

**Commission on
Parliamentary
Reform**

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Pàrlamaideach

Do Phàrlamaid
Do Ghuth

Agenda

9th Meeting

Monday 27 February 2017

The Commission will meet at 2.30pm in Waverley Chambers, Transport Interchange, Galashiels.

1. The Chair will introduce the Commission members and its remit followed by an opportunity for those in the public gallery to ask questions or provide comment.

2. The Commission will discuss digital engagement with —

Kevin Davies, Senior Public Engagement Manager, National Assembly for Wales;

Peter McColl, Head of Policy, Nesta;

Alistair Stoddart, Scotland Network Manager, The Democratic Society; and

Dr Andy Williamson, Democratise.

Paper CPR/9/1 – background paper

Paper CPR/9/2 – note by the Secretariat (private paper)

3. The Commission will consider the discussion held at items 1 and 2 (in private).

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Room CG.07

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Edinburgh

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Commission on Parliamentary Reform

8th Meeting, Monday 27 February 2017

Written Views

Introduction

1. Written views have been provided by the following individuals and organisations giving evidence at today's Commission meeting –

- Kevin Davies, Senior Public Engagement Manager, National Assembly for Wales (Annexe A)
- Peter McColl, Head of Policy, Nesta (Annexe B)
- Alistair Stoddart, the Democratic Society (Annexe C)
- Dr Andy Williamson, Democratise (Annexe D)

Written views from Kevin Davies, National Assembly of Wales

Background

The Assembly has invested a lot of time and energy in recent years to change the way we engage with citizens. In June 2016, the Assembly Commission committed to 'to engage with all of the people of Wales and champion the Assembly' as one of their three strategic goals for the Fifth Assembly term. Our public engagement work aims to deliver services that connect and engage with all the people of Wales, however, whenever and wherever they choose. We will inform and involve all the people of Wales in the Assembly's work, and introduce ways that empower them as citizens to directly influence and take pride in the legislature's work. Particular attention will be given to developing services that engage those who do not currently engage with the Assembly.

We've made a conscious effort to encourage direct participation in Assembly business by targeting citizens based on issues they are passionate about, and have looked to create an environment that provides opportunities for more and different people to get involved in the Assembly's work, particularly by contributing to committee consultations.

Assembly committees regularly hear from interest groups, charities and membership organisations who provide valuable contributions in scrutinising the work of government. These groups regularly take up the opportunity to 'opt in' to have their say, however the 'opt in' approach alone doesn't always provide us with a diverse range of views, as contributions received through the more traditional consultation methods don't tend to include the opinions and experience of those who work within the relevant sector, or citizens with an interest in or are affected by decisions made on specific matters. At the request of Assembly Members who wish to diversify the range of voices contributing to Assembly business, we now actively seek evidence from those who do not currently engage with the Assembly.

Committee engagement

The purpose of the Assembly's committee engagement activities is to:

- Collect evidence from more diverse audiences
- Build long term engagement, understanding and trust between institution and the people it represents and serves.

Sometimes engagement with these audiences provides committees with an understanding of the wider public's perceptions of an issue, at other times it provides committees with first hand experience of the issue being investigated by arranging activities which specifically seeks involvement from certain groups of public. This provides members with a greater range of evidence to call upon while holding government to account.

Not only does this make scrutiny more robust, it also provides an opportunity for those who may have little or no interest in party politics or political institutions to engage in a formal form of political participation because of their interest in the subject matter. It also provides us with an opportunity to provide participants with

accurate, non-partisan, factual information on the matter. Having taken part, we inform them on how their contribution has been used, [and what action has been taken as a result](#). We hope by providing people with a positive participation experience, that participants are then more likely to take more of an interest in political matters, understand more about the difference between the Assembly and the Government and devolved government, have more confidence to participate in political and social action in the future, and have a better perception of the relevance and representativeness of the Assembly. It also provides an opportunity to foster a longer term relationship between the participant and the institution, and create advocacy where those participants speak more positively of the Assembly and share opportunities to participate with their friends, family and colleagues.

Involving young people directly in Assembly business has been a particular focus which has been achieved primarily through refocusing our youth engagement and education programmes and increased use of digital and social platforms.

Approach to planning

Effective planning is key to delivering effective committee engagement. At the Assembly we developed an 'integrated team' approach to supporting committees – small teams made up of representatives from all the services who provide support to committees one way or another e.g. Committee Service, Research, Legal, Translation and Communications (Outreach).

Each committee is supported by an 'integrated team' which meets weekly to plan and discuss upcoming committee business over the coming weeks and months. This ensures a cohesive approach to planning and delivering committee work which has had a positive effect on the way we plan consultations in particular.

Each team works with committee Members to identify which specific audiences they want to involve in certain inquiries and when to carry out the engagement activity. The nature of the subject matter, the availability of Assembly Members and the engagement preferences of those target audiences are all accounted for when deciding which method, or increasingly, the mixture of methods we agree to engage the target audiences identified.

Methods

A variety of methods have been used to supplement evidence received through the more traditional, formal call for evidence, including:

- Web chats, using Google Hangouts to engage students for an [inquiry into STEM Skills](#)
- [Loomio for an inquiry into Alcohol and Substance Misuse](#) which involved those who have themselves suffered from alcoholism and substance abuse
- [Video evidence](#) to hear the views of small businesses across Wales on the impact that mobile and broadband connectivity has on their business
- An [online survey](#) to hear from passengers on their priorities for the upcoming Rail Franchise and South Wales Metro
- [Focus groups](#) to gather the views of gypsies and travellers on government legislation on housing
- [Events](#) where cancer patients gave evidence to Assembly Members as part of an inquiry scrutinising the Welsh Government's Cancer Delivery Plan
- A citizens reference group contributing to an inquiry of Inter Parliamentary working
- Vignettes with older people as part of scrutiny of Welsh Government legislation on social services

Members are involved in these initiatives when possible. Many of the 60 elected Assembly Members sit on multiple committees, which means that their ability to take part differs depending on their timetables and workload. Assembly Members have welcomed the opportunity to engage with the public in innovative ways and have been happy for engagement activities to take place without them being present if necessary, acting as convenors of conversation, rather than requiring every question and conversation to be directed through them. Where Members are not present, the views expressed are captured and presented to them in a formal committee setting so that information can be used during the scrutiny process and referenced at a later date.

A wide variety of methods have been used as you can see, and more often than not, we use a range of online and offline methods to deliver the consultation engagement objectives.

Some challenges remain. For example, when we seek the views of the wider public through purely online methods the views of the over 60s are underrepresented and securing the appropriate geographical spread for offline engagement comes at a financial cost. To mitigate these issues and risks, we utilise our education and youth engagement teams, our community outreach team and our visitor service team, who engage people of all ages, backgrounds and communities on a daily basis. More often than not, this approach secures a more representative sample. Similarly, embedding the idea that each and every engagement opportunity (online, on the estate and in Welsh community) provides a potential opportunity for third party advocacy widens the reach of committee engagement further.

Empower

At the Assembly we have mostly used digital tools to inform and involve. We have a presence on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Flickr and Facebook which helps communicate our work. We have recently used Facebook Live for the first time, as a means of enabling a two way conversation on specific issues being scrutinised.

In recent months we have also used digital tools to better enable citizens to help shape and set the agenda.

- One of our committees has used the [Dialogue App](#), asking people for their ideas on the future support for agriculture, land management and rural communities in Wales
- The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee used a mixture of methods, including e-mail, events, Facebook Live and a poll to [decide upon a future inquiry](#)

Impact

By changing our approach we have greatly increased the number of people contributing to Assembly business, and attracted new people who haven't engaged with us in the past.

Committees' engagement projects have shown that the views of those citizens and service users who the Assembly engage in committee scrutiny through less formal methods often confirm the viewpoints of the interest groups who regularly connect with committees. It provides the committee with an additional data set that validates the committee's recommendations to government. On those occasions when contributors express different sets of issues and opinions to those expressed in formal written evidence, it opens new avenues to explore during the scrutiny process, and can lead to different recommendations.

The fourth Assembly's Health and Social Care Committee's final report into Alcohol and Substance Misuse provides a good case study. The Committee's final report included 21 recommendations, 13 of which were based on evidence collated through a mix of a formal call for evidence and new engagement methods and an additional three recommendations based on evidence through engagement work in this instance. The evidence collated through this engagement work strengthened therefore the evidence base of this inquiry's recommendations, besides adding new perspectives to it, clear in the 3 recommendations which would not have been made had this evidence not been collected.

Recently we have started analysing the impact of engagement activities on the participant understanding of the Assembly's role and purpose. Anecdotal evidence suggested those involved in consultations on specific subjects felt more informed about the Assembly's work.

[We tested this assertion](#) with participants who took part in an inquiry into business rates in Wales by providing video evidence. All participants said they would take part in a similar process again if given the opportunity, and felt that they had been provided with an opportunity to express their views. The following statements summarise their views succinctly:

- 'People like me don't have a say in the decisions the National Assembly for Wales makes': none of the participants disagreed with this statement before taking part, compared to 67% who disagreed with the statement having taken part.
- 'I have the confidence and information I need to get involved in politics': half of the participants disagreed with this statement before taking part, where as 88% agreed with this statement after taking part.

Future direction

You may be aware that the Llywydd has set up a Digital News and Information Taskforce, which is looking at ways in which we can use digital technology to better engage with the people of Wales, particularly in light of the challenges faced by changes to media consumption habits and how this contributes to creating a democratic deficit. The findings of the taskforce will have implications for us at the Assembly in terms of the way we approach the production and promotion of our content on our digital estate and through 3rd party platforms, especially as the lines between traditional media, and digital/social media are blurring.

The Assembly Commission's Strategy for the Fifth Assembly recognises that we need to make a step change to be a world class open digital parliament. We have established an internal programme, called mySenedd, to enable us to connect and engage people with trusted parliamentary information, whenever, however and wherever they choose. It will be a key vehicle to help deliver the recommendations of the Taskforce. By the end of the programme, we will provide a much easier, more relevant and personalised experience for all of our users with those people being more engaged and more satisfied with their experience. Alongside all the other ways in which we continuously develop our services, these improvements are designed to increase democratic engagement.

As an example, we recognise that our digital infrastructure does not allow us to easily maintain an ongoing, longer term relationship with those who take part. An important part of this future vision is to develop a system of managing contacts so that individuals receive information and opportunities to participate which relate to issues they feel passionate about. Under this programme we are focusing on ways to better understand people's needs and preferences (both those who already engage and those who don't) in relation to the way they search for and consume our information, which explores some similar issues to which the Commission is doing in its consultation.

Written views from NESTA

Nesta is the UK's Innovation Foundation, and one of the key areas of its work is on democracy and collective intelligence. [d-cent](#) was the outcome of an EU-funded programme to build tools and platforms for digital democracy.

Pursuing this work, Nesta has just published Digital Democracy – Tools Transforming Political Engagement covering a typology of digital democracy and case studies from around the world. These case studies do not aim to replace representative democracy, but to supplement its effectiveness and to broaden citizen engagement in the democratic process. By showcasing how we can increase the level of engagement in democracy Nesta believes that we can produce a more effective, inclusive and representative democracy.

Written views from The Democratic Society

Thank for inviting me to submit and present my thoughts on digital democracy to the Commission on Parliamentary Reform. My submission will concentrate on the potential for digital engagement to impact on how citizens can engage effectively with parliament.

Open Policy Making and Open Law Making.

The Democratic Society believes that our democracy should be more participative and ensure that people can be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Ideally, there should be an opportunity to participate at every level of government, be that local issues at council level, national policymaking, or parliamentary processes.

We have previously discussed the concepts of Open Policy Making and Open Law Making and how important it is for the public to see the evolution of policy into legislation as a transparent process that allows for opportunities for involvement.¹

In some senses parliament is the final section on conveyer belt of democratic decision-making, while people must be able to participate in choosing their elected members, and help shape government policy, the public should also be able to work with elected members to ensure that the decisions they take on behalf of their constituents reflect local needs and priorities.

At no point do we wish to call for participative democracy to replace representative democracy. Rather, we feel a more involving and participative democracy could help representatives be more responsive with the public and assist an increase public trust in political institutions.

Digital engagement is method that can be used to assist the parliament to engage better with the people of Scotland and to deliver better scrutiny.

Digital Engagement: Potential, Not Panacea.

There is much to be said for the power of the internet and its ability to transform so many aspects of our lives. There is no doubt that digital technology has massively impacted on how we communicate with people, access services, and digest information.

As we have previously noted², the internet and digital tools provide an opportunity to “increase participation... boosting inclusiveness and engaging individuals who were previously uninspired by traditional politics and community activities”³, including

¹ Making Laws in the Digital Age, The Democratic Society's Submission to the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy, 2014 (available: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/speaker/digital-democracy/Digi058CharlotteMulcare.pdf>)

² Digital tools and Scotland's Participatory Budgeting programme, The Democratic Society, 2016 (available: <http://www.demsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/DS-Digital-Tools-paper.pdf>)

³ Peixoto, T, Unusual suspects? Effects of technology on citizen engagement, Democracy Spot, 2015

younger generations.⁴ This is partially due to digital's distinct qualities of interactivity, affordability and connectivity. These attributes create the possibility of a "Networked Public Sphere"⁵ that allows "active, creative and vocal citizenship"⁶ and enables "many new forms of participation and collaboration"⁷.

In other words, digital engagement tools could help parliament: reach new audiences; involve more people in decision making; be more flexible in the delivery of engagement processes, by overcoming barriers of time and place; speed up engagement processes; and connect local networks to engage with the parliament and each other.

However, digital tools may also generate potential problems for engagement including the "Digital Divide"⁸, which is the phenomenon of digital haves and have-nots, in terms of access to, use of, and the literacy, knowledge and understanding of digital tools.

Therefore, it is claimed that the Internet and digital engagement tools could amplify existing offline voices,⁹ or create what could be termed E-Usual Suspects: people who regularly engage offline, and continue to engage online.

While these pros and cons could encourage optimism or pessimism about the ability of digital tools to improve parliamentary engagement processes, it is important to guard against technological determinism (an overreliance on technology) and focus on the added potential of digital tools, and not focus on the impact of digital tools on their own. In other words: it is not digital engagement tools that will determine the success of a parliamentary engagement process, but how those digital tools are used and the quality of the engagement process as a whole.

Our recommendation is that digital engagement should be part of parliamentary activity as long as digital is part of a broader engagement process, integrated with quality offline engagement methods.

Using digital for Parliamentary engagement.

There are many aspects of parliamentary engagement where digital tools can be helpful, including: dissemination of information; communicating opportunities to engage; idea generation; deliberating, discussing and scrutinising legislation; prioritising aspects of policy, and even collaborative drafting.

⁴ Loader, B, *Young Citizens in the Digital Age: Political Engagement Young People and New Media*, Routledge, 2007

⁵ Benkler, Y, *The Wealth of Networks*, Yale University Press, 2006

⁶ Brants, K & Voltmer, K, *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011

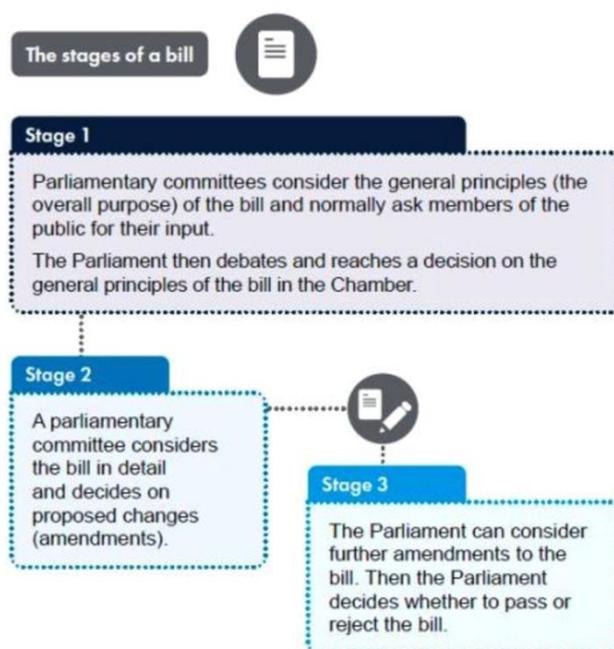
⁷ Dahlgren, P, *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 2009

⁸ Norris, Pippa. *The Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide*, Cambridge University Press, 2001

⁹ Agre, P.E, *Real-Time Politics: The Internet and the Political Process*, *Information Society* 18, 2002; Hindman, M, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, Princeton, 2009

We would like to commend Parliamentary staff for the recent experimentation with Instagram, including the #ParliamentPeople¹⁰ campaign, showcasing the work and personalities of parliamentary staff, and using Instagram stories to inform people about the work of the parliament.

So, rather than focus on dissemination of information and communicating opportunities to engage, we will pay attention to opportunities to involve the public more in the scrutiny and legislation processes.



The stages of a bill, taken for the Scottish Parliament website¹¹

Bill Stages and Digital Engagement Opportunities

Stage 1: Allowing the public to consider the general principles of a Bill

Committees could use digital engagement tools to allow the public to assist them to initially scrutinise a bill. For example there are a range of deliberative discussion platforms that could assist with deliberating, discussing and scrutinising legislation and assessing and prioritising aspects of policy.

Examples include but are not limited to: [Dialogue](#), [Your Priorities](#), [Loomio](#), [All Our Ideas](#), [WeCo123](#), and [Zilino](#).¹²

¹⁰ https://www.instagram.com/p/BQIR_DRAf8A/?taken-by=scotparl&hl=en; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BQTPIjLjg8z/?taken-by=scotparl&hl=en>

¹¹ <http://www.parliament.scot/visitandlearn/100530.aspx>

¹² <http://www.dialogue-app.com/info/>; <http://www.citizens.is/>; <https://www.loomio.org/about>; <http://www.allourideas.org/>; <https://weco123.com/>; <http://beta.zilino.com/>

While there is no shortage to the number of digital solutions available it is key to ask a number of questions before engaging with the public, digitally or otherwise.

These questions include: Why are we engaging? Who do we want to engage? How will we communicate this engagement opportunity to the public? What difference can the public make in this process? What do we want to know? What other engagement and outreach is being done? Is digital engagement fully connected with existing engagement processes? How will public know that their engagement has made a difference?

Once these important considerations have been taken into account digital engagement tools could allow committees to have deeper and more meaningful discussions with people. These crowdsourced digital discussions could help committees with the scrutiny process and in turn increase connectivity and trust between the parliament and citizens.

Stage 2: Amendments and collaborative drafting

At stage 2 committees may wish to use digital tools to allow the public to suggest amendments to a bill, or at least comment on specific aspects of draft legislation.

Platforms such as [Read+Comment](#), & [Box](#)¹³ can provide the opportunity for collaborative and commentable drafting of legislation. Other digital platforms that could assist with consultations on draft legislation include [Citizenspace](#) and [EngagementHQ](#).¹⁴

Stage 3: The public working with MSPs and the Presiding Officer

In normal circumstances only MSPs are able to lodge amendments at stage 3, and the Presiding Officer selects amendments that should be debated. As we mentioned above, we don't think participation should make elected representatives redundant, on the contrary, we feel participation can assist and strengthen the role of the elected representative.

For example, in France, the [Parlement et Citoyens](#) platform has been experimenting with closer collaboration between citizens and elected members.

Elected members offer up bills for discussion and collaboration. Participants can then comment, suggest amendments and rate ideas and proposals. There is also an option for a select number of participants to take part in a video conference call with the relevant elected member(s) to discuss the bill in more detail.

Once online discussion has been completed elected members then debate the legislation.

¹³ <https://helpfultechology.com/readandcomment/>; <https://developer.box.com/platform>

¹⁴ <http://www.citizenspace.com/info>; <http://www.bangthetable.com/engagementhq/engagement-tools/>

The image displays two screenshots from the 'Parlement & Citoyens' website. The top screenshot, titled 'The principle', shows a sidebar with five steps: 1. Presentation (Completed), 2. Consultation (Completed), 3. Synthesis (Completed), 4. Debate (Completed), and 5. Final report (Completed). The main content area shows a single proposal titled 'Generalization of on-line consultations prior to parliamentary debate' by Patrice Martin-Lalande and Luc Belot, dated Nov 17, 2016. It has 330 votes, 55 arguments, and 0 source. A pie chart indicates 300 votes. The bottom screenshot, titled 'Perimeter', shows a search for 'What exceptions to the generalization of consultations?'. It displays 8 proposals, with the top one titled 'Exception for state of emergency' by Patrice Martin-Lalande and Luc Belot, dated Nov 17, 2016. It has 283 votes, 45 arguments, and 0 source. A pie chart indicates 200 votes.

Screenshots from Parliament et Citoyens showcasing collaboration process and range of opportunities for people to discuss legislation.

This collaborative approach has been successful and there is soon to be a debate on whether or not they should generalise such online discussions before parliamentary debate. This idea was also discussed on the platform and a parliamentary debate will take place on the subject in the first half of 2017¹⁵.

While Parliament et Citoyens shows what is possible in terms of digital parliamentary engagement, it should be noted that the tool's success rests upon the willing appetite of elected members to participate in such a collaborative process. Without a culture of genuine participation and openness, all digital engagement, or general engagement for that matter, is destined to fail.

It is not the digital tools you have, but the culture that they are embedded within, and the way tools are used, which will have the most impact on the efficacy of digital engagement.

Citizen Bills

There are also possibilities for parliaments to use digital to revamp petitions committees and allow citizen proposals to become law.

We believe that engagement should be possible at all stages of policymaking. We support a process that allows the opportunity for the public to play a role in the development of new laws. Specifically, open policymaking could lead to public-

¹⁵ <https://www.parlement-et-citoyens.fr/project/generaliser-les-consultations-en-ligne/step/journee-deliberative>

initiated legislation. The Open Ministry¹⁶ (an NGO from Finland) uses crowdsourcing tools to collate citizen-generated suggestions for legislative change. Citizens and lawyers work collaboratively to develop popular ideas into proposals - those supported by over 50,000 people are presented to Parliament.

As we noted in 2014¹⁷, 10% of suggested ideas have been drafted into proposals, with 1% debated in Parliament. Arguably, these figures suggest a low proportion of conversion, yet perhaps the salient point is that the opportunity exists at all: Finnish law provides a right for public-initiated legislation.

In Estonia, the People's Assembly Rahvakogu¹⁸ provides an internet-based platform where citizens can contribute to the legislative process. Ideas are discussed online, complemented by offline events, and formulated into a coherent report to be reviewed by analysts and presented to Parliament. This is similar to the approach employed by the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (eDemocracia) and the Senate of Chile (Senador Virtual) in their use of online tools during the legislative process¹⁹.

So, rather than disrupting the traditional process of having elected members passing legislation at stage 3, digital tools can be used to ensure that the public have the opportunity to raise proposals for bills and work with elected members, parliamentary staff and the presiding officer to bring their suggestion into law.

In other words, elected members still have the final say over legislation, but the initial proposal for a certain law could have started with a proposal from a citizen. This approach could innovate the existing petitions process and mean that citizens could either eventually have an idea written into law, or be provided with clear feedback as to why it will not be pursued by the parliament.

Concluding remarks

We have compiled this submission in order to provide the Commission with inspiration and guidance as to what is possible in relation to digital and parliamentary engagement. We are currently working with the Scottish Government to test a number of digital tools as part of Participatory Budgeting exercises²⁰. The learning we gain from this work will provide further evidence and ideas about the most effective digital engagement processes and methods.

We would strongly recommend that Commission considers opportunities for digital engagement within the day-to-day work of parliament and encourages experimentation with digital engagement.

¹⁶ <http://openministry.info/>

¹⁷ Making Laws in the Digital Age, The Democratic Society's Submission to the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy, 2014 (available: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/speaker/digital-democracy/Digi058CharlotteMulcare.pdf>)

¹⁸ <https://rahvakogu.ee/>

¹⁹ <https://edemocracia.camara.leg.br/home>

²⁰ <http://www.demsoc.org/participatory-budgeting-in-scotland/>

But remember: digital is part of the engagement process, not the be all and end all of engagement. Digital engagement is nothing if it does not have strong existing engagement procedures in place and people can see the value of engaging with parliament and can see the impact of their engagement.

About the Author

Alistair Stoddart is the Scotland Network Manager, responsible for The Democratic Society's Scottish projects including: encouraging Open Government in Scotland; running engagement processes for the Commission on Local Tax Reform and the Scottish Government's Fairer Scotland Programme; and research into a Scottish Participation Framework.

He is also a member of the Scottish Government's Participatory Budgeting Working Group, which oversees Participatory Budgeting activity in Scotland. He has been exploring and testing digital tools for Participatory Budgeting in Scotland, working with 10 local authorities and a variety of community organisations to run projects that include aspects of digital engagement.

About The Democratic Society

The Democratic Society (Demsoc) works for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together.

We work to create opportunities for people to become involved in the decisions that affect their lives and for them to have the skills to do this effectively. We support governments, parliaments and any organisation that wants to involve citizens in decision making to be transparent, open and welcoming of participation. We actively support spaces, places and processes to make this happen.

We are non-profit and non-partisan and have offices in Edinburgh, Manchester, Brighton and Brussels.

Written Views from democratise

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Commission on Parliamentary Reform. This is, of course, a very important and broad area for consideration. This submission will focus on the potential for the use of digital tools to support and transform the processes of parliamentary engagement. It will do so recognising that digital is just a tool and that its ability to deliver any significant improvement in parliamentary engagement and democratic scrutiny is reliant on a concomitant transformation of the underlying processes and the culture of the institution, it's Members and staff. Digital alone changes little, yet it can act as a powerful catalyst for effective and sustainable change.

Introduction

Digital and social tools create an opportunity to make democracy more relevant, accessible, engaging and visible: to break down the walls and silos and to get ordinary people more involved in the decisions that affect their lives. But for this to happen our institutions must change and undergo significant cultural transformation. Nothing about this is digital but it is made possible by digital acting as a disrupting force. The challenge is significant but the price of failure is extremely high: the public is already more likely to see Parliament and politicians as out of touch and decreasingly relevant.

Digital technology clearly and demonstrably can change the relationship between citizens and their legislators.²¹ However, technology is a tool. It is not a solution in its own right. And it is dangerous, naïve and limiting to assume that much can be achieved if the scope of the question relates purely to the digital side of the equation. The New Zealand Government puts it succinctly:

[it] is not just about technology – it's about the ways in which information and technology are used to deliver better services and enhance trust and confidence in government.²²

Digital technologies can act as a disrupter or an enabler. They can be revolutionary or evolutionary. However, if one simply applies new digital media to a flawed process the result is most predictably going to be a flawed digital process.²³ It becomes critical to understand how digital integrates into the overall workflow of the parliament. What is the most effective blend of on- and offline tools and processes that can most effectively engage people in creating and sustaining real and active change? Change such that they begin to believe their voice counts and the system is taking notice.²⁴ Above all, the 'technology' must be appropriate for the audience: participatory budgeting can be done online in Reykjavik or Edinburgh but perhaps it's

²¹ Williamson, A. (2011). Disruption and empowerment: Embedding citizens at the heart of democracy. *Journal of eDemocracy and Open Government*; Williamson, A. & Fallon, F. (2011). Transforming the future parliament through the effective use of digital media. *Parliamentary Affairs*. 64(4). 781-792.

²² New Zealand Government (2013). *Government ICT strategy and action plan to 2017*. Wellington.

²³ Williamson, A. (2014, Jan). *Digital Democracy is About Much More Than Digital*. Politics First.

²⁴ Examples of this include: NHS Citizen (nhscitizen.org.uk), Sciencewise (sciencewise-erc.org.uk) & Betri Reykjavík (betrireykjavik.is)

more effective when done in person in Lima. And doing it online should not preclude us from offering offline alternatives.

Engagement increases when the process is accessible, appropriate and authentic. Whilst digital enables this to happen it does not happen simply because the process is digital.

Parliamentary Context

To put the role, value and evolution of digital tools in a parliamentary setting into context, it is useful to consider some of the findings of the World eParliament Report 2016, which I authored on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The findings show how digital and social technologies have led to and supported deep changes in the operational environment and cultural landscape of parliaments. They show that the digital parliament is now a living entity, able to be directly linked to those it serves in ways that were hard to imagine when the Scottish Parliament was established, despite its early progress in this area. Through digital tools, social media and open data, parliaments are now more outward facing and more open. We must also consider the internal systems within parliament that support and enable openness and engagement; often these and the processes that support continue to present challenges to progress and innovation.

The successful digital parliament mirrors the world around it and so it is no surprise to see that social networks are now important tools, allowing citizens to connect more often and more easily with members and parliaments. Making more documentation and content more available is a critical trend too, whether this is through web-based technologies or through open data. Yet many parliaments remain hampered by a lack of access to good practices and lack critical skills and resources in new and emerging areas.

Globally, we see that the challenges parliaments face are not simply ones of technology adoption (though these are very real), many are strategic. They need to be addressed at a systemic level, requiring political as well as institutional commitment. This World e-Parliament Report highlights that too few parliaments are fully implementing an end-to-end strategic planning process and, when they do, too few value their senior IT staff in terms of the overall leadership and direction of change for the institution. This is a mistake and limits opportunities for innovation and transformation. Digital is too often (and wrongly) seen as a technical function where ICT management or technical staff pre-dominate, yet the research shows that for digital to be transformative for parliaments, Members must provide political leadership in favour of greater openness and greater citizen participation.

To retrench citizen-centric web services into a technocratic IT regime would be regressive and regretful, they must remain agile and responsive, delivering quick wins and high-value to the public as well as to Parliament.

This research findings highlight that:

1. Digital is a core-enabler in strengthening and transforming parliaments. Parliaments should do more to engage at the highest political level with the potential for digital transformation.
2. To realise the real benefits of digital, parliaments need to make a commitment to a vision and to strategic change supported at the highest levels of the institution.
3. Lack of funding and insufficient knowledge among staff and members remain as key challenges for parliaments to use digital effectively.
4. There is a continued adoption of document management systems to support the legislative process but this is often hampered by a lack of resources, however, these systems are critical in the future provisioning of open data sets.
5. The uptake of XML for creating parliamentary documents continues along with the adoption of open data standards.
6. Social media has become a key, strategic communication channel for parliaments in a digital world that is now decidedly multi-channel. It can, however, be difficult for parliaments to know how members are using these new tools and how best to provide support to them.
7. Email remains a primary communication channel for members and the parliamentary website remains a core asset in terms of providing information, documentation and data.
8. Open data is increasingly important for parliaments and will continue to grow in importance, however, there is evidence that parliaments are struggling to make this data available and accessible for citizens.
9. Parliaments and members are not yet very innovative in the ways that they engage citizens directly in the legislative process, though an increasing number are experimenting with forms on citizen participation in parliamentary work.

This final point highlights the potential value of new intermediaries, who can take the information and data that parliaments create, whether formally or informally, and make sense of it for and with ordinary citizens.

Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder international initiative that aims to secure concrete and ambitious commitments that relate to the openness and transparency of public services. It is uniquely established not just as a multi-national platform for governments but with civil society representation at the heart of the process. This 'partnership' is inherent to OGP and lies at the heart of how the mechanisms established by OGP internationally and within nation states can be used to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.²⁵

²⁵ OGP (2015). Open government partnership: articles of governance.

The OGP concept was developed through an emerging realisation of the potential for digital technologies to transform not simply the way governments work but the way they can be held to account by their citizens. It's core principles are to:²⁶

- Increase the availability of information about governmental activities.
- Support civic participation.
- Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout our administrations.
- Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability.

There is an increasingly strong and productive parliamentary track within OGP. The Legislative Openness Working Group, coordinated by the Chilean Senate and US-based National Democratic Initiative has engaged several parliaments in developing commitments towards openness and transparency. In addition, Scotland is one 15 'Pioneer' programmes developing their own action plans (others include cities and regions). It would be valuable for the Scottish Parliament to engage with the Pioneer programme, not least because OGP is fundamentally a commitment to working in partnership between government (or parliament) and civil society. It would be a positive step to see the Scottish Parliament engage with OGP.

Framing Digital Engagement

Where parliaments are releasing open data sets, there is evidence that suggests these are not widely used. For example, the Italian Senate, a leading parliament in the open data movement, notes that its open data repositories have only a handful of users. However, what these independent agencies do with that data is important and forms a valuable part of the wider democratic landscape – in other words, this is a matter of quality, accessibility and re-use, not quantity (of data sets or direct users). And it is not enough to release data and expect the public to use it – its value is often specialist and niche. To be of value to a wider audience (and to be a catalyst for greater engagement) citizens must be information literate as well as understand parliamentary process, therefore interpretation, analysis and re-presentation can be critical.

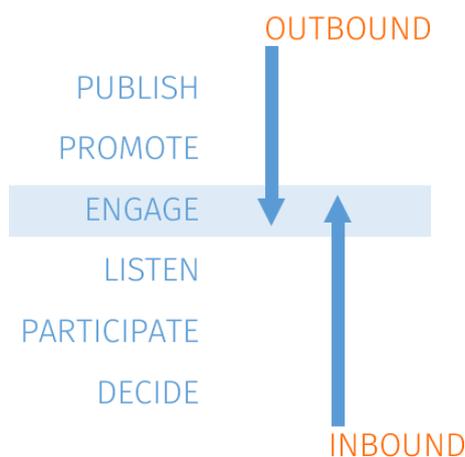
Parliaments must consider how they engage with, support and nurture active and effective partners who can reach audiences that parliament cannot and add value to the democratic process. The digital assets that deliver such a participation strategy cover a continuum of engagement practices ranging from the passive to the active. It is logical to say that the methods chosen affect who sees, and how they react to, the information provided and who is likely to become involved in a process, and, therefore, the outcomes of the process. Participation can be considered on a scale that goes from an internal process through to where decision making is fully inclusive and participatory.²⁷

²⁶ OGP (2011). Open Government Declaration. Available at opengovpartnership.org/about/open-government-declaration

²⁷ Williamson, A., & Sande, M. (2014). From arrogance to intimacy: A handbook for active democracy (1st ed.). London & Gothenburg: Democratise/Preera and derived from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public of Participation (see: www.iap2.org)

- **Inform** the public and other stakeholders, keeping them up to date with what is proposed and/or happening.
- **Consult** directly by going out and seeking public feedback on the proposals or input to the process.
- **Involve** the public directly in the process, ensure they are given a voice and their concerns recognised and acknowledged.
- **Collaborate** by working in partnership with the public.
- **Empower** the public by putting decision making in their hands.

There are several stages in the engagement cycle, relating to both outbound communication and inbound active engagement. Effective engagement must encompass the full participation ecosystem, not just one aspect of it:



How digital supports a more open parliament

One of the key challenges for those of us who are trying to engage a broader public in parliamentary democracy is that the process often appears closed and opaque. The language is off-putting, the procedures cumbersome and unfriendly and it's often hard to see what's going on. Digital can't fix the first problem (though it can help), it should improve the second (otherwise it's pointless) but it can significantly impact on the third: the internet has created a channel to support a paradigm shift towards the concept of an 'open parliament'. 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.

Digital is a key enabler of public transparency and transparency helps increase trust and limit corruption.

This doesn't simply mean providing digitised versions of existing documents (though this is helpful), it means 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.

There is and will remain a tension between the need to write legislation in a legally and technically correct way, yet to make it accessible to the public. In a digital environment, it is much easier to conceive of ways to provide better plain-language

summaries and commentaries, which are directly linked to original content. It is possible to consider processes that encourage greater public input and connectivity to the process of legislative scrutiny. There are several good examples, including civil society projects for crowd-sourced legislation, such as Open Ministry in Finland and the Peoples' Assembly (Rahvakogu) project in Estonia²⁸. There is also innovation within parliaments themselves, such as the eDemocracia and Senado Virtual projects in Brazil and Chile that give citizens the ability to comment on and revise draft legislation.²⁹

Examples of how digital is being used to engage citizens with their parliaments

Mainstream social media can be used in novel ways to solicit direct contributions to parliamentary committees or inquiries. It is also becoming increasingly common to integrate mainstream social networks with proprietary websites and content. Websites like that of the Huffington Post³⁰ allow users to login with Facebook and then have access to a number of tools for sharing and commenting on content. Going further, The Guardian newspaper³¹ has an application that makes all its content available directly inside Facebook. The Finnish Parliament's (Eduskunta) 'Committee for the Future' used Facebook³² as a platform to 'crowdsource' public input on the future of parliament, including the role of technology.

Social media has been adopted by a wider range of parliaments around the world. The UK Parliament has almost 800,000 followers, parliaments in Peru, Mexico and Columbia exceed 200,000 and the Scottish Parliament a respectable 66,000. The European Parliament has in excess of two million 'likes' for its English-language Facebook page and is one of many parliaments using the platform.

The National Assembly of Korea's e-Parliament strategy was designed to address the risk of a public perception of a lack of accountability for parliament and parliamentarians when individual social media accounts lapse or are updated infrequently. The Secretariat found that citizens mostly use Twitter and Facebook and so accounts have been set up on both networks. Whilst the stated original aim of using social media was to increase citizen interaction, it has also become a channel for the distribution of parliamentary information with most of the users being government or public organisations interested in parliamentary proceedings. Most users are under 30, suggesting that these social channels are more effective for engaging young people.

The UK Parliament has exploited the capability of Twitter hashtags to broaden input to and engagement with the Committee process. The Brazilian e-Democracia³³ project uses a combination of social media, internal discussion, video and offline events (such as committee hearings) to engage citizens, parliamentarians, civil

²⁸ See: openministry.info and rahvakogu.ee

²⁹ See: edemocracia.camara.gov.br and senadorvirtual.cl

³⁰ See www.huffingtonpost.com

³¹ See www.guardian.co.uk/info/2010/oct/26/find-guardian-on-facebook

³² See: www.facebook.com/kestavakasvu

³³ See: techpresident.com/user-blog/can-people-help-legislators-make-better-laws-brazil-shows-how for more information.

servants, researchers, non-governmental organisations and interest groups. The programme, described as ‘a kind of crowdsourcing for legislative purposes’, provides easier access to the decision-making process for citizens who are not associated with interest groups or businesses that usually lobby for change. It allows the public to:

- Share information about a problem that needs to be addressed by law;
- Identify and discuss possible solutions to the problem; and
- Draft the bill itself.

E-Democracia overcomes the barrier between the public and the expert skills involved in drafting legislation by using legislative consultants, who serve as ‘technical translators’ before responses are passed to legislators.

For parliaments with limited technical or financial resources, partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations to develop and deploy open-source engagement tools can be a good option. The National Assembly of Serbia has established a partnership with a civil society organisation to publish the parliamentary record of proceedings through the ‘Otvoreni Parlament’ (opening parliament) website. The Brazilian Congress has gone a step further by creating a ‘Hacker lab’ designed to involve the public in the co-creation of data-driven applications for democratic accountability and to open up the work of the Congress to greater access and scrutiny. They created a physical space at the Chamber which is “open for access and use by any citizen, especially programmers and software developers, members of parliament and other public workers, where they can utilise public data in a collaborative fashion for actions that enhance citizenship”.³⁴ One example of innovative engagement solutions to emerge from this is ‘Retórica Parlamentar’³⁵, which uses open data provided by the parliament to create an interactive visualisation of what Members have said in plenary debates.

Working with others builds on their networks and extends parliament’s reach. It draws in a new audience, allowing parliaments to hear a wider range of different voices. The UK House of Common’s Digital Democracy Commission³⁶ is a timely example of how to blend on and offline communications. Set up to “explore how Parliament could make better use of digital technology to enhance and improve its work” it used a range of mainstream social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) to promote the work of the Commission, to solicit contributions and submissions and to share the material that was being submitted to it with a wider audience. Whilst the Commission held hearings within Parliament these were more informal and open than traditional Committees (including encouraging attendees to use social media during the hearings). It also made a concerted effort to take the Commission’s hearings beyond Parliament and organised these with civil society organisations around the UK (including one that was held in a ‘fish and chip’ shop). They also ensured that members of the Commission and Commission staff attended

³⁴ See the Official Resolution of the Chambers of Deputies here: camara.gov.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=1214393&filename=ESP+1+%3D%3E+PRC+228%2F2013

³⁵ See: retoricaparlamentar.com

³⁶ See: parliament.uk/business/commons/the-speaker/speakers-commission-on-digital-democracy

numerous democracy-related events, using these to both share the work of the Commission and to listen to a wider range of perspectives.

Third-party tools can prove beneficial at increasing levels of citizen engagement in the democratic process, particularly where public bodies have had limited success or felt that traditional methods were not effective. 'Better Reykjavik'³⁷ uses a tool called 'Your Priorities' built by Icelandic NGO Citizens Foundation, and has been used by 40% of Reykjavik's voters. Another example of local government engagement is Wellington City Council in New Zealand, who used Loomio to create an online component to a contentious and challenging consultation exercise to develop an alcohol management strategy for the city centre. Loomio uses a discussion format that allows participants to call for decisions, at which time others can agree or disagree but also abstain or block.

Need to reframe the cost/benefit

There is a cost to digital engagement: where democracy has been poorly served, improving it can rarely cost less. Though relatively easy and therefore tempting to calculate, the short-term operational cost is a simplistic and, indeed, the wrong measure of value if we are considering the true value of new methods to our democracy. The true measure of value is the longer-term cost-benefit of better legislation, better public understanding and greater engagement. Ultimately, and perhaps cumulatively, it becomes an increase in public trust in Parliament.

Increasing public scrutiny and input into the legislative process and widening this process so that it is accessible to people with a wider range of knowledge and experiences can reduce the overall cost of delivery because it can lead to better legislation. And the earlier problems and errors are found, the less it costs to fix. This holds true for legislation as well as civil engineering and IT systems! Ultimately, the cost of poorly drafted legislation can be measured later in terms of legal challenges and re-drafting.

What must be considered is the opportunity cost of failing to adopt more citizen-facing digital assets and the social return on investment that can result from greater democratic cohesion.

The Official Report makes an interesting example; in written form its use is limited but as an XML product available in machine-readable format new opportunities arise for communities (wanting to monitor their MSPs), activists (wanting to monitor an issue) and to integrate what happens in Parliament into the classroom.³⁸

Accessibility and inclusion

Digital is an important and transformative tool for parliaments. But it is not a panacea for many reasons. One critical reason being that it leaves behind those who lack access to it, the ability to use or the skills to be an effective user. There are many

³⁷ See: betrireykjavik.is

³⁸ Williamson, A. (2013). The official report as an engagement tool in the future (Keynote). British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association, Cardiff.

reasons for being offline but it is sufficient to point out that you are less likely to have the internet if you are old, poor, poorly educated, have a disability or live in a remote rural area. Beyond this, there appears to be a distinct gender gap in British political life and, of itself, digital does nothing to address this.³⁹ New engagement methods must not further disadvantage those who are already marginalised and excluded. Parliament must also consider how it can connect with communities and individuals that remain highly dis-engaged from the democratic process; there is no easy answer to this, no one-size-fits-all solution.

New digital channels and active intermediaries create new opportunities, research and experience shows us this but it is no silver bullet. The Parliament needs to develop good processes internally and so that it can work more effectively with and through others. It must learn to let go, not insist on delivering content and engagement itself.⁴⁰ You can't try to own the conversation: To be an active and effective part of the Scottish digital landscape and to remain relevant to the wider needs of citizens Parliament must innovate, it must step outside its comfort zone, engage with people where they are, when they want to talk and it must use the methods that they use. The opportunity is there, the question that must be asked is why is this opportunity not being taken?

Author Profile

Edinburgh-based Dr Andy Williamson is a global leader in democratic innovation and civic participation and an acknowledged expert in parliamentary openness and engagement. He has recently worked with the Scottish Government, Cabinet Office, United Nations, Volvo and the parliaments of the UK, Chile, Moldova and Serbia and is the author of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's World e-Parliament Report and Social Media Guidelines for Parliaments. Andy is a member of the UK Open Government Network Steering Group, the Scottish Open Government Partnership Pioneer Board, the OGP's Legislative Openness Working Group and the Llywydd's Taskforce on Digital Communication in the National Assembly for Wales. A New Zealander, he holds a PhD from Monash University, Melbourne and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Andy was previously the Chair of Do-it UK, Director of Digital Democracy at the Hansard Society and Deputy Chair of the New Zealand Government's Digital Strategy Board, he is now the Founder of Democratise and Governor and Managing Partner at The Democratic Society.

³⁹ Williamson, A. (2011, Sep 1). The gender imbalance online seems to be the result of wider political exclusion, not digital exclusion. British Politics and Policy at LSE. London School of Economics.

⁴⁰ Williamson, A., M. Korris, et al. (2011). Connecting citizens to Parliament: How Parliament can engage more effectively with hard to reach groups. London, Hansard Society.