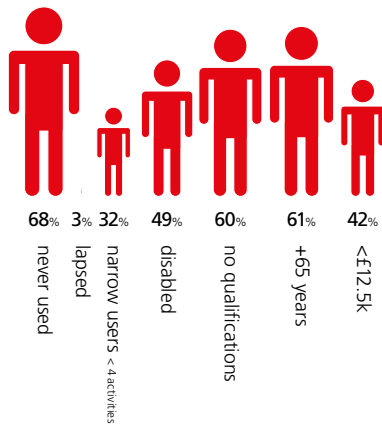
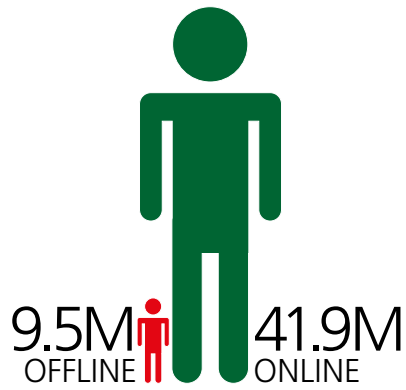
## 9 Tackling digital exclusion

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Some people go online and use digital every day on their phone, tablet or other device, whereas others rarely, if ever, go online. The division between these groups is sometimes referred to as the digital divide. In practice, there will be people with a range of digital skills in between, but there is still a clear division between those who have the means and confidence to use digital and those who do not.

## Digital Divide



99%  
16-24 yr olds



90%  
ABC1s



95%  
graduates



99%  
£40k earners



75%  
households

Figure 8: The digital divide (source: Tinder Foundation)

In the past decade there has been a rapid move to delivering commercial and Government services online. For some people, this has made it easier to access information and services, but those who are not online will have benefited less. Digital inclusion is about making sure that people are not excluded from the services they want and need, and to ensure everyone has equal opportunities to access the benefits that the digital world brings. Around a fifth of UK adults lack basic digital skills and 16% are not online.<sup>93</sup>

It is promising to see that the proportion of people who are using the internet has been increasing steadily in recent years.<sup>94</sup> But certain groups are more likely to be “digitally disengaged”, including older people, those with disabilities, and people without qualifications.<sup>95</sup>

Key barriers to getting online include lack of interest, confidence and/or know-how; financial constraints; poor broadband access; a preference for doing things in person; and fears about security.<sup>96</sup> The Government has taken steps to address those barriers and reduce digital exclusion in its digital inclusion strategy.<sup>97</sup>



Government video: approach to assisted digital inclusion: Opportunities for Innovation -- Assisted Digital Strategy Ian Trenholm (DEFRA), Helen Milner (Tinder Foundation and Digital Democracy Commissioner), Rebecca Kemp (GDS) and John Ploughman (DSA) discuss the need for assisted digital in December 2012.

If Parliament is to become more accessible and open, it too, will need to have a strategy for ensuring that the digitally disengaged are not excluded from understanding or engaging with its work. As the Democratic Society put it:

93 Media Literacy: Understanding Digital Capabilities follow-up, 2013, BBC, Ipsos Media CT; Media Literacy: Understanding digital capabilities Final Report, 2014, BBC, Ipsos Media CT

94 Media Literacy: Understanding digital capabilities Final Report, 2014, BBC, Ipsos Media CT

95 Media Literacy: Understanding Digital Capabilities follow-up, 2013, BBC, Ipsos Media CT; Media Literacy: Understanding digital capabilities Final Report, 2014, BBC, Ipsos Media CT; Tinder Foundation Disability and Digital Inclusion Blog 3 December 2014;

96 Digi061 [Carnegie UK Trust]; Digi065 [Arqiva]; Media Literacy: Understanding digital capabilities Final Report, 2014, BBC, Ipsos Media CT

97 Government Digital Inclusion Strategy, December 2014

“Parliament must play its part in addressing the digital divide and digital literacy. Not everyone has access to the Internet and many do not know how to use online resources even if they are regular internet users.”<sup>98</sup>

We heard a number of different ideas for how Parliament could do this. One suggestion was that Parliament could form partnerships with community groups to help those less able to use digital to feed their views into Parliament. For example, a group in Chesterfield suggested that Parliament could train local community group leaders to help people to upload submissions to a select committee or to engage in other ways online. For those people who would have difficulty using digital at all, these local group leaders could act as an intermediary—listening to their views and inputting them digitally on their behalf.<sup>99</sup> Some organisations already provide this kind of service, as can be seen in the example below.

## Community support initiatives

The Business Innovation and Skills Committee recently asked for people’s views on adult literacy and numeracy, and encouraged them to give their views by video.<sup>100</sup> Several organisations helped people to do this. For example, staff at St Mungo Broadway, a homeless charity and UK online centre, helped people to create a YouTube submission; the writer in residence at HMP Leicester compiled the prisoners’ submissions; and teachers from Leicester College helped learners to submit an audio-visual submission. At Robin Hood Junior School, a 6-year-old pupil used his skills to help record his teacher’s submission.

Parliament’s outreach team works with groups in the community, but it could do more to target the most affected groups by identifying relevant community support organisations and helping them to provide this kind of service, by giving training, information and other support. The Commission believes that a ‘digital first’ approach (using digital as the primary channel for information and using printed documents only where there is a clear need to do so) should be pursued. However, until UK-wide community support services are widely available, Parliament should continue to help the digitally excluded in other ways. For example, it should continue to make available on request free paper copies of parliamentary reports and other documents, where appropriate.

Digital exclusion is not a reason for Parliament to hold back the drive to become more digital. Digital has the potential to improve dramatically the relationship between Parliament and citizens, and everyone should benefit from this. As the examples above show, people who are not online can engage digitally when they are given the right support to contribute to Parliament’s work on an issue they care about. This can be a mix of direct support—helping people to get online or learn digital skills—and indirect support, through a trusted local intermediary, friend or family member.

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98 Digi015a Democratic Society

99 Roundtable Chesterfield 30 June 2014

100 Business Innovation and Skills Committee inquiry and report into adult literacy September 2014

20. **Parliament should step up its work to build links with community organisations and services to help ensure that the digitally excluded are given local support to engage with Parliament online.**

## 10 Elections and voting

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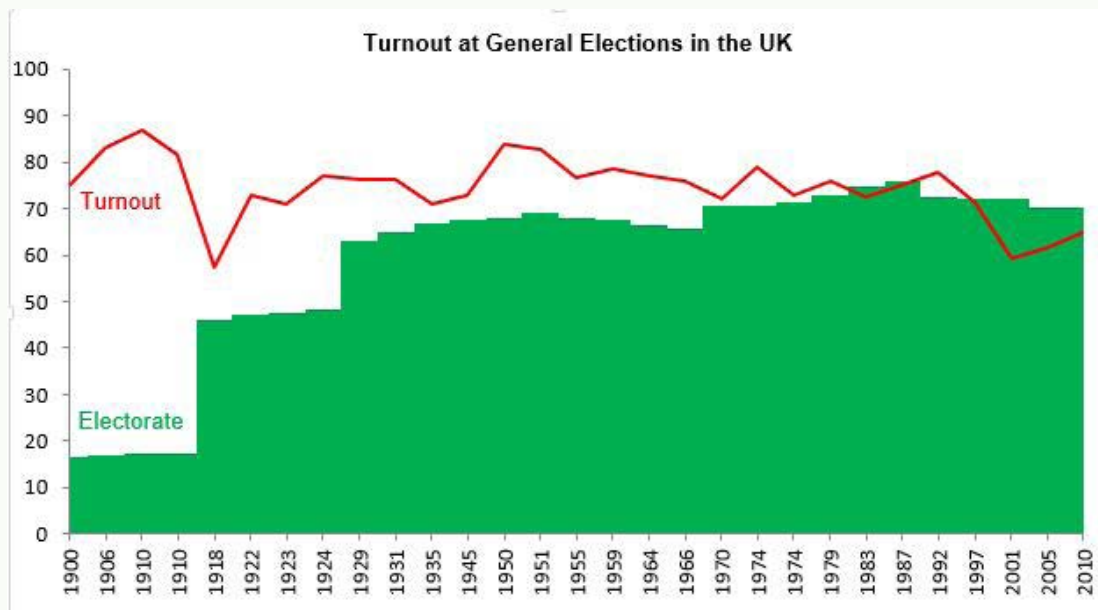
Voter turnout is a key indicator of the health of our democracy, with low turnout indicating that our democracy is not working as well as it should. The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee recently identified a number of reasons for the decline in voter turnout in recent decades, including political disengagement and a feeling that it is not worth voting.<sup>101</sup> This was reflected in our conversations with people. Some also said that candidates were not representative enough, and that there should be more diversity.<sup>102</sup> Open primaries for candidates were seen as one way of countering this.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Voter Engagement in the UK*, 14 November 2014

<sup>102</sup> Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014; Discussion with Kenny Imafidon, 11 October 2014; Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014

<sup>103</sup> Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014; Discussion with Kenny Imafidon, 11 October 2014



Voter turnout in the UK. (Source: House of Commons Library)

One reason why people do not vote is that they are not registered to vote and so are unable to do so on election day. We welcome the recent introduction of online registration for voting, which has now been used by nearly 2.4 million people, and has the potential to increase accessibility. We also support the important work by organisations such as the Electoral Commission (the independent body which supervises the electoral system in the UK) in educating people on how to register to vote. We fully support this year's National Voter Registration Day on 5 February 2015. Information on how to vote and the new system of voter registration needs to reach those groups who are less likely to be registered, such as young people and homeless people.

## Bite the Ballot getting young people registered to vote

Bite the Ballot is an organisation that campaigns to engage young people with politics and get them registered to vote. It has recently teamed up with TV presenter Rick Edwards and cross-party think tank Demos to create a Voter Advice Application for the 2015 election.

We note with concern the recent finding of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on under-registration of people from some Black and Minority Ethnic groups. It said:

“According to the Electoral Commission, some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are significantly less likely to be registered to vote compared to those identifying as White British... turnout for people from BME groups once they are registered to vote does not differ significantly from turnout for White British residents who are registered.”<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Voter Engagement in the UK, 14 November 2014



The Speaker's Commission supports the committee's call for further work to address this disparity.

## 10.1 Information about elections and voting

We were particularly concerned to hear that some people had not voted because they did not feel they knew enough about politics. Some said that they did not know how to decide who to vote for, and one person told us that they did not know how to vote.<sup>105</sup> One young person said simply: "I don't vote because I don't understand".<sup>106</sup>

The Digital Democracy Commission strongly believes it is unacceptable that anyone should be unable to exercise their right to vote because they do not know how to vote. Not everyone has learned about elections and voting at school, although these are now included in the national curriculum. Where an individual's family and friends are not active voters, their exposure to and knowledge of the process may be limited. The cycle of not voting within families was discussed at one discussion group for young citizens, in which some participants said that as members of their family did not vote, in the future they probably wouldn't either.<sup>107</sup>



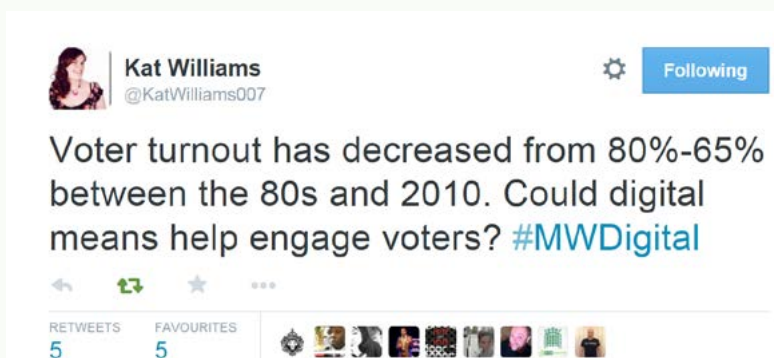
Video on voting: Parliament's education service: how general elections work in 60 seconds

21. **The Speaker's Commission wishes to encourage increased efforts on voter education and recommends a fresh, bold, look at the national curriculum in this regard.**

<sup>105</sup> Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014

<sup>106</sup> Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014

<sup>107</sup> Young people discuss e-democracy at Facebook, 9 May 2014



Digital technology can help to make information about candidates and political parties more accessible. Several people said they would like an app to help them to decide how to vote, unaware that there are already websites and apps that do this.<sup>108</sup> Voter advice applications and websites can help citizens to decide who to vote for by asking about their views and comparing their answers to the policies of different parties. This is not something that Parliament could or should do on its website, because of the need to remain impartial. Not everyone will want an app, however, and many would find it useful just to be able to access information about candidates and parties in one place.

22. **The Commission strongly encourages the political education bodies and charities to consider how to make available and publicise trustworthy information about candidates and their policies, including by means of voter advice applications.**
23. **The Digital Democracy Commission also notes a clear indication from a range of comments received that the profile and knowledge of the Electoral Commission needs to be improved, as it is a vital source of information to voters, with a website that is an Aladdin's cave for those wishing to participate in the UK's political process.**

## Example of a voter advice website.

Voting Counts UK<sup>109</sup> is a website created by 18 year old Rachael Farrington to help young people decide who to vote for.

It is obvious that anyone may want to know the result of an action, particularly if that action should be habit forming such as voting for the first time. Yet there is no single official online destination offering information about election results and there is a lack of consistency about how results are published online. Even local council websites offer data about council election results in a variety of formats. To counter this, details of votes cast at the general election could be transmitted electronically to one central database or 'results bank' as soon as they are declared. Thus the citizen would have one, indisputable source or destination online to see the result of their vote.

108 Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014; Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014; Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014; Secondary students roundtable 18 July 2014

109 <http://www.votingcounts.org.uk>

**24. The Digital Democracy Commission recommends that the Electoral Commission consider how best to establish a digital ‘results bank’.**

Similarly, information on the social characteristics of candidates and those elected is currently gathered in an ad hoc manner by different sources. The House of Commons Library could gather all of this data and produce a regular report on the background of MPs and candidates. This would create an officially recognised data source and improve the real-time data available for anyone to analyse. The Digital Democracy Commission believes that there is a demand for greater access to information about candidates and political parties, in different formats and via a range of channels, to help citizens exercise their democratic duties, and to know the results of elections.

**25. The Commission fully endorses the draft Political and Constitutional Reform Committee recommendation that “the Government and the Electoral Commission should examine the changes which can be made to provide more and better information to voters, and should actively support the work of outside organisations working to similar goals.”<sup>110</sup>**

## 10.2 Online voting

Currently, there are two main ways of voting in the UK—in person at a polling station on election day, or by post in advance. Online voting has been piloted on a small scale in the UK, but will not be available as an option in the 2015 general election. Many of the people we spoke to did not understand why they could not vote online, particularly young people. People are used to doing their banking and other day-to-day activities online and many feel that they should also be able to vote in this way.

Some people said that the inconvenience of having to vote in person was off-putting and suggested that online voting would help to increase voter turnout.<sup>111</sup> However, others said that there was little evidence of this.<sup>112</sup> One group of young people thought that online voting would be particularly useful for people in remote areas and others who do not have easy access to polling stations.<sup>113</sup> Others suggested it would help to overcome barriers to voting for Britons living abroad, military personnel posted overseas and those with disabilities. Some people felt that the ritual of making time to go to the polling station was important.



110 Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Voter Engagement in the UK, 14 November 2014

111 Digi078 [WebRoots Democracy]; Digi031 [Dr Rachel Gibson, University of Manchester]; Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014; Michael Bolsover contribution on representation

112 Spoken contribution on electronic voting by Katie Ghose, Q112; Digi047 [Councillor Jason Kitcat]; Digi075 [Open Rights Group]; Digi072 [Foundation for Information Policy Research (FIPR)]; UK Computing Research Committee

113 Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014

Some people highlighted concerns about the security of online voting and the potential for cyber attacks and hacking.<sup>114</sup> Others raised concerns about voter intimidation and vote selling.<sup>115</sup> The Open Rights Group neatly summed up the concerns over the security of online voting:

“Voting is a uniquely difficult question for computer science: the system must verify your eligibility to vote; know whether you have already voted; and allow for audits and recounts. Yet it must always preserve your anonymity and privacy. Currently, there are no practical solutions to this highly complex problem and existing systems are unacceptably flawed.”<sup>116</sup>

We think that online voting has the potential greatly to increase the convenience and accessibility of voting, and we looked into the use of online voting in other countries. So far, 14 countries have used internet voting for binding political elections or referendums, but Estonia is the only one to have introduced permanent national internet voting.<sup>117</sup> It has an advanced system for verifying citizens’ identity online, but there have been concerns about the security of its system.<sup>118</sup> In New South Wales, Australia, the strategy has been to recognise that there is not yet a “secure and reliable electronic voting system which removes all the known risks”.<sup>119</sup> It is building confidence in online voting by putting checks and balances in place and starting with a manageable segment of the electorate—people with disabilities and those who live a long way from a polling station.

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114 Spoken contribution on electronic voting by Katie Ghose, Q112; Spoken contribution on electronic voting by Andrew Colver, Q116; Digi047 [Councillor Jason Kitcat]; Digi072 [Foundation for Information Policy Research (FIPR)]; Digi075 [Open Rights Group]; Digi077 [Electoral Commission]; UK Computing Research Committee

115 Spoken contribution on electronic voting by Professor bob Watt, Q99; Spoken contribution on electronic voting by Andrew Colver, Q116; Digi072 [Foundation for Information Policy Research (FIPR)]

116 Digi075 [Open Rights Group]

117 Collected from different sources: Jordi Barrat I Esteve, Ben Goldsmith and John Turner, *International Experience with E-Voting*, June 2012 and *Smartmatic: A survey of Internet Voting*

118 Independent report on e-voting in Estonia

119 NSW Electoral Commission, *iVote strategy for the NSW State general election 2015*

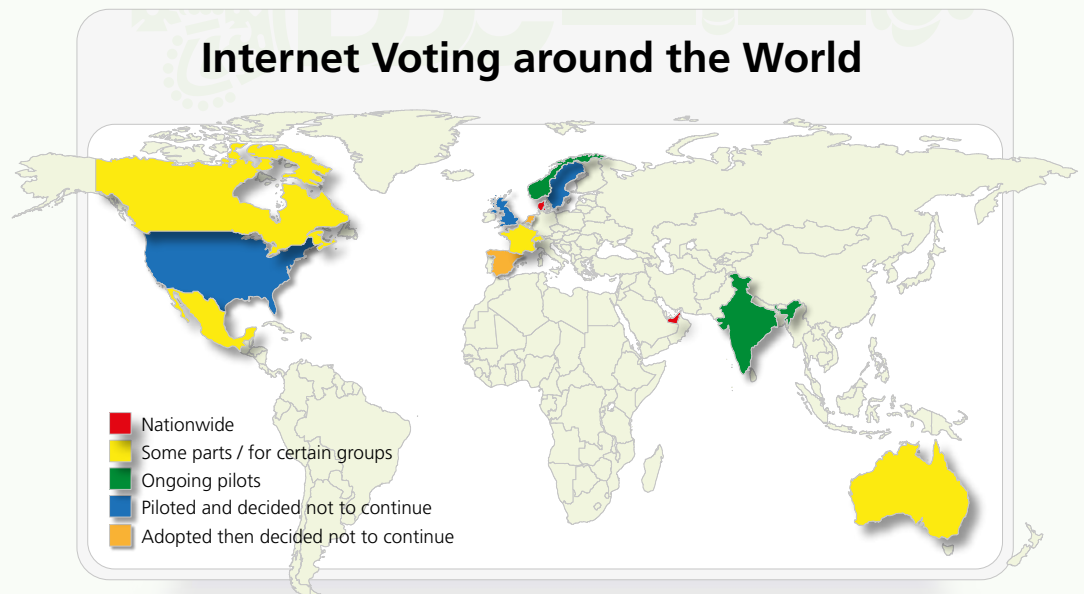


Figure 9: Online voting around the world

The Commission is confident that there is a substantial appetite for online voting in the UK, particularly among young people. It will become increasingly more difficult to persuade younger voters to vote using traditional methods.<sup>120</sup> It is only a matter of time before online voting is a reality, but first the concerns about security must be overcome. Once this is achieved, there will be an urgent need to provide citizens with access to online voting, and the UK must be prepared for this. The Electoral Commission has called on the Government to introduce a “comprehensive electoral modernisation strategy [...] setting out how the wider use of technology in elections will ensure the achievement of transparency, public trust and cost effectiveness”.<sup>121</sup> The new online registration system could be a cornerstone of a future online voting system, although it would not solve the problem of verifying the identity of people when casting their vote online.

We support the draft recommendation of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on Voter Engagement in the UK, urging the introduction of online voting by 2020. We agree that this would make voting significantly more accessible. However, we also agree that concerns about electoral fraud and secrecy of the ballot would need to be addressed first.

**26. In the 2020 general election, secure online voting should be an option for all voters.**

<sup>120</sup> Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014; Brighton roundtable 17 September 2014

<sup>121</sup> Digi077 [Electoral Commission]

# 11 A fully digital Parliament

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One of the targets the Commission has set is that by 2020, Parliament should be fully interactive and digital. This chapter describes some of the actions which will contribute to meeting that target.



## 11.1 Increasing efficiency

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Parliament has already begun to use digital to work more effectively, increase efficiency and reduce costs. Examples include:

- publishing more documents online and reducing the number of paper copies printed;
- a move to paperless working by House of Commons select committees; and
- a major project to streamline the process of sending written questions from MPs to Government Departments and publishing the replies online.<sup>122</sup>

But there is potential to use digital to bring further efficiency savings and better ways of working. Processes should also be reviewed, with a view to establishing whether they are suitable for a digital and interactive Parliament. For example, much parliamentary information is not created in a format that can be made available to the public as open data. It has to be converted into another format in order to do this, which is costly and time-consuming. These kinds of inefficient processes must be reformed so that information is handled more efficiently and a digital-first approach is taken. The new Head of Digital should be closely involved in this process, which will be a good opportunity to build links with other departments.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Parliament Written Questions and Answers

<sup>123</sup> For more on the new Head of Digital, see the next section on developing skills in Parliament.

27. **The House of Commons should identify more areas where a digital-first approach can lead to service improvements as well as increased efficiency.**

## 11.2 Upgrading Parliament's technical infrastructure

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Many of Parliament's buildings will be upgraded over the next decade.<sup>124</sup> This is mainly to ensure that the Palace of Westminster, which is a grade I-listed building and UNESCO World Heritage Site, is protected for future generations and that parliamentary buildings are safe for people to work in and visit. However, it also presents an important opportunity to upgrade technical infrastructure and facilities such as Wifi and video-conferencing.

28. **The Digital Democracy Commission recommends that Parliament should seize the opportunity that restoration and renewal work provides to improve facilities to assist MPs in their work for the public and ensure the fabric of Parliament is fit for the future.**

## 11.3 Voting in the House of Commons

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Another area where digital could improve efficiency and produce better data is in the way that votes in the House of Commons are counted. Currently when there is a vote, MPs go into one of two different corridors on either side of the debating chamber, depending on whether they wish to vote yes or no. This is known as dividing the House. The corridors are called division lobbies and a vote is called a division. MPs who are not in the chamber are given eight minutes to arrive for a vote before the doors are locked. If an MP is in

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<sup>124</sup> Restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster

Parliament but too ill to reach a lobby his or her vote may be ‘nodded through’, which means it is added to the voting total in their absence.

Votes are recorded on a paper checklist by parliamentary staff, so are subject to human error. A vote takes about 15 minutes in total. Votes need to be counted at the end of a division, which takes a couple of minutes, but it is some considerable length of time before a digital version of the list of votes can be published. There have been calls for reforms of the voting procedure, either by voting electronically or by holding some or all votes at a set voting time.<sup>125</sup> The House of Lords is currently trialling a system of using tablets, instead of paper, to record votes and this has helped to speed up the output of results.

We would like to see more radical changes to the system of recording votes in the House of Commons. We recognise that Members value the chance to meet Government Ministers and other MPs during votes, as this gives them an opportunity to raise important issues with one another. Our recommendation therefore would not affect this tradition of walking through division lobbies. We are simply recommending that MPs should use their smart identity cards to record their votes against card readers in the lobbies. This would produce an electronic record of how MPs have voted more quickly and accurately than under the current system.

In the long session of Parliament immediately after the 2010 election there were 544 divisions in the Commons. If three minutes had been saved on each one this would have added up to a time saving of 27 hours for each MP. It would also mean that a record of who had voted, and how they voted, would be available to the media and the public very soon after a vote had taken place.

**29. During the next session of Parliament the House of Commons should move to record votes using MPs’ smart identity cards but retain the tradition of walking through division lobbies.**

We would also like to see trials of an electronic version of the practice of ‘nodding through’ MPs who are physically unable to go through the division lobbies, which would enable MPs who are unwell or have childcare responsibilities or disabilities to vote away from the Chamber.

**30. The House of Commons should also pilot an electronic version of the practice of ‘nodding through’ MPs who are physically unable to go through the division lobbies, which would enable MPs who are unwell, or have childcare responsibilities, or a disability, to vote away from the chamber.**

## 11.4 Tools for democratic engagement

We received a lot of suggestions for digital tools that Parliament could use to work more effectively. Many of these were about making it more open and accessible, and this is good news because it suggests that people are interested in engaging with Parliament. Popular

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<sup>125</sup> House of Commons Procedure Committee, Programming, 5 December 2013; Digi088 [Caroline Lucas, MP]



suggestions included jargon busters and bill-tracking tools to help people understand and follow their progress through Parliament.<sup>126</sup>

In our discussion groups and workshops, young people in particular often suggested apps and tools that could help them to engage politically.<sup>127</sup> These included tools to help them decide who to vote for, and a youth social media platform, linking all the digital democracy platforms and apps.<sup>128</sup> Further suggestions are outlined below.

## Digital tools suggested by young people

At our Brighton Digital Festival and Hardcopy or #Hashtag? workshops, young people outlined some of the digital tools they would like to see:

1. Celebrities and vloggers doing 1-minute talks on YouTube about political issues they care about to help engage young people in politics (the winner from the Hardcopy or #Hashtag? workshops)
2. A system that allows citizens to vote on issues, not parties (the favourite in Brighton)
3. A TV show with a celebrity being taught about a different political issue each week. Supported by an app and online forum for users to discuss the issue with experts and politicians.
4. Legislation / Bill tracker apps, including: summaries of what Bills said; live updates; links to news articles; and tools to help scrutinise Bills.
5. Jargon busters
6. A tool enabling users to tweet or instant message questions for Prime Minister's Questions and to vote on other people's suggestions.
7. A local voting app, telling you when people are voting in your area.
8. A democracy website for students to connect with politicians, linked to democracy days, run through schools
9. A tool that uses demographic and location information to show how legislation affects individuals.
10. A website to encourage local engagement with politics, with users posing questions to representatives, debating on forums and voting on the importance of topics.

The Democratic Society pointed out that some of these tools “already exist, but are either in the wrong format (i.e. are not compatible with the types of technology young people

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126 Nick Booth, on our online comment thread, 7 March 2014; Terence Eden on our online comment thread, 20 March 2014; Student forum discussion on legislation; Student forum on engagement; Digi001 [StJohn Deakins]; Digi002 [Nottingham University Student Union]; Digi003 [Involve]; Digi008 [Jordan Milton]; Digi016 [Mark D. Ryan and Gurchetan S. Grewal]; Brighton Digital Festival roundtable 17.09.14; Hardcopy or #Hashtag? workshops; Model Westminster contribution following workshop on 12 August 2014;

127 Brighton Digital Festival roundtable 17 September 2014; Hardcopy or hashtag workshops October and November 2014; Model Westminster roundtable, 12 August 2014; Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014

128 Stockport roundtable 11 August 2014; Brighton Digital Festival roundtable 17 September 2014;

use the most) or are poorly communicated.”<sup>129</sup> Many tools that are developed simply fail to take off. Parliament does not have the resources to turn all of these promising ideas for apps into a finished product, so it needs to choose which areas to focus on. That is partly why we are recommending that Parliament should release all of its published information freely online in re-usable formats—so that individuals or businesses can develop and market digital tools and apps if they see a gap which they think ought to be filled.

## 11.5 Open data

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Open data is a policy which says that information produced by public sector organisations should be made freely available in a format that can be easily re-used—for example, to produce apps and other tools. The benefits are:

- transparency
- empowering the public
- encouraging innovation in public services and
- promoting economic growth by enabling the private sector to re-use data.



If Parliament released more information as open data, then entrepreneurs and organisations could use it to provide apps, websites and other digital tools to help the public understand the work of Parliament. A great deal of important information about scrutiny of Government policy and bills, as well as decisions on issues from the economy to military action, could be re-purposed in this way. As Dr Andy Williamson put it:

“It should now be possible for anyone and everyone to see everything relating to parliamentary business in an easy to access and user friendly way...This doesn't simply mean providing digitised versions of existing documents but ensuring that content is machine readable, correctly tagged and indexed so that it can be found, matched, verified and re-used by third-parties: build it open and encourage others to use it, mash it up and repurpose it!”<sup>130</sup>



Parliamentary open data by Alex Mitchel ([www.alexmitchel.com](http://www.alexmitchel.com))

Parliament has recently created an open data service called [data.parliament](http://data.parliament.gov.uk). There is already lots of useful data on the site, such as records of how MPs and Peers have voted, but we would like to see more and more data going up. We welcome the commitment by the Management Boards of both Houses in June 2014 that “Parliamentary data will be made easily and freely accessible in an open format for reuse, so that the value of parliamentary data may be fully realised”.<sup>131</sup> The key parliamentary data we would like to see released as open data as a priority includes:

- Hansard (the official record of what is said in Parliament and information about how MPs have voted)
- bills
- information about who is speaking in the Houses of Parliament
- the register of MPs’ financial interests

31. **All Parliamentary information in the public domain should be made available to the public as downloadable data in formats which make them easy to re-use. Hansard and the register of MPs’ interests should be made available as open data by the end of 2015, followed by bills.**

<sup>131</sup> Preparations for the new Parliamentary Digital Service, May 2014

## 11.6 Erskine May

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Parliamentary insiders will tell you that the “bible” of how to run Parliament is Erskine May, an encyclopedia of parliamentary procedure. It is named after Thomas Erskine May, the former Assistant Librarian of the House of Commons, who wrote the first edition in 1844. At present you can get Erskine May only as an expensive hardcover book, which makes it inaccessible not only to the average citizen but also to many parliamentary staff.

The Speaker’s Commission fully supports the recommendation of the House of Commons Governance Committee that the arrangements for the publication of Erskine May should be reviewed. We agree with the Committee that “this important work, central to our constitution, should have an audience beyond parliamentary experts” and that opening the publication “to all in Parliament and beyond will demonstrate the determination of the House to make the workings of Parliament understood by a wider range of staff and the public.”<sup>132</sup> We believe that it should be freely available online. This would also reduce Parliament’s publication costs. To this end, the DDC recommends that, as a matter of urgency, Erskine May should be freely available online for any citizen to access.

32. **We recommend that Erskine May, the definitive guide to parliamentary procedure, should be freely available online by the time the next edition is produced.**

## 12 Developing skills in Parliament



To meet the challenge of making its work more open, accessible and relevant to the people it serves, Parliament will need to build its digital skills.

### 12.1 Building an excellent digital service

We note the steps that Parliament has taken in recent years to develop its digital services. In 2013 it asked mySociety to conduct a strategic review of its online services.<sup>133</sup> The review recommended that Parliament should combine its web and ICT functions into one digital service, and appoint a new Head of Digital to lead it.<sup>134</sup> We commend Parliament's swift acceptance of these recommendations and the work that it has done to prepare for a new digital service, most notably by appointing a new Head of Digital.<sup>135</sup>

When the Head of Digital, Rob Greig, starts in March 2015, he will need to create a digital strategy to enable Parliament to deliver excellent digital services for the public, MPs and parliamentary staff. We hope it will cover at least some of our recommendations. He will then need to build the skills base required to deliver that strategy. MySociety outlined some of the key skills needed:

“[Parliament] does not have access to enough appropriately skilled computer programmers to meet the online service needs of Members, the public or staff...Without an increase in the number of computer programmers and designers working full time on Parliament's online services, it is inevitable that

133 MySociety, *Parliament's Online Services: A Strategic Review containing Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations*, March 2014

134 MySociety, *Parliament's Online Services: A Strategic Review containing Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations*, March 2014

135 Computer Weekly News, Rob Greig appointed director of Parliamentary Digital Service 17 December 2014

the current [web]site will slip ever further behind what modern users consider to be normal.”<sup>136</sup>

We note that market rates are high for some of these skills. This makes recruitment more challenging because the salaries demanded by people with the right skills may fall outside the range that is usually paid to permanent parliamentary staff. This has often tended to result in the use of contractors at even higher cost. However, getting people with the right skills in sufficient numbers is a challenge that must be met if Parliament is to build the vital digital services it needs. We understand that some progress has been made towards recruiting a higher proportion of permanent developers. We also understand that a review of specialist pay scales is under way and urge that this be given a high priority.

33. **By the end of 2015, Parliament should have in place a strategy to ensure that it has the skills it needs to meet the target of being digital and interactive by 2020. The strategy must ensure that the Head of Digital has sufficient means to recruit and retain staff with the specialist digital skills that Parliament needs.**

## 12.2 Building skills to produce good content

Digital is no longer an additional channel: it is the primary means of communication, and all parliamentary outputs should be designed with this in mind. Documents should be designed for online consumption, and all online content should be suitable for mobile devices. This is not just about design and layout, although these are undoubtedly important. It is also about language and format. As we have already recommended, parliamentary communications should include more bite-sized content, infographics and video.<sup>137</sup>

Parliament has already made a start in this area. For example, the Education Service has created short videos, interactive resources and games for young people.<sup>138</sup> However, if it is to build on this progress, managers across Parliament will need to ensure that their staff have the right skills to produce content that people can access in the way that they want. If Parliament is to create more video content, it will need more audio-visual skills. Now that documents are published primarily online, the staff who write those documents should be trained on how to write for the web.

<sup>136</sup> MySociety, Parliament’s Online Services: A Strategic Review containing Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations, March 2014

<sup>137</sup> See recommendation 2 in section 2, Improving public understanding about politics and Parliament

<sup>138</sup> Parliament’s Education Service website; See also Business, Innovation and Skills Committee video summary of its report on adult literacy



## 12.3 Professional communication

As we have already outlined, if Parliament is to encourage greater public involvement in its work, it is important that people have a good experience of engaging with Parliament.<sup>139</sup> This includes ensuring that people know what to expect and that they receive feedback on the impact of their contribution. Communicating with and engaging the public on behalf of a large institution such as Parliament is therefore a key skill for the digital interactive Parliament we wish to see by 2020. Social media and other online channels are becoming increasingly important as Parliament seeks to become more interactive.

Many of the people we spoke to did not know what opportunities there were to get involved in the work of Parliament.<sup>140</sup> Some suggested that Parliament should do more to raise awareness and reach out to people.<sup>141</sup> We agree: parliamentary staff need to become more effective at identifying the potential audience and making them aware of the opportunities to engage.

As the Democratic Society pointed out, people cannot engage in discussions they are unaware of, no matter how good the digital platforms for comment are. It suggested that opportunities to contribute to the law-making process and committee inquiries should be promoted more widely, and outlined how Parliament could use different channels to do this:

“Publicizing through social media as well as the conventional press and through basic advertising strategies should become standard practice.”<sup>142</sup>

<sup>139</sup> See section 8 on Ensuring that the public have a good experience of engaging with Parliament

<sup>140</sup> Discussion at the British Youth Council Convention in Birmingham, 11 October 2014; NIACE Leicester roundtable 4 September 2014; NIACE roundtable London, 10 September 2014; Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014

<sup>141</sup> Marketing roundtable 2 July 2014; Digi058 [Democratic Society]

<sup>142</sup> Digi058 [Democratic Society]



Of course, connecting with people is not just about asking people to send their views to Parliament: it is also about tuning into the conversations that people are having in online spaces. One message that resonated strongly with us is that Parliament has to get better at listening to people.<sup>143</sup> Parliament already has some good practice learning in this area, but it needs to do more.<sup>144</sup>

Access to advice and support in planning and implementing digital engagement opportunities will be key to making them effective and ensuring a positive experience for citizens. As outlined by Involve, this will be partly about managing expectations and partly about ensuring that sufficient resources are in place:

“As in all good engagement practice, be careful to set realistic expectations in advance for how much influence citizens are likely to have in the process, and set up plans (and budgets) ahead of time for closing the feedback loop. Embed a culture of continual learning, and be positive from the outset that making changes as you go along is an indicator of quality.”<sup>145</sup>

Parliament’s skills need to fit the new digital world and enable it to adapt accordingly. Gone are the days when the skills needed for effective online communications and creating digital content could be delegated to a small core of specialist staff. This needs to be reflected in its strategy for developing its staff.

## 12.4 Building an appetite for risk

Finally, we highlight the need for Parliament to develop an appetite for risk-taking and innovation, which is an essential component of doing digital well. Currently, it can seem overly cautious about trying new ways of doing things, but digital excellence requires a willingness to experiment. This means accepting that not all projects will succeed, but some failure is an inevitable part of innovation. An incremental approach is more likely to succeed than putting all digital development efforts into one grand scheme. We note an increased appetite in many parts of the House to take calculated risks—for example, by using social media to increase engagement and by ceasing publication of some of its content in paper formats—and we hope to see this approach expand.

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143 Dr Andy Williamson, spoken contribution on representation, 17 June 2014, Q23; Digital Democracy events in Cardiff and Gov Camp Cymru, 26-27 September 2014

144 Digi028 [Lucy Denton, Digital Outreach Team]

145 Digi003 [Involve]

# 13 The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness

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The Commission has drawn on digital democracy initiatives from across the world. We participated in the World e-Parliament Conference and have become a popular contact within the UK Parliament for others around the world interested in sharing good practice on digital democracy, openness and transparency.<sup>146</sup>

Launched at the 2012 World e-Parliament conference, the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness is a call to parliaments and legislative assemblies for an increased commitment to transparency, openness and citizen engagement.<sup>147</sup> Dr Andy Williamson told us the UK Parliament should adopt the principles set out in the declaration:

“It’s important to establish a credible and measurable set of objectives. A good starting point for this would be to adopt the principles contained in the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, which can be summarised under the following four primary headings:

1. Promoting a Culture of Openness  
Parliamentary information belongs to the public.
2. Making Parliamentary Information Transparent  
Parliament shall adopt policies that ensure proactive publication of parliamentary information, and shall review these policies periodically to take advantage of evolving good practices.
3. Easing Access to Parliamentary Information  
Parliament shall ensure that information is broadly accessible to all citizens on a non-discriminatory basis through multiple channels, including first-person observation, print media, radio, and live and on-demand broadcasts and streaming
4. Enabling Electronic Communication of Parliamentary Information  
Parliament shall ensure that information is broadly accessible to all citizens on a non-discriminatory basis through multiple channels, including first-person observation, print media, radio, and live and on-demand broadcasts and streaming.”<sup>148</sup>

We agree.

34. **The House of Commons should formally adopt the principles set out in the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness.**

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<sup>146</sup> The conference is the biennial forum of the community of parliaments on their use of information and communication technologies (ICT). It addresses, from both the policy and technical perspectives, how ICT can help improve representation, law-making and oversight and increase parliament’s openness, accessibility, accountability and effectiveness.

<sup>147</sup> Open Parliament website

<sup>148</sup> Digi018 [Dr Andy Williamson]

# What happens next?

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We see this report as the start of a conversation, not the end. Most of our recommendations are to the House of Commons Service and Members of Parliament and we hope that they will give rise to some interesting new initiatives or give support to initiatives that are already under way.

In this report we have made a number of recommendations. In addition to this we have identified five key targets that Parliament should work towards:

1. **By 2020, the House of Commons should ensure that everyone can understand what it does.**
2. **By 2020, Parliament should be fully interactive and digital.**
3. **The 2015 newly elected House of Commons should create immediately a new forum for public participation in the debating function of the House of Commons.**
4. **By 2020, secure online voting should be an option for all voters.**
5. **By 2016, all published information and broadcast footage produced by Parliament should be freely available online in formats suitable for re-use. Hansard should be available as open data by the end of 2015.**

Sadly, with the publication of this report, our work as a commission is done for now. Our passion however will continue and we will meet in one year's time to review the progress that has been made towards these key targets. We hope there will be much to be enthusiastic about and that Parliament will continue to be receptive to the digital democracy conversation. Many of our contacts are now connected with people within Parliament working in this area, which is a testament to how receptive so many staff and Members of Parliament have been to our work. Let the building of a digital and interactive Parliament begin!

# About Us

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The Commission was announced by the Right Hon. John Bercow MP, the Speaker of the House of Commons in November 2013. It began work in January 2014.

## Who we are

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The Commission is chaired by the Speaker and is made up of people from a range of relevant professions and backgrounds.



Robert Halfon MP  
Conservative MP for  
Harlow



Meg Hillier MP  
Labour MP for  
Hackney South and  
Shoreditch



Paul Kane  
President of  
Community DNS



Cristina Leston-  
Bandeira  
Professor of politics  
at the University of  
Hull



Helen Milner  
Chief Executive  
of the Tinder  
Foundation



Emma Mulqueeny  
Founder of Rewired  
State and Young  
Rewired State



Femi Oyeniran  
Actor and filmmaker



Toni Pearce  
President of the  
National Union of  
Students

The staff of the Commission are: Edward Wood (Secretary), Emma McIntosh (Specialist), Luanne Middleton (Specialist), and Victoria Carpenter (Executive Assistant).

The Commission was also helped by a number of other Parliamentary staff. Special thanks go to James Barr, Hansard; Laura Bristow, Digital Account Manager; Mark Cullen, Online Information Officer; Aliyah Dar, Library Subject Specialist; Sian Hodges, Business Analyst; Matt Instone, Engagement and Communities Manager; Vinay Khubchandani, Senior Web Developer; Vanda Ladeira, Business Analyst; Justine McGuinness, Former External Communications Advisor; Jemma Ridley, Audio-visual Media Officer; and Rob Thain, Design Manager.

## Our aim

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Our terms of reference were to consider, report and make recommendations on how parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom can embrace the opportunities afforded by the digital world to become more effective in:

- making laws
- scrutinising the work and performance of government
- representing citizens
- encouraging citizens to engage with democracy
- facilitating dialogue amongst citizens

In addition, the Commission aimed to consider the implications for Parliament if it is to become more relevant to the increasingly diverse population it serves.

## How we worked

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We tried to be as digital and open as possible, and hear from a wide range of people. There were successes and failures, and the challenges we faced in our working methods helped shaped this report. We went about our work by asking people questions which related to the five different themes listed in our terms of reference.

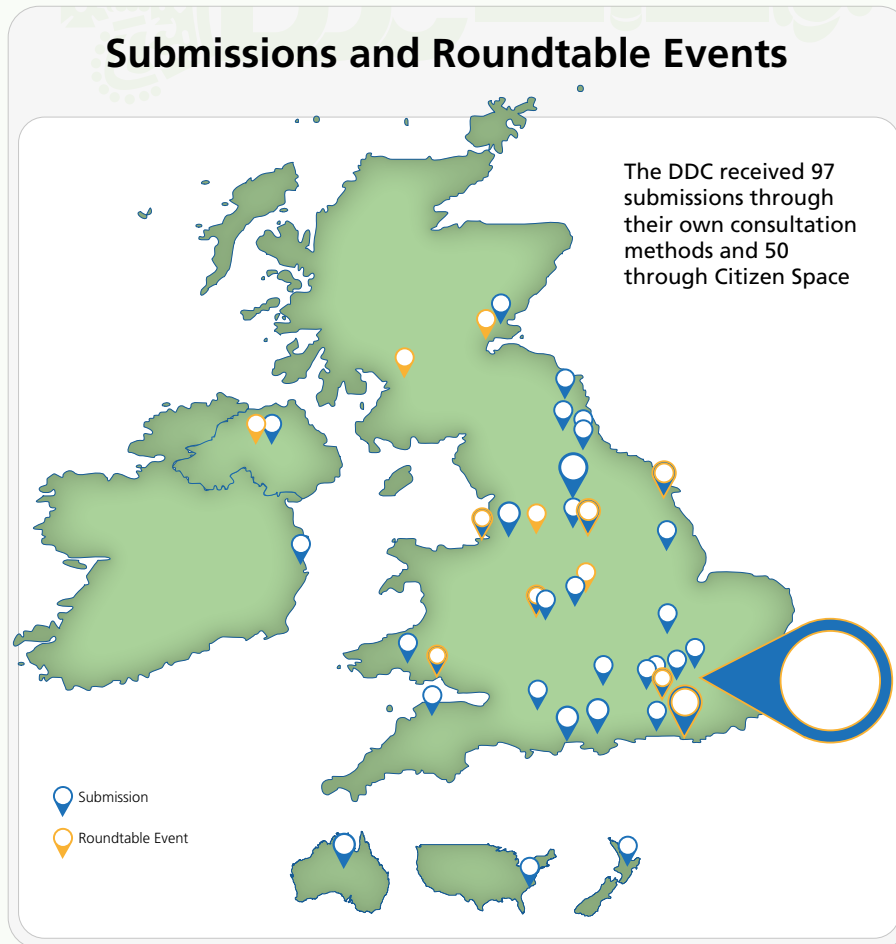
## How we engaged with people

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Our key methods:

- We invited answers to our questions via email, video, a web survey, and a web comment thread;
- We held roundtable discussions with a variety of people;
- We spoke to people on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn;
- We wrote to the Vice Chancellor of every university in the UK;
- We had online student forums for each of our themes;
- We worked with external partners;
- We held formal, open (and live-streamed) meetings of the Commission where we invited a variety of relevant people to answer questions on our themes This was followed by an opportunity for audience participation;

- We had informal meetings with a wide range of people and participated in several international events.

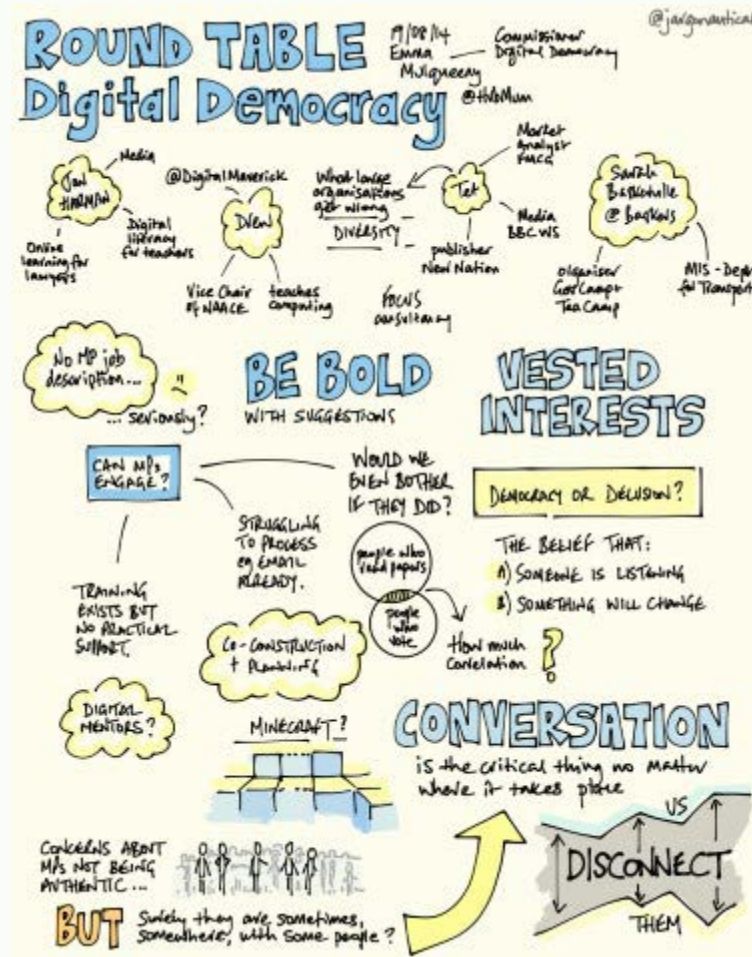


#### Submissions and Roundtable Events

Most of our responses were received by email. We received one video response on Facebook and a number of blog posts. We started with a web comment thread which had limited success and we received constructive feedback from some people who had wanted to see a more interactive online debate. We also piloted an online form to make it easier for people to submit their views, which proved popular. See below for the full list of all who sent responses.

The roundtable discussions were excellent for hearing the views of a good variety of people and were by far the favourite part of our work, so much so that Emma Mulqueeny even held some 'democracy and cake sessions' at her house. Some of these discussions came out of networking through our most successful social media channel, Twitter (Cardiff,

Belfast, Edinburgh), and one (in Chesterfield) from our web comment thread. See below the full list of where we went and the groups we spoke to. In addition, we had some useful informal meetings and discussions with people, which are listed below.



Sketch note of digital democracy discussion by Lucy Knight

Working with partners was also a successful part of our engagement. For example, the Political Studies Association's Parliaments and Legislatures Specialist Group for Parliament Week teamed up with universities across the UK (15 in total) and held discussion events to develop digital ideas to engage young people with Parliament. Model Westminster organised an event bringing together over 60 young people aged 15 to 24 from across the UK to talk digital democracy with us. The Hansard Society and Britain Thinks brought together a representative citizens jury for a one-day workshop. Others are listed below.



Video by James Galley: Discussion at the University of East Anglia



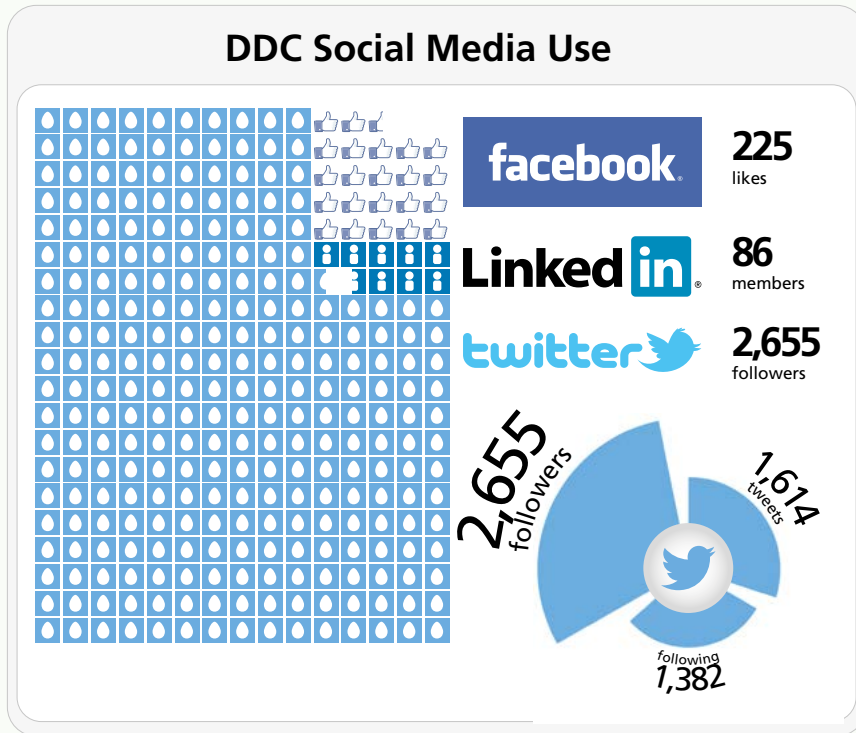
Model Westminster discussion event (image: Model Westminster)

In addition, the student forums, which were run and summarised by the students themselves, provided valuable input. See below for the list of universities and student representatives involved.

The Commission was present on the social media sites Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. In addition it used Parliament's YouTube channel and Flickr for some videos and pictures. Twitter was our most successful with over 2,600 followers at the time of writing this



report. Our Facebook page was liked by over 200 people and the LinkedIn discussion group currently has over 80 members. We hope this discussion group will continue to grow.



The Digital Democracy Commission's social media accounts

## Special thanks

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We received a great deal of support from outside Parliament. Special thanks go to Ben Fowkes and the team at Delib, who kindly provided us with a complimentary Citizen Space online consultation tool survey; and to Alex Mitchel, Freelance Cartoonist, for the illustrations in this report. We would also like to thank the following for their support, most of whom helped and organised various events for us: Baker & McKenzie; Burson-Marsteller; Simon Cramp, Fellow of the Centre for Welfare Reform; Anna Sterckx, British Youth Council; Matilda Murday and Antony Zacharzewski, The Democratic Society; Tom Whittaker, Enable Group; Simon Milner and team at Facebook; Mike Cornwell, Johanna Higgs and Caroline Robertson, The Institute of Digital Marketing; Caroline Lucas MP; Chris Brown, MCE Public Relations; Matthew Margetts, Microsoft; Daniel Swislow and Greg Brown, National Democratic Institute; Susan Easton, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education; Helena Djurkovic and James Ludley, The Political Studies Association; Jonathan Chandler, PR Guild; Public Relations Consultants Association; PR Newswire; Chris Yiu and Sally Dyson, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations; Nicola Wallace Dean, Starting Point Community Learning Partnership; Professor Matt Jones, Sian Jones and Tom Owen, Swansea University; Laura Dennis, The Tinder Foundation; Jen Thornton, Communications Strategist from Cardiff; Sarah Chaytor, University College London; Sarah Boswell and Dr Daniel Hammett, University of Sheffield; Professor Graham Smith and Professor Christian Fuchs, University of Westminster and Dr Andy Williamson, Democratiser.

# Who we heard from

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## Roundtables

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The Commission held discussions around the country and spoke to a wide range of people. This included young people, adults with learning difficulties, people with visual and hearing impediments, voluntary organisations, people from the tech industry, academics, public sector workers, marketing and public relations experts.

14 April 2014: Liverpool

Discussion with staff and volunteers from Everton in the Community, the charity of Everton FC.

9 May 2014: London

Discussion with young people at Facebook in London

19 May 2014: Westminster University

Discussion with academics from Westminster University

16 June 2014: Edinburgh

Discussion with voluntary sector professionals as part of Digital Scotland Festival 2014

17 June 2014: London

Discussion at London Technology Week

30 June 2014: Chesterfield

Discussion with adults with learning difficulties in Chesterfield

2 July 2014: Marketing roundtable

Discussion with marketing industry experts in London

15 July 2014: MPs' roundtable

Discussion with MPs in the House of Commons

18 July 2014: secondary students

Discussion with year 10 citizenship students

21 July 2014: Cardiff

Discussion workshop organised by Swansea University

22 July 2014: University College London

Discussion with academics organised by UCL

11 August 2014: Stockport

Discussion with members of the public

12 August 2014: Model Westminster

Event organised by Model Westminster

4 September 2014: Leicester

Discussion with members of the public in conjunction with NIACE

Wednesday 10 September 2014: London  
Roundtable with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

Wednesday 17 September 2014: Brighton  
Workshop at Brighton's Digital Festival

Thursday 25 September 2014: Sheffield Festival of the Mind  
University of Sheffield's Digital Society Network organised this event which was open to anyone who had pre-registered

Friday 26 September 2014: Gov Camp Cymru  
Discussion with members of the public, mostly from the public sector

Saturday 11 October 2014: Kenny Imafidon  
Discussion with Youth Policy Advisor, Kenny Imafidon at the British Youth Council Convention

Saturday 11 October 2014: Birmingham  
Discussions with young people at the British Youth Council Convention

Friday 24 October 2014: Belfast  
Discussion with digital leaders and non-partisan political bloggers

Monday 17 November 2014: London  
15 winning ideas from the "Hardcopy or #Hashtag?" regional workshops which took place between 8 September and 10 October. These were a culmination of the most innovative ideas from young people on how digital technology can increase youth engagement with Parliament and the political process. The final event was held during Parliament Week on 17 November where these ideas were presented.

Monday 24 November 2014: London  
Discussion with PR experts

15 July 2014: MPs' roundtable discussion in Parliament



Picture: The Speaker talking to young people in Liverpool (image: Pete Carr)



Discussion with young people at Facebook HQ in London (image: PC)

## Student forums

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Students from eight universities held discussions on each of the Commission's key themes: making laws, scrutiny, representation, engagement and facilitating dialogue. They were led by the students themselves who produced summaries of their findings.

The following students took part in the online forum:

Saga Barnard, University of Strathclyde;

Lisa Childs, Cardiff University;

Marian Craig, University of Strathclyde;

Stuart Gray, University of Strathclyde

Laura Griffiths, University of Hull;

Joseph Jones, University of Leeds;

Ben Kelso, University of Ulster;

Lewis King, Demontfort University;

Sara McLean, University of Ulster;

Joshua Newton, University of Hull;

Andrej Ninkovic, University of Hull;

Emmanuel Oyeniran, Demontfort University;

Katie Pearson, University of Leeds;

Sophia Pellatt, Cardiff University;

James Potts, University of Nottingham;

Jessie Powell, University of Leeds;

Peter Sinclair, Demontfort University;

Peter Smeed, University of Surrey;

Alex Wilk, University of Surrey;

Katie Wood, University of Nottingham.

## Meetings of the Commission

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We held formal meetings at Westminster where we invited a variety of people from Parliament, organisations and academics to talk about different themes:

Making Laws in a Digital Age: spoken evidence, 18 March 2014

Cristiano Ferri Soares de Faria (Brazilian Chamber of Deputies), via Skype

John Sheridan, National Archives

Hayley Rogers, Parliamentary Counsel

David Natzler & Matthew Hamlyn, Department of Chamber and Committee Services, House of Commons

Digital Scrutiny: spoken evidence, 10 April 2014

Graham Allen, MP, Chair, Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (PCRC)

Adam Afriyie, MP, Chair, POST (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology)

Lord Allan of Hallam, Director of Policy in Europe, Facebook

Ruth Fox, Chief Executive, Hansard Society

Committee Office staff: Mark Hutton, Principal Clerk, and Kevin Maddison, Committee Specialist, Communities and Local Government Committee

Representation: spoken evidence, 17 June 2014

Andrew Cooper, Populus

Cllr Peter Fleming, Sevenoaks Council and LGA

Lord Kirkwood

Dr Andy Williamson

Engagement and Facilitating Dialogue: spoken evidence, 15 July 2014

David Babbs, 38 degrees

Douglas Carswell MP

Eamonn Carey, MHP Communications

The Rt Hon. the Lord Knight of Weymouth

Brian Loader, York University

Brie Rogers Lowery, Change.Org

Electronic Voting Commission meeting: spoken evidence, 3 September 2014

Natascha Engel MP

Professor bob Watt

Katie Ghose, Electoral Reform Society

Andrew Colver, Head of Democratic Services at Rushmoor Borough Council

## Conferences and Informal meetings

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We had a wide range of informal meetings with interested people, and heard about digital initiatives which were already underway, including within other Parliaments; The National Assembly for Wales, The Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as those from around the world:

30/01/2014 Sharon O' Dea

03/02/2014 John Hunter

06/02/2014 TechCity

07/02/2014 Dominik von Malaisé

10/02/2014 Simon Milner, Facebook

12/02/2014 Social media conference, Westminster

20/02/2014 Anthony Zacharzewski, Dem Soc

24/02/2014 Buzz City breakfast meeting

24/02/2014 Geoff Mulgan and Francesca Bria, Nesta

27/02/2014 Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho

03/03/2014 Mark Kidson, Institute for Government

05/03/2014 Social Media Leadership Forum

10/03/2014 Peter Lewis, voXup online engagement tool

12/03/2014 Abdul Shayek, YOCA

14/03/2014 D-Cent/Nesta event

17/03/2014 Telephone call with Daniel Swislow and Scott Hubli, NDI

18/03/2014 Dr Cristian Vaccari, Royal Holloway University of London

24/03/2014 Elena Findley-de Regt, gov.uk content designers

25/03/2014 Dr Andy Williamson, Democratise

26/03/2014 Matt Rogerson, Guardian

27/03/2014 Andy Tye, Syctl



31/03/2014 John Stewart, Northern Ireland Assembly  
31/03/2014 Law Factory Project, Sciences Po, Paris' university  
31/03/2014 Tom Harrison  
07/04/2014 Simon Burton, House of Lords  
11/04/2014 Joe Mitchell  
14/04/2014 Ben Fowkes, Delib  
18/04/2014 Speaker's visit to Estonia  
22/04/2014 Paul Corcoran, Agent Marketing  
24/04/2014 Phone call with Patrick Oliver, Culture Lab, Newcastle University  
28/04/2014 Policy Exchange event, The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Australian Minister of Education  
30/04/2014 Hansard Society Launch of the 2014 Audit of Political Engagement  
06/05/2014 University of Westminster discussion  
07/05/2014 The University of Lincoln, introduction to digital voting  
07/05/2014 Paul Evans, House of Commons  
08/05/2014 Mr Speaker's visit to World e-Parliament Conference in South Korea  
08/05/2014 Open Government Partnership European Regional Meeting, Dublin  
09/05/2014 Oliver Sidorczuk, Bite the Ballot  
09/05/2014 Mal Smith, Policy Plus  
12/05/2014 Brie Rogers Lowery and John Coventry, Change.org  
12/05/2014 Liz Price, House of Commons  
13/05/2014 Profs John McNaughton and David Runciman, Cambridge University  
15/05/2014 Conference call with Daniel Hammett, Sheffield University  
28/05/2014 OLDP Conference II Time has come for Law-Tracking, Paris  
03/06/2014 The Institute of Direct and Digital Marketing (IDM)  
04/06/2014 Policy Exchange: The future of Digital Britain (2015 election)  
05/06/2014 Michael Simpson, Note my Vote  
05/06/2014 Matthew Hanney, Political Advisor to the Rt. Hon Nick Clegg MP  
06/06/2014 Daniel Hammett, Sheffield University  
09/06/2014 Fact Checking Conference, LSE  
09/06/2014 Natascha Engel MP  
10/06/2014 Policy Exchange  
16/06/2014 Dr Andy Williamson, Democratise  
19/06/2014 Constantine Gonticas, Millwall FC

25/06/2014 Digital Economy Programme Board, Swansea University  
30/06/2014 Wikimedia/Demos  
30/06/2014 Ben Fowkes, Delib (Citizen Space)  
30/06/2014 Conference call with Liverpool University  
01/07/2014 Laurance Meehan, Local Government Association  
01/07/2014 Dr Ruth Fox, Hansard Society  
02/07/2014 David Sleight, Lincoln University  
02/07/2014 Action for Blind People  
03/07/2014 Teachers' Institute  
08/07/2014 Technology and democratic participation: friend or foe?, University of Westminster/Involve  
08/07/2014 Tinder Foundation event  
09/07/2014 David Sleight, Lincoln University and Paul Manners, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement  
10/07/2014 Simon Cramp, Fellow of the Centre for Welfare Reform  
17/07/2014 Ayath Ullah, Model Westminster  
17/07/2014 Open Policy Making Team, Cabinet Office  
21/07/2014 PICTFOR Parliament 2.0 seminar  
22/07/2014 Jaan Priislau, Estonian Information Systems Authority  
23/07/2014 Burson Marsteller digital democracy roundtable  
24/07/2014 Valerie Thompson, e-learning Foundation  
25/07/2014 Meeting with Digital Skills House of Lords Select Committee  
29/07/2014 Meeting with Adobe  
13/08/2014 Conference call with Bite the Ballot  
21/08/2014 Dr Ruth Fox, Hansard Society  
26/08/2014 Ben Howe  
26/08/2014 Paul Rissen, BBC  
28/08/2014 Areeq Chowdhury, WebRoots  
02/09/2014 Rick Edwards, TV Presenter  
03/09/2014 Charles Eales and Neil Prior, Microsoft  
05/09/2014 Gabriel Straub, Tesco  
09/09/2014 Dr Amy Pollard, Involve  
15/09/2014 Speaker's video speech to the Global Legislative Openness Week in Chile 25-26 September 2014

Global Legislative Openness Week in Montenegro 15 - 25 September 2014

- 19/09/2014 Hansard Society and Britain Thinks workshop
- 22/09/2014 Lori Steele, Everyone Counts
- 22/09/2014 Mathew Bayfield, Big Data
- 23/09/2014 Parliamentary Delegation from Chile and Mexico
- 30/09/2014 Mr Speaker's visit to Australia
- 02/10/2014 ParliTeaCamp
- 06/10/2014 Professor Mark Ryan and Gurchetan S Grewal, Birmingham University
- 09/10/2014 Dr Dan Brown and Professor Philip Treleaven, UCL social media platform
- 13/10/2014 Tom Loosemore, Government Digital Service
- 14/10/2014 Open Data Institute, lunchtime lecture: Data for democracy
- 15/10/2014 Helen Reeves, Electoral Commission
- 16/10/2014 William Barker, Head of Technology and Digital Futures Strategy, Department for Communities and Local Government
- 21/10/2014 Jonathan Brunert, BBC
- 22/10/2014 Barclays MyZone presentation
- 22/10/2014 Scott Hubli, National Democratic Insitute
- 24/10/2014 John Stewart, Northern Ireland Assembly
- 27/10/2014 Launch of mySociety report
- 28/10/2014 Steven Clift, Global convenor, speaker and expert on open government, civic technology, and e-democracy
- 03/11/2014 Smartmatic electronic voting demonstration
- 04/11/2014 Simon Nicholls, House of Lords
- 04/11/2014 Chris Hanretty, UEA
- 11/11/2014 University College London roundtable
- 14/11/2014 Geoff Mulgan and Francesca Bria, Nesta
- 17/11/2014 Parliament week event: Hardcopy or #Hashtag? Young People's Vision for a Digital Parliament
- 17/11/2014 WebRoots panel discussion
- 18/11/2014 Serbian Parliament/CRTA delegation
- 19/11/2014 Tinder Foundation conference: Digital Evolution, Leaving no one behind
- 03/12/2014 Google hangout with Ben Kallos, New York Councillor
- 09/12/2014 Skype meeting with Swansea University
- 10/12/2014 Warren Seddon and Tom Hawthorn, Electoral Commission

10/12/2014 Andy Hamflett, AAM

12/12/2014 Workshop with the PR Guild

## Written contributions

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### Representation

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Lawrence William Dolling (555650072)

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Jonathan Griffiths (1063661764)

Jiri Mucha (184301872)

Gordon Owen (129702309)

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## Engagement

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## Electronic voting

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Christopher Chantrey, British Community Committee of France (449530731)  
Anonymous (46129656)  
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Anonymous (321453448)  
Anonymous (342153441)

The following submissions were received via email, blogs, Facebook, letters, video and Twitter. We received permission to publish the following submissions:

Advanced Computing Research Centre (Digi076)  
Aileen Walker, Director of Public Engagement (Digi094)

Alastair Howard, Streetlife (Digi020)  
Alistair Stoddart, The Democratic Society (Digi085)  
Andrew Colver, Head of Democratic Services, Rushmoor Borough Council (Digi060)  
Dr Andy Williamson, FRSA (Digi018)  
Anonymous (Digi009)  
Antony Carpen (Digi010)  
Argyro Karanasiou, Centre for Intellectual Property Policy & Management, Bournemouth University (Digi019)  
Arqiva (Digi065)  
Bazil Saiq (Digi062)  
Ben Kallos, Council Member New York (Digi097)  
Ben Worthy, Birkbeck College, (Digi073)  
Brian D. Loader, Associate Director SATSU, University of York (Digi095)  
Caroline Lucas MP (Digi088)  
Catherine Bochel, University of Lincoln (Digi059)  
Change.Org (Digi067)  
Christian Gutteridge, Southampton ECS Web Team (Digi036)  
Claire Williams (Digi052)  
Cllr Jason Kitcat (Digi047)  
Cristian Vaccari Department of Politics and International Relations Royal Holloway, University of London (Digi086)  
Darren Lilleker, Bournemouth Media School (Digi050)  
Dave King (Digi033)  
David Durant and second submission (Digi004)  
David Farnsworth (Digi054)  
David Noble, New Zealand Chief Parliamentary Counsel (Digi034)  
Democracy Counts (Digi090)  
Document Direct (Digi038)  
Dr Paul Hepburn, University of Liverpool (Digi057)  
Ed Hammond, The Centre for Public Scrutiny (Digi049)  
Eliot Hughes (Digi006)  
Everyone Counts and Everyone Counts' slide on participation increases due to eVoting (Digi083)  
Frances G. Boul Hay (Digi064)

Fraser Henderson (Digi022) and second submission (Digi042)  
Full Fact (Digi035)  
Glenyan Cochrane (Digi023)  
Hansard Society and Britainthinks event with the Hansard Society (Digi089a and Digi89b)  
Hansard Society and Britainthinks event with the Hansard Society (Digi089)  
Hardcopy or #Hashtag? YOUNG PEOPLE'S VISION FOR A DIGITAL PARLIAMENT (Digi093)  
Ian Smith (Digi081)  
Involve (Digi003)  
James Thresher, Head of Digital Outreach in Public Information and Outreach Service,  
House of Commons (Digi092)  
John Bennett (Digi070)  
John Hunter, Your Democracy Ltd (Digi051)  
John Stewart and Brian Devlin, NI Assembly (Digi030)  
Jon Foster-Smith and Proposal for an app entitled "True Democracy" (Digi043)  
Jonathan Elmer, Director of Democratise (Digi048) Second submission (Digi068)  
Jordan Milton (Digi008)  
Ken Knight (Digi025)  
Kheira Belkacem, PhD (Digi027)  
Lambeth Council (Digi080)  
Local Government Boundary Commission (Digi053)  
Lucy Denton, Former Digital Engagement Manager, House of Commons (Digi028)  
Mark Ryan and Gurchetan Grewal, EPSRC project entitled "Trustworthy Voting Systems"  
(Digi016)  
Martyn Lloyd (Digi041)  
Mary Marshall (Digi056)  
Max Richens (Digi012)  
Michael A Carson (Digi044)  
Michael Curtotti, Research School of Computer Science, Australian National University  
(Digi007)  
Michael Woodhouse (Digi074)  
Students' Union, Nottingham University (Digi002)  
Oonagh Gay, House of Commons (Digi087)  
Open Rights Group (Digi075)  
Pam Roud (Digi011)

Paul Robinson (Digi005)

Prof Chris Reed, Queen Mary University London (Digi014)

Prof Christian Fuchs, University of Westminster. Communication and Media Research Institute (Digi026)

Prof Charles Pattie, University of Sheffield (Digi084)

Prof Paul Baines, Cranfield University (Digi066)

Prof Rachel Gibson, Director, Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester (Digi031)

Rob Windstrel Watson (Digi055)

Robert Sharp and his prototype for how a government report should be structured (Digi082)

Sam Smith (Digi013)

Scytll's Cryptographic e-Voting Security Software; Issues guide on internet voting for Canada; French expats vote online in 2012 legislative elections; Analysis of French expat internet voting up until 2013; United Arab Emirates example; Gujarat, India example; The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) survey of internet voting; Democratic Audit's report 'Engaging young voters with enhanced election information'; The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Norwegian E-Vote Project (Digi069)

Smartmatic, Philippines example, Venezuela example (Digi079)

StJohn Deakins, Citizenme (Digi001)

Stuart Long (Digi045)

Susan Hedley (Digi039)

Swansea University Computer Science (Digi 070) Welsh language copy

The Carnegie UK Trust (Digi061)

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (Digi096)

The Democratic Society (Digi015) and The Democratic Society second submission (Digi058)

The Electoral Commission (Digi077)

The Foundation for Information Policy Research (Digi072)

The Rt Hon. the Lord Knight of Weymouth (Digi101)

The Speaker's Advisory Council on Public Engagement (Digi091)

Tim Knight (Digi024)

University College London (Digi063)

Valerie Thompson, Chief Executive, e-Learning Foundation (Digi046)

WebRoots Democracy (Digi078)

Wiki-sourced submission by Wiki Media UK and Demos (Digi029)

William Perrin (Digi017)



The following people contributed via our website comment thread;

John Black

Nick Booth

Simon Cramp

David Durant

Terrance Eden

John Flood

Lyndsay Hope

Tim Jokl

Michael La Costa

Rachel Ling

Bruce Lloyd

Shane McCracken

Tim Millea

Sailesh Patel

Tony Spiess

Norman Strauss