

Contribution from Elliot Hughes

I write to answer the questions from the 'Making Laws in a Digital Age' call for evidence.

I am a 21 year old student of Computer Science at the University of Southampton.

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.

Technology allows a freedom to express the same information in many different ways. That means that an individual citizen who in the past wouldn't have been able to fully understand laws can now be given the opportunity to understand them better.

The law making process in particular could be greatly enhanced by technology. How we write to our MPs, how we communicate with ministers and how we give feedback to calls for evidence such as this could be greatly helped.

<https://www.writetothem.com/> is a great example of how removing the barrier of writing a physical letter and posting it can allow a broader range of citizens to write to their MP. By recording the response rate of MPs they can be held to account. (After all, holding people to account is a key part of the democratic process).

It's also important to look at how technology can inform people about things that they can already do, like speaking to their MP in Westminster or attending a committee.

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

I'm sure it will always be necessary to consult an expert about the full meaning of an act as it applies to you, but in the digital age we can do better at explaining acts in full.

For example, there is no reason why a full explanation of various lines in an act (that would not be legally binding, but would be checked for accuracy) couldn't be put alongside the actual act in an online view.

Should technology be used to integrate citizens' views better into the legislative process? At what stage of the legislative process would this work best?

Yes.

- More citizens than ever want to be involved in the process
- Technology is overwhelming the current communication channels (MPs have to send out bulk replies)
- This means that noise is overwhelming the signal of public feeling
- Needs to happen at every stage

How could the Public Reading Stage be improved?

More public feedback is needed. Some way to digest the various views and capture the key arguments then feeding them into the public debate is really needed. Many large campaigns simply get ignored as it is so hard for capture the strength of public feeling. (Maybe in this particular context people's views aren't best represented by their constituency?)

April 2014