

# Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy

## A USER'S MANUAL

### DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

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**Please send comments by:**

31 August 2019





“The Convention will work for two years  
to forge a new partnership between our  
elected representatives and the people.”



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

We are writing in support of the application to fund a nationwide “Citizens Convention” to strengthen British democracy up to and beyond the 2022 General election. Its agenda should be set by the Convention itself but we hope it would cover the whole of the UK’s governance and politics including the core issues, themes and directions that should drive the evolution of our democratic settlement.

We believe we should collectively initiate and give continued moral support to such a Citizens Convention. In order to bring a practical political conclusion to this work-we commit now to seek to persuade our colleagues to incorporate in our 2022 Manifestos a promise to put Bills which emerge from the Citizen’s Convention in front of the new Parliament as its first business for debate, amendment and decision. However we wish the Citizens Convention itself to be established at arm’s length from political parties to guarantee its independence, so that – rather like the Scottish Convention prior to devolution and the recent Irish convention on the constitution – it would be inclusive of opinion across society and produce a report which was subject to unprecedented levels of public participation.

Regardless of party allegiance, we all feel the time is right for an urgent and comprehensive look at our democracy and believe the threats of political disenchantment, cynicism and disaffiliation must be tackled swiftly.

Vince Cable MP, Leader Parliamentary Liberal Democrat Party

Tom Watson  
Deputy Leader  
Parliamentary Labour  
Party

Caroline Lucas MP, Leader Parliamentary Green Party

Dominic Grieve MP, Conservative

David Davis MP, Conservative



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# INTRODUCTION

**This draft User's Manual has been developed by the Design and Process Group of the Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy, as well as a number of other individuals who have given their ideas, time and support. The project is led from the Centre for British Politics and Government, King's College London, with support from the Policy Institute at King's.**

We are publishing this document in order to seek the feedback of a much larger group of people. We invite your ideas, comments and challenge.

**Please email any comments by 31 August 2019, to the Project Director, Frances Foley: [frances@ccukdemocracy.org.uk](mailto:frances@ccukdemocracy.org.uk)**

Part 1 of the manual makes the case for a Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy. Part 2 outlines how a citizens' convention would work, including what issues it would and not address, who will take part and how they will be selected, what the stages and features of the convention will be, what principles it needs to fulfil and how it will be communicated. Finally, Part 3 looks at how the citizens' convention will be established, including its governance and funding.

The development of this manual has been supported by a generous grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Our wider project also has support from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

The members of the Executive Committee, who have been in charge of the creation of this User's manual, are Tim Hughes, Andrew Blick and Graham Allen.





# Part I

## WHY HOLD A CITIZENS' CONVENTION?

### I. The Challenge

Democratic institutions in the UK – as well as around the world – are struggling to respond to profound changes in our society. In return, the public are feeling disconnected from decision-making and cynical about the values and motivations of decision-makers. The Hansard Society's most recent annual Audit of Political Engagement found that:<sup>1</sup>

1. 72% say the system of governing needs 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of improvement;
2. 63% think Britain's system of government is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful;
3. 54% say Britain needs a strong leader who is willing to break the rules;
4. 47% feel they have no influence at all over national decision-making; and,
5. Of a list of 13 political activities, the number of people saying they would be prepared to do 'none' is up 10 percentage points in a year to 22%.

This is a dangerous position for democracy. If our political institutions lose their authority, people will cease engaging with them and/or seek answers elsewhere. We have already seen a worrying rise in populist and extremist ideologies. Without a change that can inspire and engage large numbers of people across the country, this will only continue.

Our elected representatives cannot rebuild our democratic system alone – the public are an essential part of the process. Without a reform agenda, driven by a new partnership between citizens and their democratic institutions, trust in our democratic system risks reaching crisis point.

### II. The Response

The Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy aims to learn from the best examples around the world and work over two years to forge a new partnership between our elected representatives and the people, to ensure our democracy becomes effective once again.

After a year's careful preparation in 2019, we propose a two-year countrywide Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy to:

- Develop a widespread public conversation about the changes needed, which is facilitated in a respectful and deliberative way, making use of evidence, listening to and uniting the differing interests and perspectives in our society;
- Develop a set of recommendations for reform, reached through a fair and rigorous process, which have widespread support from both the public and elected representatives.

A unique feature of this project is that it has support from a core cross-party group of senior MPs. We have sought the support of representatives of all parties; and participation remains open to all parties currently represented in the UK Parliament.

<sup>1</sup> Hansard Society (2019) Audit of Political Engagement 16  
<https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/publications/reports/audit-of-political-engagement-16>





In pledging their commitment to this project, our core group of MPs is supporting a Citizens' Convention to strengthen democracy up to and beyond the (scheduled) 2022 general election:

*"Its agenda should be set by the Convention itself but we hope it will cover the whole of the UK's governance and politics including the core issues, themes and directions that should drive the evolution of our democratic settlement."*

*"We believe we should collectively initiate and give continued moral support to such a Citizens' Convention. In order to bring a practical political conclusion to this work, we commit now to seek to persuade colleagues to incorporate in our 2022 Manifestos a promise to put Bills which emerge from the Citizens' Convention in front of the new Parliament as its first business for debate, amendment and decision. However, we wish the Citizens' Convention itself to be established at arm's length from political parties to guarantee its independence."*

*"Regardless of party allegiance, we all feel the time is right for an urgent and comprehensive look at democracy and believe the threats of political disenchantment, cynicism and disaffiliation must be tackled swiftly."*

This group of representatives has agreed a set of five core democratic themes that they want considered as part of the process, alongside other matters of democratic importance that the process of engagement with citizens may identify (see Part 2).

The Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy will fulfil this mandate by initiating a UK-wide conversation on the state of our democracy and governing institutions. This will feed into deliberative citizens' assemblies to arrive at a set of robust recommendations for reform. This ensures that an inclusive UK conversation can lead to a concrete and achievable set of recommendations developed by a representative section of the UK public.

### III. The Outcome

Through the two years of the Convention, we hope to stimulate a deep debate on the future of UK democracy that will give citizens a sense of ownership and investment in the process. However, we see this as the beginning not the end of the process of renewal. We hope that this Convention will stimulate further processes, to entrench a culture and method of deliberation that in time will become a permanent feature of our democratic decision-making.

The process must arrive at a set of clear and specific recommendations that our elected representatives can clearly respond to. Broad statements and ambiguous discussions will risk creating further disillusionment and irreparable damage to the cause of deliberation as a way of improving our democracy.

The Convention will produce concrete outputs in the form of a final report and recommendations. By January 2022 this complete final report will be translated into draft legislation that could be used or adapted by elected representatives in Parliament to implement the key recommendations of the Convention.

It will also produce broader social and political benefits. Through the UK Conversation, it will increase awareness of what can be done to improve UK democracy at all levels, by both government and citizens.

It will give citizens an example of "democracy in good conditions" which reaches across the UK and reaches those citizens who feel the most disaffected, who might be inspired to participate in future political deliberation and conversation. It will produce evidence that considered public views can inform decision-making and demonstrate the benefits of deliberative process.

During the process, the Convention will also learn, develop and educate on its own work and practices, contributing to the growing domestic and international understanding of deliberative democracy. It will explore the possibility of introducing standing arrangements for citizens' conventions at local, UK and at parliamentary and governmental levels, as is being demonstrated in other countries.

Among the participants, it will cohere a group of powerful ambassadors for participatory democracy and new approaches. Informed by their experiences, they will be able to spread the word into their networks and communities and act as advocates for further deliberations.

Finally, the development of this process document and the running of the process itself will enhance understanding of deliberative democracy and citizen participation in the UK, and increase the skills and aptitudes of those who are involved, as designers, participants or facilitators.

**THE PROCESS MUST  
ARRIVE AT A SET OF  
CLEAR AND SPECIFIC  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
THAT OUR ELECTED  
REPRESENTATIVES  
CAN CLEARLY  
RESPOND TO**





## Part II

# HOW THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION WOULD WORK

### I. The Question that the Citizens' Convention would consider

The remit of the citizens' convention will be crucial to its success. It must:

1. Be framed in an accessible way that citizens want to engage with;
2. Allow citizens space to interpret and explore the topic as they see fit;
3. Be discreet enough for the Citizens' Convention to consider the issues in sufficient depth and arrive at recommendations.

Crucially, the remit must allow the Convention to start from the position and framing of citizens, while arriving at a set of clear and specific recommendations that politicians can clearly respond to.

Our proposal for the question to be addressed by the citizens' convention is:

*"What are the key problems with democratic institutions in the UK and how should they be addressed?"*

We are not starting with a blank sheet of paper. From 2015 onwards, our conversations with elected representative supporters and our consideration of democratic issues on which there has been recent interest lead us to agree that there are a number of key democratic issues where citizens, working through the Convention, could begin to make a contribution to breaking the logjam. The issues include, but are not limited to:

1. Reviewing the powers and membership of the second chamber
2. Examining the voting system at Parliamentary and local level to encourage greater participation in public life

3. Reviewing the relationship between central and local government, and the question of devolution for England

4. Proposing how politics should be paid for

5. Examining the legal recognition given to some constitutional provisions, including individual rights

6. Such other relevant democratic issues that may be recommended by the convention as its work progresses

These issues will be the starting point for the conversation, but the final list of themes to be considered by the Convention will be decided by the citizens themselves. As indicated by item 6, the representatives backing the Convention have agreed that the agenda should also include any other democratic questions which the citizens themselves agree should be addressed as part of this process. As outlined in detail below, following a broad UK-wide conversation about the state of our democracy, a Prioritisation Convention will meet to consider the issues that have arisen – including those listed above – and select those that should be the focus for the Convention.



**WE ARE  
STIMULATING A  
PROCESS WHICH  
CAN ADDRESS  
DEEP POLITICAL  
ISSUES AND  
WHICH MUST  
BE TRUSTED  
BY THE PUBLIC,  
POLITICIANS AND  
THE MEDIA**

## **II. What would the Citizens' Convention not consider?**

The breadth of potential issues means that it is essential to keep a clear focus and agenda which is deliverable in the time available. Where an issue that arises cannot be handled in the available time, the Convention may recommend it for consideration in a later Convention process.

We are stimulating a process which can address deep political issues and which must be trusted by the public, politicians and the media. Comprehensive democratic reform is necessary at this scale in order to undertake the task of UK democratic renewal.

We know our politics is more polarised than ever – this fact itself is one of the driving forces behind the Convention. We want to create a new partnership between citizens and their democratic representatives and institutions in order to counteract that drive towards polarisation.

We will need to keep the Convention focused on the common foundation of democracy and governance. It is not a process to address any specific issues of public policy that may be brought to the table.

Our UK-wide political conversation is dominated by policy issues – like health, education and immigration. In contrast, the Convention will only look at the structure of our democratic system: we will be talking about the rules of the game, not its results.

Having such a conversation in public will be immensely stimulating and help our democracy to evolve into the modern era. Policy questions speak to the immediate needs of both voters and politicians – and enjoy more attention from the media and Parliament as a result.

Sometimes, policy questions aren't easily separated from democratic or constitutional ones. As a result, we will need to be clear from the beginning that there are some issues that fit into the Convention's remit and others which are beyond its scope.

One particular issue that will be outside the remit of the Convention is the issue of Britain's relationship with the European Union. This will almost certainly still be a matter of live political debate while the Convention is running and, if it is not explicitly excluded, it risks diverting much of the energy of the Convention into a live and intensely divisive question. In addition, various live processes are likely to be underway, seeking to reach a UK consensus on the issue and we should not risk obstructing this process.

In addition, the Convention will have to acknowledge any separate processes taking place in other parts of the UK on constitutional issues and will not seek to duplicate or interfere with these but look to work together with them, if appropriate.



## **III. The People Taking Part**

Our elected representatives have begun and will end the Convention's work. However they will not control the Convention, its agenda or its structure. Nonetheless the politicians that we elect will be a central part of this process – not least since we will depend on them to deliver the outcomes of the Convention and subsequent stages of reform. We are delivering a practical set of outcomes, not just a report. Our UK Conversation will make space for elected representatives, campaign groups and civil society to contribute to the conversation, and during the Convention meetings we will be asking them to support the process with evidence and their personal stories.

Our methods of deliberation mean that all voices can be represented through the Convention.

Communication, transparency, accessibility and inclusion are high priorities for the Convention. This demands that we find imaginative, new ways for people to discuss subjects that they might not be familiar with or feel confident in addressing.

No process will have credibility unless it can demonstrate that everyone is equally able to participate, and that it is designed to make the experience of participating easy and enjoyable. During the UK Conversation and the Convention itself, we will allocate specific resources to finding and amplifying the voices of those who feel alienated from the political process, and whose confidence and willingness to participate may be low. We will ensure that everyone can be represented fairly in the UK Conversation and that citizens are able to attend and fully participate in the Convention events, if selected by the Civic Lottery.



## IV. Political Liaison

The Convention sees elected representatives as key partners if the proposals from citizens are to make progress. Part of the promise to citizens is that their recommendations will have a smooth and predictable path to consideration by the UK Parliament.

The final proposals will strengthen and complement our representative democracy by responding to citizens' deliberations by proposing a practical reform agenda which Parliament can take seriously and act upon. The Political Liaison Group is the most obvious example of this joint effort: a group of leading parliamentarians of all parties designed to deepen understanding of our project within Parliament and to be available to give impartial advice to the Executive Board of the Convention on its liaison with Parliament and Government.

The group is currently made up of Tom Watson MP (Deputy Leader of the Labour Party), David Davis MP (Former Secretary of State, Conservative), Dominic Grieve MP (Former Attorney General, Conservative), Sir Vince Cable (Leader, Liberal Democrats), and Caroline Lucas (Leader, Parliamentary Green Party). All the above have agreed that the Convention can discuss the agenda referred to above and have signed the letter of support pledging to seek a manifesto commitment to put the Convention's proposals in front of Parliament, following the 2022 election or thereafter.

The agenda, letter of support and senior supporters have existed since 2015. The Political Liaison Group's main objective is to use the 2019 preparatory year to expand the understanding of the Convention and of deliberation among a growing number of MPs of all parties. The membership remains open to

welcoming a senior representative of all other parliamentary parties who have yet to join and who support the concept of a Citizens' Convention for UK Democracy. We respect the views of those from other parties who do not yet wish to join the group and they will continue to be regularly briefed on the work of the Convention and the group.

For democratic reform to succeed, we need practical proposals from our citizens, which can then be debated and enacted through Parliament as legislation. Citizens and MPs fully comprehend and appreciate that there will only be change with the understanding and active support of the representatives that we all elect.

## V. How will participants be recruited?

The first stage of the Convention will be open to all citizens and organised groups. Participants in the latter three parts of the Citizens' Convention will be chosen via civic lottery. The aim of this selection method is twofold:

1. Every adult in the UK has an equal chance of receiving the invitation to participate;
2. The membership of the Citizens' Convention will be a microcosm of UK society.

The recruitment and selection process will take place through three key stages:

1. Invitation;
2. Stratified sampling;
3. Onboarding.

## Invitation

For each recruitment round, a large batch of invitations will be sent to households across the UK. These will be selected at random from the Royal Mail's postcode database – the most complete and up-to-date address database in the UK. This provides more coverage than the Electoral Register, though comes with the downside that invitations must be addressed to households, rather than specific individuals.

To encourage people to register their interest, the invitation package will need to include:

- A stylish invitation card that is attention grabbing (and does not look like spam);
- An official invitation letter, ideally signed by prominent politicians;
- A short 'Frequently Asked Questions' sheet providing more detailed information;
- A specifically designed envelope with enticing details printed externally.

People will need to be able to register their interest online or by freephone. During this registration process, people will need to be asked to provide their contact details and demographic data, which will be used during stage 2 (see below).

A 3-7% response rate is typical from such an exercise, meaning a batch of 10,000 invitations should generate 300 to 700 responses. Invitation batches will need to be suitably large to ensure that a stratified sample can be achieved during stage 2.

FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM TO SUCCEED, WE NEED PRACTICAL PROPOSALS FROM OUR CITIZENS, WHICH CAN THEN BE DEBATED AND ENACTED THROUGH PARLIAMENT AS LEGISLATION

## Stratified sampling

The second-step of recruitment is a process of stratified selection. This ensures that the participants match the socio-demographic profile of the UK and overcomes any bias in the registration process (e.g. it is a common experience that younger and less educated individuals will be under-represented in the pool of registrants).

We will select people at random to be participants, marking off their characteristics against the key recruitment categories. Once a category becomes full (e.g. 18-29 year olds), people who fall into that category will no longer be eligible to be randomly selected. The selected assembly will therefore have an overall profile that matches census data as closely as possible, delivering a diverse and broadly representative membership.

The stratified selection will need to take place roughly 5-6 weeks before the first weekend. A small pool of stand-by participants should be kept in case of dropouts ahead of the first weekend.

## Welcoming participants

Once selected, members of the Convention will need to be taken through an onboarding process in order to help ensure their participation.

Those selected should be sent a confirmation by letter and email, as well as receiving a courtesy call to address any questions or concerns they might have. Ahead of their participation, members should be sent:

- A short essential information document, with reminders/ information about:
  - Where the event will take place
  - When it is
  - How to get there
  - Booking travel and travel expenses
  - Arrangements for accommodation, food and drink
  - The honorarium (and when and how participants will receive it)
  - What participants need to bring with them
  - The organiser's contact details
- A short briefing on the Citizens' Convention and what to expect;
- A short briefing about the topic of the Citizens' Convention;
- The form for claiming travel expenses.

We know from experience that making these contacts friendly and efficient, and establishing a relationship with participants before the event, is an excellent way to help ensure they attend.





## WHAT ARE THE KEY PROBLEMS WITH DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE UK AND HOW SHOULD THEY BE ADDRESSED?"

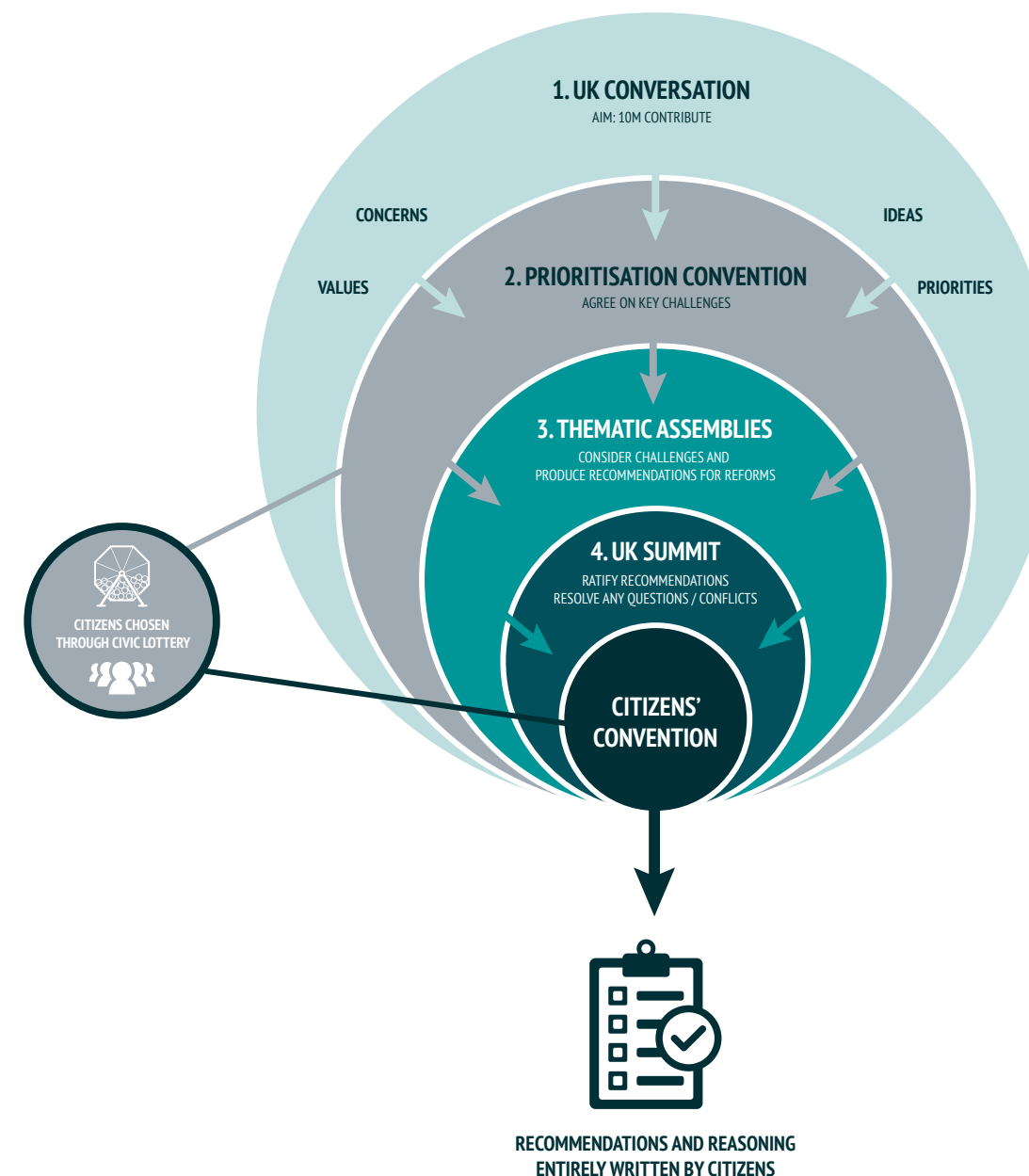
The Parliamentary leaders group has explicitly asked for guidance on:

1. Reviewing the powers and membership of the second chamber.
2. Examining the voting system at Parliamentary and local level to encourage greater participation in public life.
3. Reviewing the relationship between central and local government, and the question of devolution for England.
4. Proposing how politics should be paid for.
5. Examining the legal recognition given to some constitutional provisions, including individual rights.
6. Such other relevant democratic issues that may be recommended by the convention as its work progresses.

# HOW THE PROCESS WILL WORK



PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS LETTER



MANIFESTOS • GENERAL ELECTION • PARLIAMENT • CHANGE

2018  
THE LETTER

2019  
SCOPE & PREP

2020-2021  
CITIZENS' CONVENTION  
ACTIVE

2022  
POLITICAL PHASE



## VI. The Structure of the Convention

The Citizens' Convention process would consist of four parts, each with a distinct role:

- 1. UK Conversation** – a mass communications and engagement exercise to spark and support a UK-wide conversation on the challenges facing UK democracy and how they should be tackled;
- 2. Prioritisation Convention** – to hear evidence collected from the UK Conversation and agree the key challenges that the Citizens' Convention should explore;
- 3. Thematic Assemblies** – to consider the key challenges identified by the Prioritisation Summit and their potential solutions in depth and produce recommendations for reforms; and,
- 4. UK Summit** – to ratify the recommendations produced by the Thematic Assemblies, and resolve any overarching questions or conflicts.

### 1. UK Conversation

The UK Conversation will be a mass communications and engagement exercise to spark a widespread conversation and collect inputs to the Convention. It will adopt methods from other successful countrywide engagement exercises. The most recent example is the Grand Débat National in France, but there are other examples in the UK stretching back to the campaign around the 2003 Communications Act. All have in common a mixture of structured events and more unstructured action, providing tabletop kits for discussions in small groups, digital modes of engagement, and encouraging local authorities and others to host events.

**THERE IS A NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION, TO IDENTIFY THE ISSUES THAT ARE OF MOST CONCERN AND TO REFLECT BACK TO THE PUBLIC THE VIEWS OF EXPERTS**

### Why it is important

The UK Conversation is the essential first stage of the Convention process, to raise awareness, to identify key issues, and to build a community of “founding fathers and mothers” who feel themselves participants in the broader convention process, and who are from every community and area in the country. Concern about the state of UK democracy is widespread, but it is diffuse and unfocused.

Some people see issues like the power of the government and the weakness of Parliament as a serious issue, while others have particular concerns with the electoral system, or with the role of the House of Lords.

On all these areas, there is a need to understand the public conversation, to identify the issues that are of most concern and to reflect back to the public the views of experts, and the experience from other states.

The UK Conversation would ground the Convention in the hopes, fears, priorities and values of the public, while also collecting evidence from experts and stakeholders. It will raise awareness of the Citizens' Convention process, focusing on the opportunity it presents to reform UK democracy. It will provide a positive and constructive outlet for the demand for change and build the political pressure to implement the Convention's recommendations.

### Who it would involve

The UK Conversation would be form of mass participatory engagement, seeking to engage a large and diverse range of people. It will use communications, campaigns and engagement activity to reach a large and diverse range of people. It will be open to any interested groups or organisations to host a discussion, and any interested residents of the UK to take part.

Particular effort would be needed to engage seldom heard groups.

### How it would work

The UK Conversation will use a range of channels and methods to inform, mobilise and engage people in a conversation about UK democracy. Its starting place will be the impact of democracy on people's lives and their aspirations for how the system could better serve them. It will need to find ways of connecting with people through the issues and places with which they currently engage. While it would be supported by communications, materials and resources from the Convention team, the Conversation would be led by a diverse range of partners and groups across the UK.

The Convention team will partner and support a wide range of groups and organisations in order to spark and facilitate the UK Conversation. A large-scale communications campaign will be held to advertise the Convention process and encourage people to engage. Ideally, this will be run in partnership with a media organisation, like the BBC.







The UK-wide Conversation. Innovations such as Automated Moderation could facilitate genuine mass online deliberation

Groups will be invited to apply for small grants to support them in hosting conversations. The Convention team would produce materials on key democratic issues in a range of interactive formats and guides for groups to facilitate their own conversations.

We will partner with groups and organisations that can help us reach the broadest possible audience for the conversation, and support groups with training and materials to ensure that the UK Conversation is truly countrywide and inclusive, and does not favour those with pre-existing strong views or the social capital to make themselves heard.

A small group of quality assurance workers in the Convention team will be available to support selected events, both to gather images and ideas for use in the Convention's communications, and to ensure that the events are being correctly run and reported in a democratic fashion. Such quality-assured events will be the "gold standard" in the analysis phase.

### What it would produce

Reporting from the conversations will take place in several ways. Surveys could be used to understand the views of the broad public and to create media moments that can drive awareness and broaden the conversation.

A digital platform will be established for groups to report back on their conversations. Key statistics will be collected to allow the Convention team to understand the reach and range of participation. This mechanism will need to be set up in a way to make the contribution of material as simple as possible, while ensuring that there is enough data to understand the provenance and make a judgement of quality.

The evidence gathered from surveys, event reports (including the quality-assured events) and other elements of the UK Conversation will be synthesised by the Convention team with external supervision, or by external analysts, to produce a Report of the UK Conversation, as one of the key materials for the Convention process.

In parallel, an open call for evidence will be held to collect input from experts and stakeholders. The evidence received will be published as soon as it is received and reviewed, and collated in a separate report as part of the evidence materials for the Convention.

### When it would happen

The UK Conversation will take place at the beginning of the Convention process. It will run for roughly 9 months, until shortly before the beginning of the Thematic Assemblies. The team responsible will then transition into the communication stream of the Convention.

## 2. Prioritisation Convention

The Prioritisation Convention would meet over one weekend to consider the results of the UK Conversation and agree the highest priority challenges that the Citizens' Convention should address. Based on what it has heard and its own discussions, it will select the most important challenges that will be considered by the subsequent Thematic Assemblies. The Prioritisation Convention may also make a recommendation for other issues that should be considered in subsequent Convention processes.

### Why it is important

A large number and wide variety of democratic challenges will likely emerge from the UK Conversation. The Citizens' Convention process will only be able to consider a small number in depth and, therefore, needs a way to select the most important for immediate consideration. This will be the role of the Prioritisation Convention – to weigh up the different democratic challenges that face the country and make a judgement on where the Convention should focus. Putting this decision in the hands of the Prioritisation Convention ensures that the convention process is driven by the priorities of citizens themselves, which will help to build its legitimacy in the eyes of the wider public and decision-makers.

### Who it would involve

The Prioritisation Convention will be made up of at least 100 citizens selected by civic lottery to reflect the UK population. Stratification criteria would include age, ethnicity, gender, region and socio-economic group. Further stratification criteria could include level of engagement with politics, political party affiliation and/or opinions on the democratic system.

Participants will be selected through a civic lottery. Invitations will be sent to approximately 10,000 households to participate, with a random stratified sample selected from those who respond positively. Participants will be given a monetary gift to recognise their contribution and encourage a diverse range of people to take part. This will be set at approximately £150. Where necessary, resources will be provided to cover caring and other responsibilities to remove barriers to participation.

**WE WILL PARTNER WITH GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP US REACH THE BROADEST POSSIBLE AUDIENCE FOR THE CONVERSATION, AND ENSURE THAT THE UK CONVERSATION IS TRULY COUNTRYWIDE AND INCLUSIVE**



### How it would work

The Prioritisation Convention could be run akin to a deliberative poll. Its members will be polled at the beginning to get their top-of-the-head impression of the most important challenges facing democracy in the UK. They will then hear a series of presentations summarising the views and evidence collected during the UK Conversation, before being polled again on what challenges the Convention should address. The number of issues that will go forward to the Thematic Assemblies will be determined in part by the available budget.

### What it would produce

The Prioritisation Convention will arrive at a prioritised list of issues or challenges that need to be addressed to improve democracy in the UK. The subsequent stages of the Citizens' Convention will address the most important issues to arise from this, but additional items will be collected for consideration by future possible Conventions.

### When it would happen

The Prioritisation Convention will meet once and take place following the UK Conversation at the end of 2020.

## 3. Thematic Assemblies

The Thematic Assemblies would be a series of citizens' assemblies run in parallel, meeting up to six times each, over a six-month period. Each will address a democratic challenge or closely related set of issues chosen by the Prioritisation Convention. Having heard the range of evidence and opinion, each Thematic Assembly will make recommendations for reforms that will be put to the final UK Summit for ratification.

We considered the possibility of having regional meetings, rather than thematic, in order to allow for a stronger regional focus. However, we concluded that grouping assemblies by region, rather than by subject, could generate competing priorities and unnecessary tension between regions, rather than one UK-level conversation about UK democracy.

There is also good evidence to suggest that mini-publics should reflect the demos which they are representing: in this case, the UK population, rather than any particular region. Thematic Assemblies will have a tighter focus on the topic in question, whilst ensuring that there is regional representation from across the UK through our selection process. If a Thematic Assembly is considering an issue relevant only to one or more constituent components of the UK, then its composition will be drawn only from the component or components in question.

### Why it's important

The Citizens' Convention will need to consider a vast amount of information, evidence and points of view in order to arrive at informed and well-reasoned recommendations. The Thematic Assemblies will support this by receiving and synthesising those inputs and developing detailed recommendations.



### Who it would involve

Each thematic convention would be made up of 50 citizens selected by civic lottery to reflect the UK population. Stratification criteria would include age, ethnicity, gender, region and socio-economic group. Further stratification criteria could include level of engagement with politics, political party affiliation and/or opinions on the democratic system.

Participants will be selected through a civic lottery, as described above. Invitations will be sent to approximately 20,000 households to participate, with a random stratified sample selected from those who respond positively. Participants will be given a monetary gift to recognise their contribution and encourage a diverse range of people to take part. This will be set at approximately £150 per weekend and will be paid following each assembly meeting.

### How it would work

Each Thematic Assembly would be run as a citizens' assembly. Its members would hear evidence from relevant experts, stakeholders and the UK Conversation. They would be supported to deliberate (individually and collectively) on the basis of that evidence. Each Thematic Assembly would use expert lead and small group facilitators.

### What it would produce

The Thematic Assemblies would agree a package of detailed reforms to address the challenge or issue they have been set. Each reform would come with clear justifications, including analysis of their advantages, disadvantages and any wider considerations. Where an Assembly has been unable to reach a clear-cut decision, it may choose to refer an issue – with supporting material around options – to the UK Summit, for a final decision.

### When it would happen

The Thematic Conventions would meet up to six times each, at intervals of a month.

**THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION PROCESS IS A POLITICAL PROCESS, AND THEREFORE NEEDS TO ENSURE AND DEMONSTRATE ITS LEGITIMACY IN ORDER TO SECURE SUPPORT**



#### 4. UK Summit

The UK Summit would be a large gathering of citizens that would meet once to mark the culmination of the Citizens' Convention. It would bring the members of all of the Thematic Assemblies together to ratify and launch the recommendations of the Citizens' Convention.

##### Why it is important

The Citizens' Convention process is a political process, and therefore needs to ensure and demonstrate its legitimacy in order to secure support. A UK Summit would support this by bringing together all of the members of the Thematic Assemblies to ratify and launch the recommendations of the Convention.

##### Who it would involve

The UK Summit would be made up of the members of the earlier Thematic Assemblies. It would meet only once in order to limit the time commitment required of participants. As with the Thematic Assemblies, participants will be given a monetary gift to recognise their contribution and encourage a diverse range of people to take part. This will be set at approximately £150 per weekend and will be paid following the Summit.

##### How it would work

The UK Summit would meet once to consider the package of reforms proposed by the Thematic Assemblies. Each reform would need to cross a threshold of two-thirds support in order to be adopted by the Convention. As well as reviewing and ratifying the recommendations of the Assemblies, it would be responsible for considering any overarching issues or conflicts that have arisen out of the Convention process.

Politicians, the media and other stakeholders would be present on the second day of the UK Summit in order to receive the package of reforms.

##### What it would produce

The UK Summit will produce the final manifesto of reforms to be put to politicians for consideration and adoption within party manifestos and parliamentary bills. Convention staff could facilitate this task through producing drafts during the period between the operation of the Thematic Assemblies and the Summit, for the UK Summit to ratify or alter.

##### When it would happen

The UK Summit would meet at the end of 2021.

**THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION PROCESS IS A POLITICAL PROCESS, AND THEREFORE NEEDS TO ENSURE AND DEMONSTRATE ITS LEGITIMACY IN ORDER TO SECURE SUPPORT.**

#### VII. What would happen in the room?

The Citizens' Convention process is based on the principle of high-quality public deliberation in an environment in which everyone feels welcome and able to participate. From a democratic perspective, the process will need to conform to good standards of deliberation in order to ensure its integrity and the credibility of the recommendations. From a citizen's perspective, it must be a positive and empowering experience, where they feel able to express themselves and exchange views with others in a respectful environment.

##### The Venue

We will seek venues that are open and airy, with plenty of space to move around, and that are accessible to everyone.

From the beginning, participants will be kept informed about the process by a dedicated contact person and will be offered any support they need to ensure they are able to attend.

Participants will arrive at the venue for each weekend on the Friday evening before it commences, both to ensure that there is a full day of deliberation on Saturday but also to give them the opportunity to relax and socialise, with social activities in the early events to break down barriers to communication.

Teas, coffees and food will be provided in a relaxed environment.







## VIII. What principles would the Citizens' Convention need to fulfill?

Not every individual will be able to take part in the Convention. Like the jury in a trial, the participants will be trusted to deliver a fair outcome by the citizens not involved in the process. To build trust, the Convention must be based on the following principles.

### Clear remit

The Citizens' Convention as a whole, and each component part within it, must have a clear remit that is accessible and engaging to citizens.

### Transparent

The process must be completely open and transparent to ensure trust and legitimacy. Participation will be on a basis of informed consent. We will be open with those taking part about what is expected of them, and make clear to them that they have the right to withdraw at any time.

### Information

The Citizens' Convention must have access to the information it requires to make an informed decision. Its members should be able to select witnesses they wish to hear from.

### Clear process

The Citizens' Convention must have a clear process for considering the agenda, deliberating and making recommendations.

### Neutral facilitation

The Citizens' Convention must be professionally facilitated to ensure that the process is neutral and that all participants are able fully to engage.

### Sufficient time

The Citizens' Convention must allow its members sufficient time to learn about and deliberate over the issues. The scope of each conversation should be proportionate to the time available and vice versa.

### Impactful results

The Citizens' Convention must arrive at robust and coherent recommendations and there must be strong commitment to ensuring those recommendations are considered and adopted by politicians. The Citizens' Convention must not be a talking shop.

**FROM A CITIZEN'S PERSPECTIVE, IT MUST BE A POSITIVE AND EMPOWERING EXPERIENCE, WHERE THEY FEEL ABLE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND EXCHANGE VIEWS WITH OTHERS IN A RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENT**

## IX. Communicating the Citizens' Convention

The Citizens' Convention will be promoted throughout by a media and comms team, who will spark broader interest and engagement. The purpose of the comms strategy will be both to publicise and build support for the Convention itself and to involve the wider public in deliberating on the themes.

Transparency throughout the Convention will be crucial to its credibility. Citizens not selected to participate should be able to access, follow and comment on the Convention, even if not actively involved in deliberation. If the Conversation is effective in sparking widespread public interest in the process, this should continue into the Convention phase, meaning that the process stays in the public eye. The Convention will be streamed live, so that people can follow the proceedings in real time online. Participants in the Convention will be offered media training from media partners.

Media will be granted access to some parts of the Convention process, but must agree to a code of conduct, in order to protect the integrity of the process and to safeguard participants. Our participant team will help with support and media liaison so that participants feel fully comfortable with media in the room.





# Part III

## ESTABLISHING THE CITIZENS' CONVENTION

### I. How would the Citizens' Convention be governed?

#### The Preparation Stage 2019

Good governance of the process is essential to fostering trust and this involves both governance of democratic process and financial/probity oversight.

During the Preparation Phase, the project has been governed by the Executive Board – Tim Hughes, Andrew Blick and Graham Allen.

Throughout this phase, much of the design work has been with the Design and Process Group. This benefits from the participation of UK and international experts, who have been offering their advice on process during the design phase.

#### Members of this group include:

Frances Foley (Project Director), Andrew Blick (King's College London), Tim Hughes (Involve), Graham Allen (former Chair of Parliamentary Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee), Suzanne Hall (Ipsos MORI), Ben Wilkinson (Policy Institute, Kings), Marian Cramers (Democratic Society), Prof Graham Smith (University of Westminster), Anthony Zacharzewski (Democratic Society), David Van Reybrouck (author and organiser, 'G1000', Belgium), Iain Walker (newDemocracy Institute, Australia), Peter MacLeod (Mass LLP, Canada) and Jim Fishkin (Stanford Centre for Deliberative Democracy)

We have been able to draw on a range of international examples of citizens' assemblies and learn from best practice in design and delivery.

We are also working within the Democracy R&D network, a community of practitioners and experts in citizen participation, who have been lending their support and guidance. Following the initial design phase, we will be inviting these practitioners to give feedback on our process design, in order to take advantage of their expertise in running deliberative processes.

The Preparation Phase is also being overseen by the Advisory Council, composed of advisors from a range of backgrounds who are lending their support and expertise to the Convention planning.

#### Members of the Advisory Council include:

Dame Julie Mellor (Involve), Miriam Levin (Department of Culture, Media and Sport), Dame Laura Cox (High Court Judge), Ryan Shorthouse (Bright Blue), David Halpern (Behavioural Insights Unit), Bobby Duffy (The Policy Institute, King's College), Matthew Taylor (RSA), Professor Robert Blackburn (King's College London) and David Farrell (University College Dublin).

We will also develop our links to elected representatives, starting with the 5 senior parliamentarians who have promoted the agenda for change and signed the letter of support. We will also seek to expand this group, building the case amongst representatives of all parties who share our view that they should work together with citizens to find sustainable solutions to our current democratic challenges. This work of political liaison and engagement will continue throughout the 2 years of the Convention and following its conclusion.





### During the Convention

For the Convention process, financial and probity governance must ensure that the resources committed to the process are well used and that there are transparent decisions on how it should be used. In such a significant public engagement exercise, GDPR and privacy will be a priority.

Democratic governance must ensure that the Convention process as a whole responds to and reflects the goals of citizens, and that the key decisions and their implementation are supported by participants.

In addition, there will need to be effective day-to-day management of the Convention. We will consider the appropriate legal form for this as we develop our project further.

The final governance structure will have four elements:

**The Committee for a UK Convention** meets monthly and is made up of the principal backers of the convention process. In time, the membership will

grow to include a balanced group of political representatives. It is responsible for overseeing work plans and accounts, for fundraising, and for allocating funding that is. The Committee has final decision making on finances and probity.

**The Citizen Oversight Group** is a group of 25 citizens, meeting roughly quarterly throughout the process. They receive briefings from the operational team and deliberate the most difficult design choices to ensure that the decisions taken are on the basis of citizen views. The COG has final decision making power on the process and issues of legitimacy.

**The Academic Reference Group** is a group of academics and other process experts, not involved directly in the delivery of the project, who meet as required and comment by correspondence on process proposals and documentation. They provide support to the Committee and the COG, as well as to the operational team.

**The Project Team** is the leadership of operational team, made up of those organisations who are funded to undertake the Convention work, and the leadership of any permanent staffing structure for the Convention. The Project Team works closely together, meeting at least weekly and reporting to the Committee and the COG.

Fundraising activities are directed by the Committee and delivered by the Project Team, with commissioning of work led by the Committee to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest and money received is spent in the most economically advantageous way, with organisations who can demonstrate the appropriate level of skill and expertise.

**DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE MUST ENSURE THAT THE CONVENTION PROCESS AS A WHOLE RESPONDS TO AND REFLECTS THE GOALS OF CITIZENS, AND THAT THE KEY DECISIONS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION ARE SUPPORTED BY PARTICIPANTS.**

## II. Funding the Convention

The Convention is designed to be thorough, inclusive and ambitious and ensure the citizens involved have a rewarding experience. As such, the process itself will require substantive resources to guarantee quality throughout, from the first public communications to the final bill-drafting process.

Throughout the course of the Preparation Phase, we have been generously supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. We thank them for giving us the time to ensure the Convention is carefully designed, planned and prepared.

At present, it seems unlikely that the current UK government will fund the Convention and we are therefore looking to create a consortium of funders who will commit to supporting the process from its outset. The benefit of external funders is that the Convention can exist separately from the UK Government, allowing it to focus on high quality deliberation and maximum citizen participation, rather than particular policy recommendations.

Our cost estimate for the process as presented in this manual is £3 million. This will fund the communications and media, political liaison work, recruitment and selection of participants, the meetings, including travel, accommodation and participant gifts, the salaries for the core team – including comms, participant support and project oversight, and the final bill drafting process.

## III. Partners and collaborators


A massive vote of thanks goes to all those who have helped us get to this point on our journey. We have a particular debt to those we have asked to help in the design phase, most of whom give their unstinting expert assistance free of charge. Thank you also to those who've helped advise, guide and support the project as it develops.

A lot of the heavy lifting in getting this Manual to this point has been undertaken by our wonderful partners at Involve and The Democratic Society.

**Involve**  
Involve is the UK's leading public participation charity, on a mission to put people at the heart of decision-making. We support people and decision-makers to work together to solve our biggest challenges.

**The Democratic Society**  
The Democratic Society (Demsoc) is an international non-profit organisation working for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together. We are a non-profit organisation and are non-partisan and politically non-aligned.





“Deliberative democracy is “Democracy when people are thinking under good conditions”. They are offering reasons, listening to the reasons offered by others, listening to the evidence and coming to considered judgments. It is democracy at its best and we need nothing less.”

PROF JAMES FISHKIN

The Center for Deliberative Democracy, Stanford University

“My message to MPs is always “Give us your hardest problem”, the one where the wider public will feel cynical and any decision you reach alone won’t be trusted. By sharing the decision with a group selected like a jury you get people from all walks of life standing alongside you to explain why they believe a decision is the right one.

In a long format deliberation, people gain an understanding of the hard tradeoffs, and have the freedom to give you a recommendation unencumbered by some of the downsides of needing to worry about media coverage and threats to re-election – or those from the party whip! They just answer the question the way they think is best for their community, and by doing so, provide space for leaders to lead.”

IAIN WALKER

newDemocracy Foundation, Australia

