Contribution from Paul Robinson

Dear Mr Speaker

Firstly I'd like to congratulate you on putting together such an impressively talented team for your Commission on Digital Democracy. In particular Emma Mulqueeny is both an inspired and an inspiring choice.

In relation to your evidence gathering, I thought I would offer my view to each of your questions:

- **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. I think the Cabinet Office website and the gov.uk website have made huge improvements in recent years, although they could go even further to simplify access.

- **Should you need to be a lawyer to understand and use an Act?** As a non-lawyer, but a former user of the law in relation to advising managers and employees on matters of employment, I think it's essential to make Acts of Parliament as accessible as possible. Nevertheless I also appreciate that Acts of Parliament need to be exacting and precise in the language used, so as to avoid misinterpretation or multiple interpretations. But laws are ultimately made by the people, and for the people, and I think the language that is used should be chosen with that in mind. You will not put any lawyers out of business by opening access, but you will undoubtedly reduce engagement and democratic participation by making laws more inaccessible.

- **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?** I would urge the Commission to investigate some of the following tools that have been developed for collaborative decision-making within institutions or groups: DemocracyOS (eg as used by the Net Party of Argentina); Loomio (eg as used by LSE for creating a crowd-sourced constitution for the UK); LiquidFeedback (eg as used by the Pirate Party of Germany) are a number of projects which I think need to be considered. There is even a proto-party (yet to be registered with the Electoral Commission) in the UK who have developed their own way of collaborating on a political manifesto. I have no doubt there are others, but it is clearly an area in which various groups are developing solutions which I have no doubt could be useful to you.

- **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?** I do not know the extent to which technology is used, but I think the Swiss model of regularly engaging with the electorate in the legislative process through referenda, is something we should try to emulate.

Thank you again for looking into these matters. It is an area I find hugely exciting and I cannot wait to read your findings and recommendations.

With kind regards,
Paul Robinson

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