Open Up!

Plain language summary

What's in the report?

Introduction

Open Up! is about using digital technology to bridge the gap between the public and Parliament.

Every five years, we vote for someone to be our MP.
Our MP represents us in Parliament.
Parliament talks and makes laws about things that affect our lives.

In the past, it was hard for us to get information about Parliament for ourselves.
The internet and social media have made it much easier to get information about things that affect our lives.

You might think that having more information means that more people get in touch with their MP. But most of us do not. There is a big gap between us and our MPs and Parliament. Many of us have little to do with politics. Some of us want to get involved, but don't know how. Many of us don't even vote.
The Speaker of the House of Commons wants this to change.

The Speaker set up a Commission to look at how Parliament could do things better using the internet, technology and social media more.

The Commission has been working for a year.

The Commission has written a report called 'Open Up!' The report tells you:

- what the Commission found out
- what the Commission thinks needs to change

The report has

- 34 recommendations
- five key targets

What you are reading now is not the full report.

You are reading a plain language summary.

Words with special meanings

Parliament means the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

House of Commons means all the MPs who are elected.

Government means the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministers. The Prime Minister is the leader of the winning party (or the bigger party in a coalition). The Prime Minister chooses MPs to be Ministers.

The Speaker is elected by the MPs. The Speaker's job is to make sure the House of Commons can get on with its work. The Speaker is the person who says 'Order! Order!' At the moment, the Speaker is John Bercow.

Select Committees are small committees of MPs or members of the House of Lords. They look at the work that the Government is doing.

Hansard is the written report of what MPs have said in Parliament.

The five key targets

The report has five targets for Parliament. Each target has specific recommendations.

1. By 2020, the House of Commons should make sure that everyone can understand what it does.

The House of Commons needs a new communication strategy.

The strategy will:

- make more people aware of what Parliament does and what MPs do

- get more members of the public involved in what Parliament does

It can be hard to understand what the House of Commons and MPs say and do. Here are some things the House of Commons should do to make it easier:

- use words that most people understand

- write 'jargon busters' to explain the special words used by the House of Commons

- use easier language and layouts for online information and printed information

- make information easier for disabled people and deaf people to use, for example by using more British Sign Language translations and subtitles for videos

The House of Commons should try out ways to write, talk and vote using plain English.

The Commission suggests making Parliament's website easier to use.

This includes:

- using more pictures
- quick and easy ways to get the most important information

The Commission suggests that Parliament's website needs some new tools:

- a better search engine
- an easy way to sign up for updates on anything that interests you

The House of Commons should put more real-time information on the internet.

This includes:

- information about who is speaking in debates
- live social media coverage

The Commission suggests that people should be allowed to take phones and tablets into the House of Commons Chamber and Westminster Hall during debates.

The House of Commons should sign up to these rules for giving information to the public:

- be open

- share information with the public

- make it easy for any member of the public to get and understand information about Parliament

- use the internet and social media, as well as radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and encouraging people to come to the House of Commons

The Commission would like the government to look at this report, and think about ways that schools could use digital technology to help pupils learn more about politics.

2. By 2020, the House of Commons should be fully interactive and digital.

The House of Commons should try out new ways for members of the public to:

- put forward questions for ministers

- have their say about laws that are being made

Select Committees should

- use social media and the internet to tell more people about what they are doing
- try out ways of using digital technology to get people involved in their work

Not everyone can use the internet. Parliament should build links with local community organisations so that these organisations can help people to use the internet.

The House of Commons should work with national and local organisations to:

- try out new online activities
- find ways to work with groups of people who do not vote or have their say (for example, 18-25 year olds who are not at university, people with learning difficulties, homeless people, people living in areas where very few people vote)

The House of Commons should do more work to make sure young people get involved.

This might include:

- encouraging young people to use e-petitions

- debates involving young people and MPs about things that interest young people

Parliament's buildings need to be fit for the future.

Parliament will have a new digital service. This service should find ways to help MPs and members of the public communicate better. The service needs to talk with MPs and members of the public about good ways to do this.

Others have done work on cyber-bullying and online security.
The Commission suggests that:
- each party should have a plan to support a General Election candidate who is being cyber-bullied
- the House of Commons should plan to support an MP who is being cyber-bullied
- this should happen at the same time as checking online security

At the moment, MPs vote by being counted by a person with a register when they walk through the 'yes' or 'no' door.

In future, MPs' votes should be counted using their smart ID card as they walk through the 'yes' or 'no' door. Parliament should work with the Government and others to:

- make it easier to work online to create new laws
- make it easier for anyone to find out about new bills and changes to bills

The House of Commons should look at which services can be done better by doing them online first.

By the end of 2015, Parliament should have a plan for how to be digital and interactive by 2020. The plan must include how the head of the digital service will get the right staff to do this.

3. **After the General Election, the House of Commons should set up a new way for members of the public to have their say during House of Commons debates.**

Members of the public want a say in House of Commons debates. The Commission thinks this is a good idea.

It suggests trying out a public online forum during debates in Westminster Hall. If this works, then the public online forum could be used for debates in the Chamber as well.

The public online forum could be called 'Cyber Chamber' or 'Open House'.

4. In the 2020 General Election, all voters should be able to vote online.

The Commission wants more to be done to teach people about voting. This includes looking at teaching school pupils about voting.

The Commission wants political organisations and charities to think about how to give the public good information about candidates and policies to help them decide who to vote for. This includes things like online quizzes that show people which party's views are closest to their own.

The Commission thinks more people need to know about the Electoral Commission and its website. The Electoral Commission website has a lot of information for anyone who wants to vote or get involved in politics.

The Commission suggests that the Electoral Commission should find a way for all the election results to be sent electronically to a 'results bank'.

A House of Commons Committee suggested that the Government and Electoral Commission should make sure voters get more and better information. The Digital Democracy Commission agrees with this.

5. **Parliament publishes and broadcasts a lot of information about its work.**
    By 2016, all this information should be freely available online.

Any public information should be online. The public should be able to download it and re-use it.

By the end of 2015, Hansard and the register of MPs' interests should be available as open data. 'Open data' means anyone can use the information or republish it.

Erskine May is a guide to how things are done in Parliament. The Commission suggest that people should be able to see the next edition online for free.

By the end of 2015, anyone should be able to download media coverage of parliamentary debates and committees.

You can contact the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy by email digitaldemocracy@parliament.uk

This plain language summary was written Barod Community Interest Company www.barod.org