

A Wiki-sourced submission on digital scrutiny to the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy

**The contributors to the Wiki
Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos
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https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Connecting_knowledge_to_power:_the_future_of_digital_democracy_in_the_UK

Introduction

On 29 May 2014, Demos and WikimediaUK established a page on ‘Meta-Wiki’, the global community site for the Wikimedia movement and Wikimedia projects, of which Wikipedia is the most famous.¹

The page, called ‘Connecting knowledge to power: the future of digital democracy in the UK’, posed the three questions raised by the Commission under their request for submissions under the digital scrutiny theme:

- How can technology help Parliament and other agencies to scrutinise the work of government?
- How can technology help citizens scrutinise the Government and the work of Parliament?
- What kinds of data should Parliament and Government release to the public to make itself more open to outside scrutiny?

People were invited “to try to answer these questions collaboratively, in much the same way Wikipedia articles are approached - using the space below for content and talk page for discussion.”² They were informed that what was produced would be formally submitted to the Commission.

Consistent with the structure and principles of Wikipedia, the page was:

- *Divided into a ‘content’ and ‘discussion’ page* - The content page represents the standing consensus. The discussion page represents the underlying deliberation that produced that consensus, including challenges, suggestions, justifications for edits, and requests;
- *Editorially open* - wherein anyone can add or remove content, or the sections and headings of either the discussion or the content page;
- *Transparent* – wherein every change to the page is publicly logged and attributed to the editor’s Wikimedia account or IP address.
- Subject to a series of content policies, the most important being that content must:
 - Be written from a neutral point of view, representing views fairly,

¹ ‘Wikimedia Projects – Meta’, http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikimedia_projects

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https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Connecting_knowledge_to_power:_the_future_of_digital_democracy_in_the_UK

- proportionately and without bias
- Be verifiable, and evidenced from reliable sources
- Not include original research
- Be written with respect and civility, and with the intention of achieving consensus

Between 29 May and 10th July:

The content page was viewed 2205 times
Was edited 50 times
By 14 unique editors

The discussion page was viewed 171 times
Was edited 40 times
By 12 unique editors

The page was an experiment with two purposes: first to source new ideas for digital scrutiny to the Commission; and second to test whether the Wiki process – as a technology, community, ethos and body of policies – is itself a promising digital democratic resource.

The submission – below - is the product of this experiment. Other than limited curatorial interventions in the discussion page from members of both Demos and Wikimedia-UK, and non-substantive edits to render the content amenable to a paper submission, it is the entire and unchanged output of the contributors to the page.

Part 1 – Content Page

How can technology help Parliament and other agencies to scrutinise the work of government?

Definitions

To answer this question, we will specify what we will mean by "scrutinise", "the work of government" and "technology".

In this response we will assume "scrutiny" means either (1) the close consideration of the validity of the arguments put forward to support an action taken, (2) assessment of the effectiveness of the action (i.e. the extent to which the outcome meets the set objectives) and (3) assessment of the performance (i.e. how well they have delivered their objectives).

In this response we will separate "The work of government" in the UK into three main functions: (1) proposing legislation; (2) delivering services through executive agencies, and (3) supervising the work of independent bodies. Scrutiny of each of these three functions is carried out in a different way.

Encyclopedic analysis

Building an encyclopaedia and analysing the effectiveness of legislation are tasks that could be readily compared. Both require the distillation of diverse sources of information into a single, neutral, summary of the facts. Systematic links are key to building quality, useful information. Acts of Parliament³ can be linked to secondary legislation made under those Acts,⁴ debates in parliament,⁵ the websites of public bodies created under the Acts,⁶ reports of the effectiveness of these bodies,⁷ and other reports.⁸ Associated European law can also be linked.⁹

³ *Example:* Data Protection Act 1998 at legislation.gov.uk

⁴ The Data Protection Act 1998 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2011 at legislation.gov.uk

⁵ Data Protection Bill [Lords] in Standing Committee D at www.parliament.uk

⁶ Independent Commissioner's Office official site at ico.org.uk

⁷ Information Commissioner's Annual Report and Financial Statements 2012/13 from ico.org.uk (*PDF document*)

⁸ Data Protection: Constituency Casework at www.parliament.uk

⁹ Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. Official Journal L 281 , 23/11/1995 P. 0031 – 0050

In the same way that many Wikipedia readers become Wikipedia editors, practitioners using services like www.legislation.gov.uk and www.parliament.uk can be engaged to build a library of useful links and to produce feedback on the effectiveness of the legislation.

Transparency and communication

Governments develop their own evidence base, which is not always easily accessed by Parliamentary committees. Data and evidence should be shared by default. Raw data should be accessible for Parliament to scrutinise.

From the *ekklêsia* of Athens to the floor of a modern Parliament, the development of functional forums has always been central to democracy. Modern technology can make citizen scrutiny more dynamic and continuous and bring the public deeper into the process of legislation. Parliamentary committees can track the development of new policy rather than simply wait until it has been completed. Commenting on White Papers, draft Bills, etc could be done through a wiki-type format that would enable individual comments by Parliamentarians to be tracked and then responded to by Government in a transparent manner.

Careful development of open forums for citizens to present and vote on petitions and proposals has the potential to make the general will of the nation more apparent to those who seek to implement it. It is by no means simple to design a truly free and fair forum, where everyone has an honest opportunity to be heard and have their ideas evaluated by neutral members of the public in a way that rewards good ideas rather than tactical gamesmanship. To do this so effectively that the leading proposals are popularly supported, well thought out and useful for drafting legislation would be a triumph of social technology.

How can technology help citizens scrutinise the Government and the work of Parliament?

Technology is only a medium - Government and Parliament need to make their work more accessible in terms of tone, relevance and accessibility. Technology can facilitate that, but the starting point for engagement has to be to translating the technocratic content of Government into language and content that is

relevant to people's lives and concerns. Technology alone cannot do that, but it can facilitate the two-way conversation between decision-makers and those that are affected by decisions.

It would be valuable to facilitate conversation and dialogue about Bills, committee discussions, meetings and their implications. This includes presentation of diverse views and perspectives, so that citizens can see the trade-offs and synergies between their individual perspectives. Democracy needs to balance individuals with what is right for the country as a whole - we won't all be happy with everything. Digital platforms can enable conversation and expose people to others viewpoints. However, this needs to be moderated carefully to ensure that discussion is civil and that conflict is addressed in a constructive manner.

Currently the way that non-mainstream issues are raised in Parliament is via a Members Bill - technology could help identify issues that are important to citizens but have been overlooked by Government and/or Parliament. Technology can enable direct engagement between citizens and Parliament without having to rely solely on MPs or knowledge of Parliamentary procedure.

It is presently possible to subscribe to an RSS feed of bills before Parliament.¹⁰ A list of draft bills before Parliament is "published to enable consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny."¹¹ It is also possible to receive email updates on a particular Bill through the parliament website.¹²

We recommend that this laudable work be continued and expanded, so that those who subscribe to a particular bill can receive updates on anything and everything that happens regarding it: for example, transcripts of discussions in Parliament or committee, upcoming votes and the results of votes, and any official petitions regarding that piece of legislation. RSS syndication with additional updates for the list of draft bills is also desirable. Providing a more engaging and accessible interface for viewing annual budget allocation

¹⁰ Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. Official Journal L 281 , 23/11/1995 P. 0031 - 0050

¹¹ Draft Bills before Parliament at www.parliament.uk

¹² For example, the entry for the Access to Mental Health Services Bill 2013-14 at services.parliament.uk offers a link to "Receive email updates for this Bill".

information and quarterly financial performance reporting would aid scrutiny of departmental expenditure and policy delivery.

What kinds of data should Parliament and Government release to the public to make itself more open to outside scrutiny?

A lot of data is already available, but not necessarily in an accessible or machine-readable format.

Central government

- Office of National Statistics datasets - grouped by policy areas and as a way of providing an evidence base for discussions
- Evidence and research used by Government to develop policy
- Parliamentary Committee research and data
- Annual budget allocation information. This data is partly available in the Budget, but not in an engaging or accessible way.
- Quarterly financial performance reporting would aid scrutiny of departmental expenditure and policy delivery.
- Departmental monitoring and reporting data - currently often available internally but is rarely made available externally.
- Voting records and MP attendance
- Searchable Hansard entries
- Calendar of Parliamentary activities - that can be tailored to interest and downloaded in an accessible and multi-platform format (so someone could put it on their phone for example)
- The Register of Members' Financial Interests should be made available as data

Local government

- Equivalents of the above for local government, where similar things exist: budgets and financial reporting, council minutes, registers of councillors' financial interests, registers of by-laws, etc., preferably in a uniform format mandated by central government, so that the performance of local governments in different areas can be compared.

Part 2 – Discussion Page

On the talk page – the username of the contributor is posted under the contribution. We echo that practice here, placing each contributor within angled brackets.¹³

Electronic voting

Much to my disappointment, the last time the Open Rights Group were consulted on the issue of electronic voting, they strongly discouraged the idea.¹⁴ This sentiment was picked up by senior figures in PPUK and I wasn't happy about this at all.

Electronic voting is effectively a trade off in accountability and security for increased democratic participation until such a time as the idea of widespread secure home PC exists. (e.g. no time soon).

Also to be cautious of is governments tendering technology solutions to the lowest bidder, using insecure proprietary systems, as well as the enhanced voter registration infrastructure (and therefore massive database of personal information that must support such a project).

None the less, I would like to see electronic voting picked up within an honest framework that acknowledges the trade-offs at stake (as opposed to dismissing them) with the goals of increased democratic participation, NOT cost or speed saving.

<Deku-shrub>

It's a difficult technology. For any election we need to be committed to maintaining the secrecy of every vote, yet be able to audit that the vote was actually made (though that one has been widely compromised when electronic

¹³ We have determined that given the open nature of the Wiki, and the clear and original purpose stated for this experiment, the contributors would not reasonably expect their contributions to be in any way private. We have therefore taken the decision to directly attribute their contributions in this submission.

¹⁴ Originally hyperlink: <https://www.openrightsgroup.org/ourwork/successes/evoting>

voting machines have been used), and to ensure that one and only one vote is given to each citizen. So the voter needs to be able to contact the proper office and *prove* who he is, receive some token, cryptographic or otherwise, that lets him file a vote, yet no one should be able to find out from the vote with the token which voter it came from, *yet* it should not be transferable i.e. sold to the highest bidder. That last one is a killer.

For this process, we should do much of the same: we should offer people commenting a way to conceal their identities and be sure the opinions are not being secretly silenced by someone with a bias who is running the site. But with good design we don't have to care that much if there are a few duplicate accounts so long as we know that they aren't a major fraction of the total and we can prevent them from being able to pile in on a particular proposal and promote it to top consideration. We definitely *cannot* prevent people from supporting opinions on issues that they've been paid to or have a vested interest in - there will be plenty of loyal employees, career activists, and probably outright lobbyists for hire getting involved in the process. As a result, I think that electronic advice to a government can be developed before electronic voting is viable.

<Wnt>

Standards

What's the best source for standards for data publishing?

<Anonymous>

Organising responses around specific recommendations

It's not entirely clear to me what kind of response is desired here, but perhaps the most useful response would be a collection of short, easily understandable recommendations, which are each backed up by a more in depth explanation.

Does that sound like a good idea?

<Mark M>

Agreed. I think an explanatory/introductory paragraph should be included too.

<AndrewRT>

Thanks for your comment. I will reflect on the opening statement to see if it can be made more clear. It's really positive to see the level of engagement so far, and

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I thank everyone who has taken the time to get involved.
<Stevie Benton (WMUK)>

WTF are they smoking!?!?

My impression is that neither Bercos nor Miller have spent so much as a day editing WP. At its best WP is a reasonably smooth running example of anarcho-communism, at its worst it is a dictatorship of the obnoxious subverted by crypto-spammers. The one thing it is not, and by design never will be, is a democracy.
<Dodger67>

This isn't about what Wikipedia is or isn't; it's about using processes that are already being used in Wikipedia to do something a bit different. I'm hopeful still. <Mark M>

It is a valid and interesting experiment. Success is *not* guaranteed, but it is well worth trying. <Wnt>

Hello there, I just wanted to pick up on the initial point in this section that Wikipedia isn't a democracy. We're aware of this, and aren't trying to pitch it as such. What is of interest to us here is the way that content and policy are arrived at by consensus. We're looking at whether those principles can be applied to digital engagement with the democratic and legislative process. If we find that it cannot, that's still a valid finding. But we're hoping that enough people engage with the process to offer something a bit more interesting as a conclusion.
<Stevie Benton (WMUK)>

Bills before parliament

I can't say I understand the details of how bills get through parliament; it would be very helpful if regular people (like me) could look at the list <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2013-14.html> and understand more about the current status of each bill. For example the first one says "This means the Bill will make no further progress." Does that mean it's never going to pass? Why is it still on the list? Could any of these bills still pass? What are the reasons for delay? Some kind of more detailed summary (possibly editable) would be helpful.
<Mark M>

That page is from the last Parliamentary session (2013-2014). Bills in the current session are on this page¹⁵, which has been moved recently. However they don't seem to have updated the 2013-14 page to note that it is older. The new Parliamentary year started last week (with the Queen's Speech). The bills on that list that haven't already passed are dead, unless the Commons passes a resolution to bring it forward to the next Parliamentary year (but that tends only to happen with big Government bills where the Government doesn't wish to lose all the effort they've gone through).

Bills usually don't pass before the end of a session if the Government (or the Speaker) don't want to give it time for debates; there is only so much Parliamentary time, and the Government usually has a lot of stuff of its own to get through. Or with some Bills, such as the Capital Punishment Bill, the Government desperately wants to avoid the Parliamentary or public debate. However, the bills page could have a lot more information on it; such as whether the Bill is a Government Bill (likely to pass) or a Private Members' Bill, or what stage it is at.
<DukeUK>

We need to develop the best possible forums for democratic policy development

In response to "How can technology help citizens scrutinise the Government and the work of Parliament?", I think that we should pay special attention to the question of how you make a *good* forum for people to exchange opinions, rate good ideas, and work collaboratively on draft comments, reviews, and proposed legislation. I think that forum design is itself a crucial technology, but one which is often underappreciated. For example, I remember when mybarackobama.com and Change.gov put out requests for ideas, and the ideas that won out were generally those submitted very near the beginning because they got the most votes and people read and voted for the proposals with the most votes. The current White House petition system doesn't have that problem, but essentially relies on outside PR work to get a lot of votes to petitions of interest. Some ideas that I'd suggest for evaluating forums would be:

- **Gini coefficient.**¹⁶ Calculate the overall level of disparity between the number of

¹⁵ Originally hyperlink: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/>

¹⁶ Originally hyperlink: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gini_coefficient

reads for the various ideas people put forward. On a site like Reddit you might file 40 comments and one gets hundreds of upvotes while the others go essentially unread. Wikipedia presently has a low Gini sheerly by accident, with the primitive Wiki comment system set up - there is a proposal for a new forum system, however, which would sort all the threads by how often they are added to, which in widely read forums would lead to much more inequality. While I appreciate that a high inequality presents a range of the most interesting content for entertainment, serious policy discussion requires that we keep the inequality below a threshold. After all, if no one will ever read his comments, a citizen is not really scrutinizing anything.

- **Voter selection.** On one hand, people with no interest in a topic or knowledge about it can't be expected to decide what proposals or comments are best founded. Yet when anyone can come in and comment on a process, it can easily be hijacked by people with an agenda. This is a notorious problem on w:WP:ANI,¹⁷ for example. On online forums we usually deal with this with some sort of ad hoc category system, so that a fraction of a total group of users reads a specific subforum, but any given post is more likely to get dispassionate drive-by comments than if it were just filed to Twitter and left to interested partisans. However, there may be substantial room for improvement on this in a government context, because for example you can solicit comments from multiple groups of people with specific verified credentials (but also none; it should always be open to the public) but give each group its own chance to develop a consensus and to evaluate the others' consensuses with feedback in real time.
- **Freedom.** When assisting in government decisions, people must have a robust freedom of speech equivalent to that they have under the law. That means, for example, that "spammy" posters must be dealt with by some dispassionate mechanism that pushes the spam out of sight, rather than by banning them from further contributions. But it is also vital in policy work, as in broader society, that people be shielded from discrimination in employment based on their beliefs. One way in the short term that Wikipedia shields people is by allowing pseudonymous and anonymous contributions, and the government should consider the same; but with more and more high-profile firings of people over legal and even reasonable comments in social media, a more explicit intervention against discrimination by the employer itself appears necessary.

¹⁷ Originally hyperlink: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:ANI>

- **Content cycle.** We want people to be able to introduce ideas at different times, not just at the beginning of the process, and to have these ideas fairly evaluated no matter when they are introduced. This will require not only a way to ensure voting is not skewed to favor the first proposals, but also a way to merge very similar proposals according to a consensus of genuinely neutral participants, and doing so in a way that preserves and combines the good features of each. Some of this is similar to Wikimedia work, making this indeed a good place to ask for ideas, but even Wikimedia doesn't really have much of a technology for this. For example, we preserve CC-by-SA licensing and an edit history, which are things you'll want, but we don't have good tools for spotting content that has been taken out in some intermediate revision by someone with potentially a biased agenda. I would suggest that further research is needed, both for a better Wikipedia and a better democracy.

<Wnt>

Moving beyond democracy

The questions being addressed on this page are rather like being asked to participate in a major consultation about building a nuclear power station in a particular location and finding that the only issue that can be discussed is what colour to paint it. The questions here are about scrutinising government whereas we need a prior discussion about how government should operate.

If we take as a prime principle that everyone should be able to participate at any stage in the making of decisions that affect them, then democracy is not fit for purpose. Democracy is rooted in the concept that there is this entity, δῆμος or the people, that has a will. In reality a million different people have a million different wills. It is rooted in the concept of group decision making as against the reality that only individuals make decisions. All forms of democracy end up with making decisions in one way or another that are supposed to be decisions of the whole group. To a greater or lesser extent alternative and minority viewpoints may be represented but there are limits to the extent that this can be, and in practice is, done. In the common forms of majority voting democracy only the winning point of view is represented.

In practice the outcomes are largely determined by the most influential individuals or groups. Supporting everyone to be able to participate in decisions that affect them means moving towards panocracy, rule by everyone. To do this requires two key ingredients:



- gathering needs, information and ideas and
- ruling, managing and organising by consent.

Gathering

Gathering is a development of the Quaker method of gathering the sense of the meeting. The idea is to gather together all the information, needs and opinions on an issues so that everyone concerned knows that their points have been recorded and acknowledged and that people making decisions have a reasonably complete picture.

In meetings

Anyone can start a gather whenever they think it would be useful. They aim to summarise all the points of view that have been expressed about the issue under consideration. If anyone thinks that the gather is incorrect or inadequate they can regather, but the regather has to be a complete gather. Further regathers can take place. Once everyone is satisfied that the last gather was good enough the process is complete. The effect of this is that everyone and all points of view have been heard and acknowledged.

Each person decides what to do in the light of the gather. It may be clear that there is general agreement about, say, a particular course of action. Participants may feel that they have enough information to pursue their own course of action, which may be different from others, doing so in the light of what others have said. Or it may be that some or all of the group choose to carry on with further discussion of the issue.

With larger groups

For larger groups and for government the internet enables a similar process to take place. A web site can be the repository for a gather. It will be a dynamic gather with the process of regathering being replaced by editing the page. The rule here is that everyone has the right to have their point of view included. Contributions are in general anonymous since the issue of who holds a particular point of view is irrelevant to the gather. The page editors need to commit to this process, and there may be a need for resolving disputes between the editors and individuals about whether a form of words properly incorporates a particular point of view.

This could use wiki type software but there would be a couple of important differences. First, where Wikipedia aims for a neutral point of view a policywiki would be aiming for all points of view. Secondly the information needs to be differently organised. There needs to be a hierarchical structure of topic, sub topic, sub sub topic and so on. It should be clear on each page where it fits within the structure and easy to navigate up, down and across the hierarchy. Also the language needs to be clear so that most people can follow it.

Again, anyone can gather and Demos could host policywikis.

Consent

The principle of ruling (including managing and organising) by consent is that decision makers aim to have sufficient consent for their decisions. Consent is not the same as consensus nor is it an exact quantity. Consent means that enough people support the decision, opposition to the decision is sufficiently small in size and intensity and everyone else is sufficiently content with the decision. In the latter group there will be those who do not agree with the decision but accept that it is well founded.

Not having enough consent can lead to two outcomes in particular. On the one hand the decision will be ignored. For example the law relating to not cycling on pavements is widely flouted, it does not have sufficient consent. Clearly there is a problem, but the current approach is not working and solutions need to be found that have more consent.

On the other hand there will be trouble. We have many large scale examples of this, recently in Ukraine, where governments have attempted to act in ways that do not have the consent of whole sections of their citizens.

Ruling by consent involves a fundamental change in the basis for decision making though it involves a change in attitude rather than structures. We can still have parliamentary government but in some ways the more imperfect the electoral system the better. MPs would no longer speak for their constituents, they would speak for themselves and be personally responsible for their actions. They would be appointees whose function would be to find solutions and make decisions that have sufficient consent. They would be advocates for their constituents but not their voice.

<John Talbut (talk)>

"Other comments"

I've temporarily removed this section because I think it goes too far afield. I think we have to explain how our official response is an answer to the questions, not say that they should have asked something else. It's better to be brief and restrained and if we really want to publish a manifesto (and I just might) then provide it somewhere else on Meta and link to it only parenthetically by reference.

I also have a big problem with naming RfC/U, RfA, and ArbCom as examples. Frankly these are some of the most dysfunctional institutions on Wikipedia, and show very clear vulnerabilities to manipulation even by rank amateurs (e.g. a few anti-Wikipedia people blackballing admin candidates at RfA). They are also at odds with the usual Wikipedia processes, for example by discussing editors rather than edits and by using actual votes rather than seeking "consensus". I think that the ordinary model of some editors developing an article, even one of very low quality, is a better precedent than these for Parliament to follow when looking to create a digital town hall.

The text I removed was:

A focus on the people

The questions posed above centre on the work of Parliament and government. It is also possible, however, to focus on the work that could be achieved by the people: on crowdsourced politics.

Different options exist for what could be done with the output of such a process:

- it could inform traditional politics in a similar way to the way in which petition websites and opinion polls do; or
- various levels of integration between crowdsourced and traditional politics could be achieved.

The primary challenge to such an idea is of designing a platform capable of encompassing opinions and democracy. PeopleTree.org is one possible name for a platform that might achieve this. Other platforms or mechanisms, such as wikis, Q&A sites, and internet/social media coupled with search technology, also

have suitable attributes that are useful for inspiration.

Examples of relevant processes within Wikipedia

- Requests for Comment on User Conduct - Abbreviated to RFC/U, it is an informal non-binding process enabling users to discuss problems with specific editors who may have violated Wikipedia policies and guidelines. This allows public scrutiny of an individual's actions, if they have been involved in some dispute and have been unable to resolve it among a small group of editors. A "Request for Comment" is an appeal to the wider Wikipedia community for more input. See the list of all recent RFC/U cases¹⁸.
- Requests of Adminship - Administrators are Wikipedia editors who are given <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:CONSENSUS> are considered to require a high level of trust from the community. Administrators are determined by an election-type process, but instead of simply counting votes, the outcome is determined (like almost everything in Wikipedia) by consensus¹⁹; in practice this means having the support of at least 70-80% of editors who give an opinion (anyone can voice their opinion, and usually about 100 to 150 editors do). The elections occur on a rolling basis, and there is no limit to the number of administrators that are elected. Currently there's about 1,400 administrators on the English Wikipedia (compare that to the 125,000 registered editors who have made at least one change in the last month). The election process publicly scrutinizes individual editors, and discusses all aspects of their actions on Wikipedia. The whole process lasts a week or two (see here for a recent successful nomination²⁰). Once elected, their adminship may still be scrutinized through the RFC/U process above, or less formally through the Administrator review²¹.
- Arbitration committee - This is an elected panel of 10 to 15 (volunteer) editors, elected in an annual anonymous election by registered Wikipedians; they have the authority to impose solutions to serious conduct disputes which the community has been otherwise unable to resolve. They take about 10 to 15 cases per year, and the proceedings of

¹⁸ Originally hyperlink:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_comment/User_conduct/Archive

¹⁹ Originally hyperlink: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:CONSENSUS>

²⁰ Originally hyperlink: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Requests_for_adminship/Deor

²¹ Originally hyperlink: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrator_review

the cases are made public (see en:Wikipedia:Arbitration/Index/Cases/2014²² for the most recently closed cases). They gather evidence from members of the community (example evidence page²³), the committee and members of the community propose and discuss decisions and solutions (example workshop page²⁴), and finally the members of the committee vote on the proposed decisions (example decision page²⁵). All these pages are publicly viewable as they are created (and the page history's are also viewable, of course), so the rationale for the decisions are up for public scrutiny.

- .. other examples.

<Wnt (talk)>

Parliament is an elected body, and we are being asked to give suggestions how to scrutinize it, correct? Therefore it seems relevant to describe how our "elected" bodies are scrutinized, doesn't it? The thing to focus on here is not how these bodies are elected (which is presumably the part you think is dysfunctional), but rather how they are *scrutinized*, which is the question at hand. Maybe you'd like to add in some relevant examples from within Wikipedia, if you don't like the ones above? <Mark M>

Well, my feeling is that simply dumping random comments about how Wikipedia works isn't relevant enough to be included. You would have to say that Wikipedia does some specific thing *and Parliament should too*.

As an aside, I should also rant on (but it's also straying more from the topic): The elections are pretty dysfunctional, but the scrutiny is much worse. ArbCom has pretty much claimed a right to discuss anything in secret (though with some regularity their more salacious e-mails get leaked) and make decisions without explanation or meaningful appeal. RfA elects admins but doesn't monitor or recall them. And RfC/U generally consists of users grinding their axes in preparation for

²² Originally hyperlink: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Index/Cases/2014>

²³ Originally hyperlink:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Austrian_economics/Evidence

²⁴ Originally hyperlink:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Austrian_economics/Workshop

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²⁵ Originally hyperlink:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Arbitration/Requests/Case/Austrian_economics/Proposed_decision

an ArbCom proceeding, to the degree that it has little independent relevance and was being done simply because someone edited a policy saying it was a place to stop before filing the case. Crowdsourcing works, open access works, the old core of the Mediawiki software works, but Wikipedia isn't something to quote as an example for a government. There are a lot of times when there is distinctly Stalinist flavor to Wikipedia; the more that control over the existing trove of documents matters (for example in PR circles) the more that officials purge one another trying to get control. (it is enlightening to look up how many of Wikipedia's top all-time contributors, and also past members of ArbCom, are now indefinitely blocked/banned from contributing) I should emphasize that Wikipedia *is* declining quite steadily and has been since 2007 when the power struggle really took off and many people started to put more emphasis on "ethics" than on allowing people to develop free content. I have been mulling over some ideas of my own to fix this but the bottom line is that crowdsourcing works, but this particular implementation turned out to have an essential instability based on the accumulation of valuable property (web traffic to the preferred version of a page) in the hands of whoever could seize control over it.<Wnt (talk)>

Need to get more people involved

At present, the text here is the work of myself, User:Mark L MacDonald, User:*Anonymous*, User:Greenrd, User:*Anonymous*, User:Anthonyhcole, User:Impsswoon, User:FormerIP, User:AndrewRT, User:Dkcyeo, User:Katie Chan (WMUK), User:EdSaperia, User:Dennymeta, and (presenting the question) User:Stevie Benton (WMUK). While several contributors provided some very good ideas and information, the truth is that we simply did not get the attendance to do good crowdsourcing here. We are very near (if not at) the end of June deadline for the first round of discussion. I can only hope that those leading this process are able to extract enough from the response and the text on this talk page to pose a longer and more engaging list of questions, and that next time they and all of us can do more to get more people to come out to our obscure Wikimedia Meta-Wiki and take part in this.
<Wnt (talk)>

I agree, in many ways this serves to illustrate the point that "digital democracy" is not just about the platform, it's about engaging people in a conversation. I suspect that even the question of "How to scrutinise parliament" is not seen as relevant to most people's lives (even though it is). Secondly, a process like this

requires facilitation and active engagement. Crowd sourcing is still an active activity - not just a matter of "if you build it, they will come". It would have been good if this had been accompanied by some deliberative fora to stimulate input and engagement - as well as capture inputs from offline people and thoughts. There are some much more fundamental issues about the nature of our democracy and how the demos (as in the Greek term, not the think tank!) are actually engaged in our democracy. So what happens now? Is someone going to parse this experiment and then submit something to the enquiry? What if the committee wants oral evidence? Who will speak on our behalf? Ooh, meta...
<User:dkcyeo>

<User:Stevie Benton (WMUK)> left a message at my talk page which provides some insight on this, saying *"We are going to look at encouraging submission to the next theme - representation - and the final theme, when it is announced. Each theme will have a separate submission (to include the talk page) but at the time of the final one we'll be compiling some kind of report as an accompaniment."* He also asked me for suggestions on how to get more people involved ... I'm still waiting for lightning to strike there. The obvious problem is that most people are on Wikipedia and this is on Meta (which is on the face of it where material like this belongs) - though I think the global SUL unification is supposed to go through soon, which would make it possible to guarantee people they can log in. It would be tempting to suggest putting or mirroring the next stage on Wikipedia anyway though, somehow... maybe call it a "special project of the Refdesk" or something. Still mulling.
<Wnt (talk)>

Next steps

Hi everyone, this is Carl. Firstly, thanks so much for participating so far. This process has already provoked great interest, including from Parliament and the Commission itself.

As Stevie has mentioned, we're now getting ready to submit what has been produced as an interim submission to Parliament - that'll happen over the next week or so. We're also now planning to open up the experiment, as Stevie says, to the theme of representation.

Before we do that, I wanted to collect thoughts on how we do it. I'm struck by the comment above: "Secondly, a process like this requires facilitation and active engagement. Crowd sourcing is still an active activity - not just a matter of "if you build it, they will come". It would have been good if this had been accompanied by some deliberative fora to stimulate input and engagement - as well as capture

inputs from offline people and thoughts."

I completely agree. So what deliberative fora? How? Is there a better way we can structure and outline how and where people contribute? This is of course an evolving process; so much in the way Wikipedia has, I'm interested in how we can develop the policies and procedures to make the process of submitting evidence in this way as effective as possible. But this is your process, not ours; so we won't apply any top-down structuring or organising that hasn't been suggested by the process itself.

Also: on the question of getting more people involved - we're doing our best to promote this experiment as best we can. But I'd encourage everyone here who wants to, to be ambassadors of this process too. Blog on it, write about it - link to it wherever you want to - even on Wikipedia itself if that's appropriate. Momentum will build if this happens.

Thanks again everyone. This is an important experiment and already the results - thanks to you all - are promising.

The statement above was the first edit by <Carl Miller (Demos)>. I don't think he's learned to end posts with "~~~~" so that they include his signature yet, but we'll welcome him aboard anyway. B)

First, the bad news: though it is satisfying to see that this experiment has provoked widespread interest, this interest has the potential to break down the process itself. As I'm in the process of commenting²⁶ currently, a wiki can develop a "resource curse"²⁷ as people fight for control over it as a valuable asset. The moment you harness any pure thing to a practical end, it begins to lose its purity.

The most fundamental way to oppose this is by developing a sense of rights for the participants in the process. Whenever governments have allowed people the right to choose their faith, the wars over what faith the government commands come to an end. When scientific advisory committees protect the right of whistleblowers to speak out against political pressures, the advice they give is less prone to corruption. In a wiki, a right we need to preserve is one of "inclusionism", i.e. we should w:WP:PRESERVE²⁸ the content of what people write.

²⁶ Originally hyperlink: <https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Usenetpedia>

²⁷ Originally hyperlink: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/resource_curse

²⁸ Originally hyperlink: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:PRESERVE>

Now in this first iteration of the process my implementation of that principle was not very good - judging it to be irrelevant, I took that whole section about Wikipedia governance above out of the response and put it here in the talk page (but at least I didn't just delete it). In this case I knew that you would see it here, and when you choose to write your own commentary you may reference it or not, but if we are to expand this operation to more elaborate discussions we will need better methods.

Fortunately, Wikipedia is built largely for this purpose. We should try to divide the questions up into more effective subheadings than we did this time. Beyond that, we don't have to stick to just one article and talk page. We can put each question on its own subpage (something like Connecting knowledge to power: the future of digital democracy in the UK/How can technology help Parliament and other agencies to scrutinise the work of government?²⁹, only one would hope a bit shorter) then put the name of the subpage in curly brackets to `w:WP:transclude`³⁰ the content into the parent page. We'd only do that for very independent issues though; the better technique is `w:WP:summary style`³¹ where subjects are broken up into subtopics and the subtopics are each summarized at the main page. Done well, this allows editors to branch out and explore the obscure details of obscure details in relative peace, and yet by reference they are accessible even from the highest level document. Of course, there's a limit to how well that works when you're producing a document to distribute rather than a wiki, but some of the choices for that final document are not really the wiki participant's responsibility.

We need to get more people involved, especially those who are neutral and knowledgeable. Editing this, my feeling is to some extent that I am trespassing in someone's field of science and I don't even know whose. My comments above on designing better forums above seem like they should be the central question that some university department writes philosophy about, and I sure wish we had some of them on hand.

An easy way to draw in more people is simply to ask more questions. Besides potentially broadening the overall focus, consider if there are specific factual

²⁹ Originally hyperlink:

https://meta.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=Connecting_knowledge_to_power:_the_future_of_digital_democracy_in_the_UK/How_can_technology_help_Parliament_and_other_agencies_to_scrutinise_the_work_of_government%3F&action=edit&redlink=1

³⁰ Originally hyperlink: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:transclude>

³¹ Originally hyperlink: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WP:summary_style

questions we should work on to hone our response. For example, to list all the ways the UK government makes information about its legislative process available. Some of these things might be natural candidates to send out to the w:Wikipedia:Reference desk/Humanities³²; others might even be suitable to begin new Wikipedia articles about to cover. Something like w>List of publications by Parliament (UK)³³ (which doesn't exist; I'm sure you can think of a better title for it that better includes all relevant material). If by coming up with questions you're coming up with articles, you'll be left with the enduring benefit that the information is actually available to any Wikipedia reader. <Wnt>

³² Originally hyperlink: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Reference_desk/Humanities

³³ Originally hyperlink: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_publications_by_Parliament_\(UK\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_publications_by_Parliament_(UK))