Contribution from Jon Foster-Smith

Further to my contribution of the new True Democracy app concept, please find my answers to the questions below…

    • Could technology improve the access to and usability of both legislation and the law-making process for the citizen, representatives and professionals (such as lawyers), and if so do you have any suggestions?

Yes. It already has, but this is just the beginning. Like a horse and bridal, we harness the internet with the right app, and we keep on developing that app to perfection.

My proposed True Democracy app shows popular opinion, not law. But the same app used in a different way could show legislation to the layman, making it searchable and comprehensible. Let's call it 'Plain Law app'.

    • Should you need to be a lawyer to understand and use an Act?

Ideally, no. But the system has evolved complex language requiring years of studying to understand.

Rather than reinventing the wheel (impossible), Plain Law app would simplify existing Acts into layman's terms. As part of their studies, law students break down every law into small, comprehensible, <140 character sentences. Those sentences are categorised on a coast tree of subjects and issues. Other students, academics and legal professionals indicate their agreement to those statements, to ensure accuracy.

Unlike True Democracy, only legal people can input, but everyone can search and read the content.

    • Should technology be used to integrate citizens' views better into the legislative process? At what stage of the legislative process would this work best? How could the Public Reading Stage be improved?

Yes. True Democracy app addresses this. Bills at Public Reading Stage could be brought more prominently to user's attention to be addressed urgently.

    • Are there any examples from other parliaments/democratic institutions in the UK or elsewhere of using technology to enhance legislation and the legislative process, which the Commission should consider?

• Currently on leave while serving as the United States Deputy Chief Technology Officer for government innovation, Jennifer Pahlka is a coder and the founder of Code for America, which matches software geniuses with US cities to reboot local services. For me, this short film was a life-changer...

www.ted.com/talks/jennifer_pahlka_coding_a_better_government

• Besides a lesson in digital democracy, the story of the Mayor elected on the promise of a polar bear for Reykjavík zoo...
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/25/reykjavik-mayor-digital-democracy

• The Icelandic experience challenges the view that constitutional process must be exclusionary and secretive
http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=6747

• www.democracyos.org (Buenos Aires)

• www.MySociety.org