

In the service of democracy

Your Response



HM Government



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Introduction

1. As well as setting out the principles that will underpin further policy development and proposing what could be done to make e-democracy a reality, *In the service of democracy* set out both the reasons for holding a consultation on e-democracy and what the Government hoped to achieve.
2. The consultation was launched on 16 July 2002 with a ministerial press conference. It attracted wide coverage including a specific BBC online discussion.
3. The Government stated that it was seeking views on all aspects of the paper's content, but particularly on the consultation issues that were raised throughout the paper. By consulting in this way the Government aimed to:
 - provide opportunities for everyone with an interest to express their views, so as to enable and inform the further development of the policy; and
 - seek as broad a consensus as possible on the policy in its final form.
4. In particular the Government stated that it was keen to hear the views of:
 - the general public;
 - civil society;
 - the UK Parliament;
 - the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Greater London Assembly, and their associated administrations;
 - political parties;
 - local government;
 - central government.
5. The consultation ran for 15 weeks to 31 October 2002.
6. This report does not attempt to provide a detailed analysis of the responses received but rather seeks to determine whether the Government has achieved what it set out to do at the beginning of the consultation. It also provides some limited early views on the themes that are emerging from the responses, although it should be borne in mind that these may change with more detailed analysis.

Part 1 – Technical Analysis

The Consultation Approach

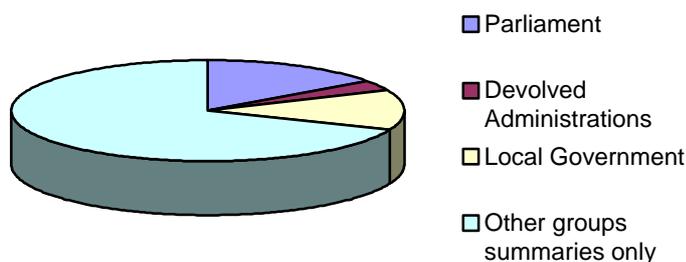
1. The consultation on e-democracy was designed to stimulate replies from a broad cross-section of the population. To ensure that as many of the target groups as possible were included, a multi-channel approach to the consultation was adopted. The channels used comprised:
 - A detailed consultation paper setting out the issues plus an associated summary paper;
 - A specially commissioned e-democracy website, including an online questionnaire;
 - A specific study on inclusion issues;
 - Workshops and meetings with important stakeholders;
 - An online discussion forum on ukonline.gov.uk moderated by the Hansard Society;
 - A supplementary consultation on e-voting security issues.

The Written Consultation

2. The consultation paper was available both on and offline. Printed copies of the paper were sent to all MPs and members of the House of Lords, government ministers, ministers and members of the devolved administrations, stakeholders in local government, civil society organisations, media, industry and academics. Approximately 6,500 copies of the main consultation paper were sent out.
3. The consultation paper was available, in full or in summary, for anyone to read at www.edemocracy.gov.uk. Copies of the consultation paper could be downloaded in English and Welsh. A summary document was also available in English, Welsh and six other languages.
4. Over 6,000 copies of the summary leaflet were sent to specific groups who work closely with the public; for example, disability organisations, Citizens Advice Bureaux, homeless groups, pensioners organisations, youth groups and student unions. Summaries in other languages were issued to groups representing the interests of people from ethnic minorities.

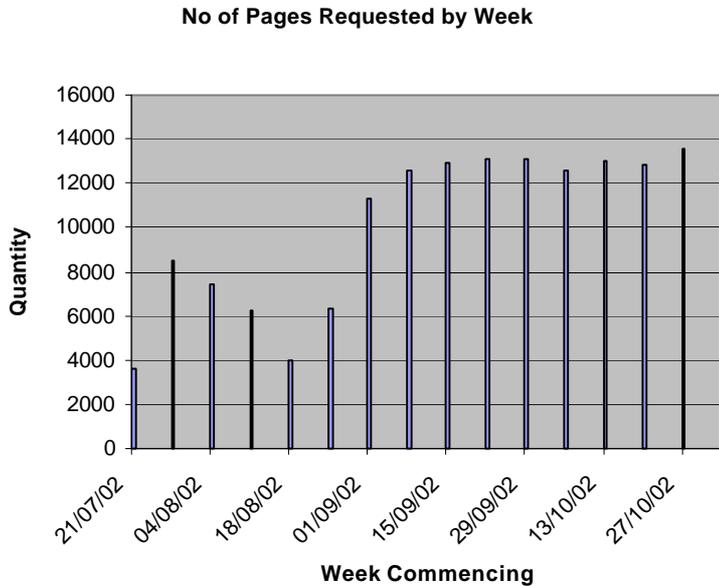
5. 1,200 summary leaflets were sent to Senior Librarians nation-wide, asking them to consider displaying the summary in libraries. Many librarians requested additional copies and as a result a further 1,500 summary leaflets were issued.
6. Throughout the consultation period, members of the public and representatives of local groups telephoned or e-mailed the e-democracy team to request additional copies of the consultation paper or summary leaflets; more than 600 additional copies were requested.

Distribution of consultation documents



The e-Democracy Website

7. On the specially commissioned e-democracy website at www.edemocracy.gov.uk, people could read or download the consultation paper and find out more about e-democracy from an online library.
8. The e-democracy website has delivered over 160,000 pages of information since the consultation was launched - an average of 1,500 pages per day. Requests for pages reached a steady rate during September, and have remained at around 12,000 pages per week with no sign of interest waning.



9. A total of 40,500 copies of the e-democracy consultation paper, background and summary documents were downloaded from the website. 22,000 copies of the main paper, *In the service of democracy* were downloaded. Around 200 of each of the non-English language summary documents were downloaded.
10. There was substantial international activity on the website. People in Canada and Australia were particularly active users of the site.

Online Questionnaire

11. An online questionnaire was available on the e-democracy website. This asked 60 questions that were drawn from the issues raised in the consultation paper. 169 questionnaires were completed. In general, this was the channel through which individual members of the public chose to respond.

Inclusion research

12. Running in tandem with the public consultation, the Office of the e-Envoy commissioned Creative Research to look into specific issues of how e-democracy could help certain groups of people who may currently be excluded from the democratic processes. The research also looked at people who may feel that a shift to more use of technology may lead them to be excluded in the future. A summary of the initial findings is attached at Annex B.

Workshops and Meetings

13. Members of the Office of the e-Envoy e-democracy team held a programme of meetings and workshops with over 200 representatives from groups and organisations. Much of the output from these meetings and workshops will be fed into the analysis of the e-democracy consultation.

14. These groups and organisations included:

- Local Government Association
- Improvement and Development Agency
- The Electoral Commission
- Association of North East Councils
- East Midlands Regional Government Association
- Greater London Assembly & London Connects
- Surrey Local Government Association
- Southwest Communities Strategy Network
- National Forum for Internet Democracy
- Voting Network
- BBC
- Hansard Society
- University of St Andrews
- MPs
- Parliamentary Officials

Online Discussion Forum on ukonline.gov.uk

15. For the duration of the consultation, ukonline.gov.uk hosted an online discussion forum on the subject of e-democracy focussed particularly on the issues raised in the consultation paper. The discussion forum was “pre-moderated” (i.e. contributions were vetted before being published) by the Hansard Society. Approximately 350 contributions were published in over 50 separate discussion “threads”.

Subsidiary Consultation on e-Voting Security

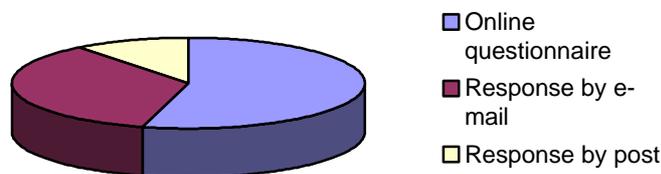
16. Security is a key issue for e-voting, and one on which the consultation invited responses. The Government is already committed to using local government elections in 2003 - 2005 as the platform for e-voting pilots. We needed, by November 2002, to have developed and formalised security requirements for e-voting, as part of the project to launch the 2003 round of pilots.

17. We therefore commissioned a report about e-voting security from the Communications-Electronics Security Group (CESG), a branch of GCHQ, and published it early in August. It was presented both as part of the e-democracy consultation and also as an opportunity for key suppliers to influence security requirements at draft stage. Eight suppliers formally responded by the end of August and a number of contributions from academics and others were received by the end of October. As a result, some requirements were modified. In particular, a requirement to support “publicly verifiable code” was introduced, to strengthen the auditability of electoral systems.
18. The security requirements have been developed and adopted for all future electoral pilot schemes. In 2003 providers must conform to them, or be actively moving toward them. Their viability will be explored in practice during these pilots and improvements made, if necessary, in subsequent years. As the security requirements develop it will become mandatory for all suppliers to conform to or exceed them.

How Written Responses Were Received

19. Respondents wishing to submit a written response to the consultation paper (rather than, say, joining the discussion forum) could do so in a number of ways: by completing the online questionnaire or by sending in a response by e-mail or by post.
20. Individual members of the public originated most of the responses submitted via the online questionnaire. In general, civil society organisations and businesses sent in written responses by e-mail to the specific e-mail box set up for the consultation. Interestingly, a number of respondents felt it necessary to send in a hardcopy of their e-mail response by post, or to request specific acknowledgement that the email had been received. This may, in part, be due to the email address being edemocracy@e-envoy.gov.uk rather than a named individual.

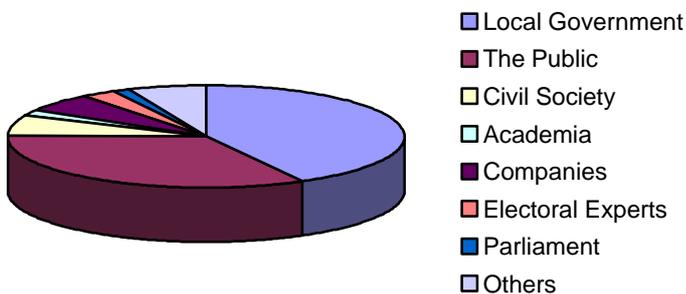
Responses received by channel



21. Over 140 written contributions were received – some of these were heavyweight and extremely detailed. The majority of these responses were from local government and businesses. In particular responses were received from:

- The Electoral Commission
- ePolitix
- A joint reply from the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Clerk of the House of Commons and Parliament
- Women Connect
- RNIB
- The Liberal Democrats
- The TUC
- BT
- Electoral Reform Society
- University of St Andrews
- The Basic Skills Agency

Responses received by sector



The Internet Effect

22. In the consultation paper and in the Government's thinking there was a general view that the Internet would bring its own particular benefits to the consultation. The assumption was that, through other websites linking to the e-democracy website and through webrings and other technical means, the e-democracy debate would spread out across the Internet and generate spin-off discussion groups and interest on other websites.

23. The e-democracy team in OeE investigated this particular aspect. On the basis of the evidence, it is not possible to conclude that the provision of the consultation on the Internet significantly increased the number of people included or the spread of the e-democracy debate.

- The e-democracy website was not highly visible on the web when searched for through commonly used "search-engines". Some e-democracy websites are highly visible, for example, Steven Clift's *Democracies On-line*¹, being consistently found by search engines - possibly at the expense of www.edemocracy.gov.uk.

¹ Launched in January 1998, Democracies On-line connects experts, practitioners, journalists, and citizens with an interest in democracy online issues.

- The e-democracy website was not heavily linked to by other sites. Some important stakeholders chose not to link their website to the e-democracy site. Government could do more to encourage other organisations to link to consultation sites or to host specialist discussion forums on discrete topics that then feed in results to the main discussion forum.
- There was little evidence to suggest that people who would not normally have participated in the consultation process did so via the discussion forum. The level of visibility of the website may have been a contributory factor.

24. A full report on the “Internet effect” is included at Annex C.

Part 2 - Emerging Themes

Written Responses

1. *In the service of democracy* was generally well received with many respondents welcoming the fact that the debate is taking place. It is apparent from the responses that considerable experience and knowledge already exists, as well as a desire from many different groups to investigate the issue further and to take it forward.
2. Although the consultation document was primarily concerned with e-democracy, comments were received on a wide range of issues, both on aspects of e-voting and e-participation and issues relating to the broader environment of democracy and representation. A number of the comments related to issues that fall outside the scope of a policy focussed on e-democracy, for example proportional representation, compulsory voting and non e-voting methods such as postal voting. These comments will not be lost but fed into any wider debate on the voting practices and processes in the UK.
3. At this stage, a few main themes have emerged, outlined below. A number of significant quotes are included at Annex A.

The Bigger Picture

4. The issue of falling participation, and the reasons for it, were discussed by a number of respondents. Many argued that the use of ICT alone cannot address the root causes of disengagement (Stephen Coleman, Interact) but that it could provide a greater range of channels for people to express their views, both at and between elections (VoteHere).

A Two Track Policy

5. Most respondents agreed with the separation of the two strands of e-voting and e-participation, acknowledging that there are different issues to be addressed. However, many of them also noted the interdependence between the two strands and argued that there should be some interplay between the two aspects in policy formulation (Oracle).

The Local Aspect

6. It was argued that people were more likely to participate in the democratic process when issues had a direct importance to them. This led a number of respondents, particularly local authorities and others in the local government arena, to emphasise the importance of this tier of government, given its proximity to, and relationship with, the general public (Oxon CC). Others also emphasised the need for central government to work in

partnership with local interest groups to reconnect with local people (South Lakeland District Council).

Funding

7. The issue of how any future policy would actually be delivered was raised by a number of respondents, particularly local authorities. Many expressed the view that the policy would need to be rolled out locally and that this would require funding.
8. A number of other respondents also highlighted the issue of how hardware, software and supporting functions (such as training) would be funded.

E-voting

9. The majority of responses from individuals and a number of private sector companies focussed on the issue of e-voting. The response was mixed. Some stated a clear opposition to the concept of e-voting, others, while supporting the work currently being undertaken in e-voting, expressed concern that the current levels of security and transparency were not adequate, others simply expressed support for the concept of e-voting.
10. The majority of respondents who commented on e-voting raised the issues of security and trust.
11. The responses covered a range of views, some advocating a paper audit trail for electronic voting (Liberal Democrats) others expressing concern that proof of how an individual voted could encourage intimidation or reprisal (CMG). Others expressed concern that on-line voting at home could also encourage coercion (University of Essex). The consultation document acknowledges these issues and states that "Before an electronic voting system can be established, it will be vital to ensure that the system is at least as secure as existing methods and that people trust the system."
12. A number of respondents, particularly IT companies, suggested how some of these issues might be overcome, for example, use of supervised remote online voting.

Increasing channels - traditional methods retained

13. Two issues arose during the consultation, firstly many respondents, while supporting the development of electronic methods of participation and voting argued that this should supplement and enhance the current voting methods rather than replace them (Three Rivers District Council).
14. Secondly, a number of those who opposed the use of electronic methods, particularly for voting, stated that some members of the public either

through choice or lack of knowledge would always prefer to use the traditional methods.

15. The consultation paper advocated increasing the different channels by which government and the public can interact and states “e-Democracy offers new ways of participating and seeks to complement rather than replace existing structures”.

Exclusion and Inclusion

16. The traditional methods of participation were seen by many respondents as exclusive (Basic Skills Agency). However, other respondents argued that moving to an electronic, ICT based democracy, while possibly encouraging some sections of society to participate, would exclude others, eg. older people (members of the public).
17. Many of the comments were, however, predicated on the move away from traditional methods and to exclusively electronic means. This issue is discussed briefly above.

Responsiveness

18. The issue of responsiveness is one of the underpinning principles outlined in the consultation document. A significant number of respondents expressed the view that the public will only participate in the democratic process if they can see that the views they have expressed have been listened to and have had an impact on the decision making process. Others stated that success would be dependent on responsiveness (International Teledemocracy Centre), and that trust between citizens and government would be lost if citizens thought their views had not been taken into consideration (Glasgow City Council).

Publicity

19. A common held view among respondents was that, while the government and others could create well thought-out, flexible on-line consultation exercises, this would be worthless if people were not aware that they existed (Cumbria County Council).

Specialisation, personalisation and targeting

20. As stated earlier, many respondents considered that people would be most engaged and interested in local issues which had a direct relevance for them. Many suggested a method whereby citizens could register an interest in a number of topics, and could then be notified when consultation was being undertaken on these topics.
21. There was a concern about information overload and consultation fatigue, and that if information could be tailored to the requests of individuals this would assist in more informed and effective consultation.

Online Questionnaire

22. Emerging data from the questionnaire indicates:

- When asked should the Government explore ways to strengthen democracy by encouraging participation via the Internet and other communication technologies, 95% answered yes.
- Libraries, Supermarkets and Community Centres were seen as helpful locations for e-democracy services.
- There were overwhelming expectations to see Government (ministers and officials) (88%) and elected representatives (90%) participating during online discussions.
- An e-democracy charter was considered to be helpful in establishing trust in both e-participation (70%) and e-voting (65%).
- Although 25% of the people completing the questionnaire had used CitizenSpace on ukonline, many were not aware of its existence.
- When asked what should be the priority of the new e-voting pilots schemes, 80% of respondents cited online voting.
- When asked if e-voting was available which method might you use, online voting was named by 85% of respondents. Electronic voting machines and touch telephones were a close second and third.

Inclusion research

23. It should be noted that, at the time of writing, the report is still to be finalised and that the final conclusions may differ from these early themes. A full report on the inclusion research will be available on the edemocracy website in due course. However, issues emerging from the research include:

- Inclusiveness/ equality of access; particularly that current methods will still be available and that new methods will include more familiar technology such as touch tone phones. Consideration could perhaps be given to offering lo-tech methods of participation such as voicemail.
- Communication of results; ensuring that opinions expressed via all channels (not just via the Internet) are taken into account.
- Greater transparency about how the opinions expressed feed into the decision-making process; ideally, how (at least sometimes) they do make a difference.

- Reassurance about security and confidentiality (difficult, as concerns are largely based on 'fear of the unknown' rather than concrete knowledge of specific issues).
- Role of trusted intermediaries in day centres, hostels, residential homes, cultural centres and the like, to help those who wish to use the new technology.
- Provision of the new methods in appropriate languages/formats.
- Promotion of the new channels and methods via appropriate channels and in relevant formats/languages.

24. A draft summary of key findings is attached at Annex B to this report.

Part 3 – Conclusions

1. The e-democracy message was broadcast widely. The specially commissioned website was particularly successful in distributing the consultation document.
2. A substantial number of high quality responses were received from a broad cross section of the population. Responses were received from the general public, businesses, local authorities and devolved government, elected representatives and government departments. In broad terms, responses were received from all of the groups that the Government targeted.
3. Some techniques were clearly more successful at generating useful data than others. This will require careful analysis during consideration of implementation issues. In particular, many of the most considered and thoughtful responses were received through traditional channels.
4. The majority of the replies are supportive of the Government's efforts to develop an e-democracy policy although many important and serious issues were raised that will require detailed analysis and consideration.
5. Due to the wide variety of methods through which people could respond, it is neither meaningful, nor indeed possible, to arrive at a single figure for the overall number of responses. However, it is clear that a significant number of high quality responses have been received from a broad cross section of the population. Through the inclusion survey, this includes those who would not, in the normal course of events, engage in a government consultation. The data that has been generated through the consultation is clearly of sufficient quantity and quality to provide a meaningful input to the next stages of policy development.

The Government is very grateful to everyone who has taken time to consider the issues raised by *In the service of democracy*. It is particularly grateful to those organisations and individuals that have responded, whether through the discussion group, the online questionnaire, written submission or by attending a workshop or taking part in a survey.

Annex A

Significant Quotations

- E-democracy is not a panacea for democratic disengagement and should not be regarded as a quick-fix for falling participation in traditional politics. (Stephen Coleman)
- There is a need to address democratic processes as a whole, not just e-democracy, and to recognise that ICT will not cure problems of citizen involvement or low voting turnouts, though it could be a tool to help resolve these problems. (Interact)
- Convenient voting alone will not bring in the cynical or apathetic non-voting citizen. Likewise, e-participation alone will frustrate new voting citizens who want to participate but find the act of voting cumbersome. (VoteHere)
- The danger in separating the two strands is that the broader e-participation issues could be sidelined and the read-across between the two largely ignored. (Oracle)
- Local government and the important role it plays should be seen as the corner stone for e-democracy and participation issues and not as an “add-on”. (Oxfordshire County Council)
- The government must engage local councils, community groups to develop e-democracy, engaging specific groups in discussion and demonstrating how this channel can enhance the actions of the community. (South Lakeland District Council)
- I distrust electronic voting because it lacks transparency - there is no ballot box and the votes can easily be "lost". (Member of Public)

- We believe that only a paper-based audit trail has the demonstrable robustness to win public trust and to maintain that trust beyond any initial technical gremlins. (Liberal Democrats)
- How can anonymity be guaranteed to voters using traceable technology to vote? (CMG)

- One simple and compelling argument against e-voting, and that is that it re-introduces the possibility of coercion. (Member of Public)
- We would like to stress our support for the view that e-democracy should enhance and not replace current methods of trying to engage citizens in the democratic process. (Three Rivers District Council)
- Research we've commissioned has suggested that adults with poor basic skills are least likely to vote or take part in the democratic process. (Basic Skills Agency)
- Has it occurred to any member of the Government that OAPs in particular cannot afford the fees an ISP charges plus BT's phone costs? (Member of Public)
- There are elderly and uneducated people who either cannot use the net, or cannot easily acquire access to a computer. The result of evoting - even as an option only, would be to disenfranchise some portion of the

electorate and leave the business in the hands of the computer competent.
(Member of Public)

- People will NOT participate unless they have good reason to believe that in doing so they might affect the outcome. The author of the paper has understood this, but will the powers that be actually follow through?
(Member of Public)
- The resource implications may well be less significant than the consequences of inaction, since the evidence is clear that responsiveness is a pre-requisite for success. (International Teledemocracy Centre)
- If citizens perceive, rightly or wrongly, that the contributions are not being taken into consideration then they will quickly lose trust in the process.
(Glasgow City Council)
- To ensure that e-democracy engages people and is a success, people need to take part and this can only be done if people are aware of the opportunity to participate. E-democracy must be publicised in an effective and targeted manner selling the benefits strongly. People need to know that their voice will be heard and will make a difference. (Cumbria County Council)

Annex B

Inclusion Study

Summary of Key Findings

Introduction

1. This project was conducted by Creative Research for COI Communications on behalf of its client, the Office of the e-Envoy. It aimed to explore attitudes towards e-democracy proposals amongst groups that currently feel reluctant to participate in the political system or face barriers to doing so, and amongst those who are not comfortable with computers and other new technologies. For the purposes of this research, those who do not currently participate in the political system are referred to as 'unengaged'. They were made up of a mix of those who used new technology such as the Internet and those who did not. 'Engaged' refers to those people who vote at least some of the time but do not use the Internet.
2. This qualitative project involved a total of nineteen focus groups (5 'unengaged' General Public; 4 'engaged' General Public; 1 each for Black Caribbean, Black African, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Homeless People, Visually Impaired, people with Physical Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Mental Health Issues), and two paired depth interviews (Hearing Impaired). Each focus group contained between six and nine respondents, with General Public groups held in North Wales, South Wales, Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Southampton and Gloucester. All the Ethnic Minority groups were conducted in London and targeted 'unengaged' people, while the Disabled/ Disadvantaged groups contained a mix of 'unengaged' and 'engaged' respondents.
3. It should be noted that, at the time of writing, the report is still to be finalised and that the final conclusions may differ from these early themes.

Participation

4. It is important to note that the research targeted people that logically would be the hardest for E-Democracy initiatives to attract: those who felt disenfranchised; and those who disliked using computers and the Internet.
5. By and large, 'engaged' people were more likely to participate than their 'unengaged' counterparts. This difference was by no means clear-cut, however, with some 'engaged' people voting but having little interest in politics, and a number of 'unengaged' respondents having participated in other ways (e.g. going on marches or signing petitions).
6. There seemed to be two quite different types of 'unengaged' respondents. Some were **disinterested**, regarding events at Westminster or their Local Council as being of little consequence to their everyday lives. Others were instead **disaffected**, and often reported that they had attempted to participate in the past but found doing so made little difference.

7. The areas that respondents were concerned about tended to be either narrow issues that impacted directly on them (e.g. drug dealing on their estate, access to housing, the state of local transport), or broad, vaguely defined, national issues (e.g. 'crime', 'health care'). Where respondents had been motivated to actually put their views across (e.g. by writing to an MP), this tended to be an issue that had a significant direct impact on them (e.g. assisting an immigration application by a relative).
8. Underlying all the groups was a feeling of disillusionment with the current state of the democratic system. This was muted in some groups but pronounced in others. The main reasons given for this were a feeling that politicians made up their minds on issues without taking note of the views of 'people like us' even when large numbers made their views known, and that their one voice was unlikely to make any difference.
9. The key form of participation for most people was voting and many defended the importance of voting, at least in principle. Most believed that it was desirable for as many people as possible to participate in important decisions, although this is often 'taken as a given' rather than passionately argued.
10. The general consensus was that people were becoming less inclined to participate and vote, and that this was something that needed to be addressed.

Voting

11. Respondents were often more likely to vote at general elections than local elections, saying that these were more important (in that they were perceived to have more influence on the ways 'things' are run).
12. The key arguments in favour of voting were that it is the citizens' duty, and, in the words used in many of the groups, "*If you don't vote, you can't complain.*" A number also argued that there was always the chance that their one vote could be the one that decided the result.
13. Arguments against voting centred on the belief that it made no difference. This was variously because the person elected might not listen to their views or break promises they had made, because their one vote was highly unlikely to influence the result, because the result was often obvious in advance, or because they saw little difference between the political parties or no-one electable that was advocating the policies that they supported.

New Technology

14. Participants' attitudes to new technologies such as the Internet broadly fell into four groups. *Technophiles* liked the technology and used it on a regular basis, even though most of those we came across only used computers at a very basic level. *Hesitant Users* were people who conceded that the technology was important but were not yet comfortable with using it (often relying on others to show them how). *Rejectors*

consisted of those who disliked the technology (often because they saw it as impersonal) and/ or had no intention of using it even though they might be able to. *Access Denied* referred to those who were not especially negative about the technology, but believed that they were never likely to be able to use it much themselves (often citing financial constraints or a lack of knowledge).

15. Mobile phones (but not text messaging) have clearly moved into the mainstream, and are not seen as intimidating and 'unknown' in the way that other new technologies are.
16. An important factor discouraging people from using new technologies more was a fear of making mistakes. Respondents were also very concerned about Internet security (often confidentiality), with this being based largely on fear of the unknown and news stories rather than concrete knowledge or direct experience of the Internet's flaws.

e-Democracy

17. The preliminary reception for the e-democracy concept based on a general description was lukewarm at best among the General Public and Ethnic Minorities. Respondents generally felt that while it would be good to have services like these available in case they wanted to use them, they themselves would be unlikely to do so unless something came up that they were very interested in. The proposals were largely seen as something that would appeal to people who were both very interested in politics and comfortable with using the Internet. A few respondents described it as a waste of time and money because (they believed) no-one would use it.
18. Many believed that introduction of the new methods was inevitable based on the availability of the technology and some (but minimal) awareness that new methods had been tried out at the last election.
19. After discussing the concept and the specific technologies that might be used for e-participation and e-voting, a number of respondents expressed some interest in 'having a look'. Participants generally felt that the proposals would not make a great deal of difference, as they addressed the widespread feeling of disillusionment and detachment in only a very minor way. However, as described below, when faced with the options for new ways of voting, the appeal of e-voting increased for some.

e-Participation

20. Although there was some muted interest in the idea of an *Online Government Forum*, *Citizen-led Discussion Groups*, *Bulletin Boards* and *E-mail or Text Messaging* for expressing one's views on an issue, the general consensus was that they were not aimed at 'people like me'. Respondents felt that the main users would be people who were both seriously interested in politics and very comfortable with using computers, as well as people with vested interests and 'fanatics'.
21. The most popular of the four options tested was the *Online Government Forum*, largely because users would be able to address their issues

directly to someone who could make a difference. Many also reacted positively to the idea of being able to send a message to an MP/ councillor using *E-mail* or *Text Messaging*, seeing this as essentially a faster version of existing methods.

22. Chatrooms were, for many, strongly associated with misuse of the Internet (e.g. users impersonating others, inappropriate discussions). Since it was a form of chatroom, and because they felt that there was no guarantee that anyone influential would be monitoring the results, respondents were not particularly positive about *Citizen-led Discussion Groups*. *Bulletin Boards* were not a popular choice for similar reasons.

e-Voting

23. Despite some initial resistance (mainly relating to security and confidentiality), there was reasonable support for e-voting, particularly where the techniques were simple and made voting more convenient. As with participation, respondents wanted to be assured that existing voting methods would still be available, and also that there would be no charge for voting. Whilst the largest single group said that they would stay with pen and paper, at least half the respondents (including some who had never voted before) stated that they would vote using one of the five methods tested.
24. For most, the term 'e-voting' was instinctively linked with computers and the Internet. As a result, participants were surprised and quite pleased to see voting by *Touch Tone Phone* amongst the options. This was something that they were familiar with and that they felt would make voting much faster and more convenient.
25. *Digital TV* was also a popular option, but required some explanation. In each group where there was an advocate who could explain how it might work, a substantial proportion of respondents selected this as their preferred option.
26. *Internet Voting* was seen to require a degree of comfort with computers which most of the respondents felt that they did not have although there was a very positive reaction when one participant suggested the possibility of including hyperlinks to candidate profiles and a comparison of party views on key issues.
27. *Text Messaging* was something of a surprise inclusion. Most felt that this was a good idea but would choose another option instead. The groups considered *Computer Kiosks* to be something of a 'halfway house'. Respondents generally believed that this would be reasonably easy to use if they felt so inclined, but saw little point. Benefits such as the ability to vote at any polling booth did not come up unprompted.

Disabled & Disadvantaged Groups

28. Of all the groups, the e-democracy proposals, and especially e-voting, may hold greatest promise for those people who face problems at present with accessing democracy due to mobility problems or sensory

impairment. Registering to vote, getting to a polling station and into the voting hall, using the polling booth and casting one's vote can all present enormous barriers. Confronting the ritual of voting, while part of the attraction of voting in person to some, may also act as a barrier to those with mental health issues who happen to feel unable to cope on election day.

29. While many will continue to feel that voting in elections is something that they are not interested in doing or feel disaffected from, others will welcome the broader range of options open to them. The choice of preferred methods for voting varied but *Touch Tone Phone* was well received by those without access to a computer or experience of using one. *Internet Voting* found appeal among those who were computer literate, the largest group of whom were among those with some form of visual impairment. Increased participation delivered through technology was not of great interest to the majority in these groups but those with Internet access could often see the potential of this channel and felt that they might use it at some point on an issue that was important to them.
30. The group of homeless people that were involved in the research were unusual in that, through their use of a charity for the homeless that offered IT training, they were all at least reasonably computer literate. Some also participated in the democratic process via the charity although they were very cynical about the efforts that had been made to identify and support homeless people. While none were currently living on the streets, half the group had done so at some point and made a distinction between attitudes at that point in their lives and now that they were more settled in hostels and similar accommodation. Issues of intoxication, denial of identity and mobility meant that those on the street were unlikely to be interested in voting or prepared to register to do so. Once in a hostel however, it was suggested that *Internet* access or a *computer kiosk* within the hostel, with trained staff on hand to help, could help greatly with registration and encouraging those who wished to vote.

Ethnic Minorities

31. The Indian (post-family male) and especially the Pakistani (pre-family female) and Bangladeshi (family age female) groups fell into the **disinterested** category of non-voter discussed earlier. They were more focussed on issues affecting their local communities (often defined very narrowly) than those in the General Public groups and felt that the actions of Government had little direct impact on their day to day lives. Many also identified language as an important barrier to participation and in certain cases, it was clear that participation by the women was something that was controlled by their husbands.
32. For Black Caribbean respondents, and to a lesser extent Black Africans, however, the causes of non-participation were more related to disillusionment. Most of the Black Caribbean respondents had been born in the UK, and their concerns were similar to those of the General Public. Black African participants were mainly recent immigrants, and suffered

from the same cultural barriers as the Asian groups (although to a lesser extent).

33. The e-democracy proposals may go some way to addressing the causes of disinterest, although barriers such as language, culture and access to technology would still need to be addressed. Overall, it seems that it would be very difficult to encourage female respondents such as those in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups to participate to any great extent unless this was done through a trusted local cultural centre. It should be noted, of course, that the ethnic minority groups were specifically recruited to involve only 'unengaged' respondents, and that in certain communities outside London it was difficult to identify those who were 'unengaged'.

Preliminary Conclusions and Thoughts

- This research was conducted among those people whom one might expect to be less attracted to proposals for e-democracy; those who feel unengaged or find it difficult to become engaged in the political process at present, and those who dislike using computers and particularly the Internet. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the response was largely lukewarm except among audiences with very specific needs which might be addressed by the technology's ability to provide easier access. Among all audiences, e-voting was seen as more relevant than e-participation.
- For those who are unengaged because they are disinterested or disaffected, the proposals may encourage some people to participate by voting at some point in the future because of the greater convenience but are unlikely to make a significant difference to attitudes. In themselves, they do not address underlying feelings of disillusionment and detachment.
- Even amongst those who were unengaged but 'technophiles', the level of comfort and familiarity with the Internet and computer technology was not high, so that the potential offered by these channels was not appreciated greatly.
- Among those who were already engaged (to some degree) but not users of the Internet, the response to the new options varied from a few who felt it unnecessary and a waste of money, to those who appreciated that it potentially broadened access to democracy even if it was not relevant to them. Here, key issues related to the validity of the views expressed and the need to ensure that everyone could give their views if they wished, even if they did not have access to the technology.
- Some of the issues raised by this research in developing plans for e-democracy include:
 - Inclusiveness/ equality of access; particularly that current methods will still be available and that new methods will include more familiar technology such as *touch tone phones*. Consideration could perhaps be given to offering lower tech. methods of participation such as voicemail.

- Communication of results; ensuring that opinions expressed via **all** channels (not just via the Internet) are taken into account
- Greater transparency about how the opinions expressed feed into the decision-making process; ideally, how (at least sometimes) they **do** make a difference
- Reassurance about security and confidentiality (difficult, as concerns are largely based on 'fear of the unknown' rather than concrete knowledge of specific issues)
- Role of trusted intermediaries in day centres, hostels, residential homes, cultural centres and the like, to help those who wish to use the new technology
- Provision of the new methods in appropriate languages / formats
- Promotion of the new channels and methods via appropriate channels and in relevant formats/languages.

Annex C

Report On How Online Debate on E-Democracy Developed

INTRODUCTION

Aim of report

This report on the e-democracy consultation seeks to address three key issues in considering the effectiveness of the Internet as a means of encouraging public participation. The report seeks to

- find out how the online debate on e-democracy is developing looking at three main areas: discussion forums, e-mail lists and websites linking to the e-democracy.gov.uk site;
- establish whether those that want to access the e-democracy.gov.uk website are able to find it easily; and
- what the effect of the Internet itself has been on the propagation of the debate.

In order to do this, the report address three assumptions held in the consultation paper:

- a) that discussion forums on the Internet will allow more people to access, and be included in, the e-democracy debate.
- b) people who would not normally participate in consultations will be more willing or able to do so via the discussion forum on the Internet.
- c) that the nature of online discussion forums will allow the debate to evolve more. For example, people will be able to post replies to previous comments enabling the debate to develop.

Reason for report

The lessons learned from the report will be used in the further development of the policy on e-democracy and will also be useful in planning future online consultations.

Method of Research

The research was conducted over a period of eight days, from Monday 2nd September to Tuesday 10th September¹. This was mid-way through the consultation period, which ran from 16 July to 31 October 2002.

- The analysis of the discussion forums was achieved by reading the comments in the forums and picking out common themes amongst the posts.
- Websites that linked to the e-democracy.gov.uk site were found by looking at the sites linked to by the e-democracy.gov.uk website and then looking at links from them and so on. Searching for the word 'e-democracy' in various search engines also produced some links to the e-democracy.gov.uk website.
- e-Mail lists on e-democracy were found via searches for websites linking to the e-democracy.gov.uk site. The e-mail lists were a service the website's provided to update people on e-democracy and were usually clearly advertised from the website's homepage.
- Forums discussing e-democracy were found in the same manner as e-mail lists for e-democracy.

DISCUSSION FORUMS

UKOnline Forum

Below is a brief summary of the UKOnline discussion forum on e-democracy when analysed on the 6th September 2002.

e-Participation

- None of the responses were against the idea of e-participation (although not all of the responses said they explicitly supported it). The responses indicated that people wanted more participation in the democratic process and e-participation is just one of these methods of participating.
- e-Participation is seen as a more important issue than e-voting. It may be able to raise interest (and therefore electoral turnout) in democracy.²
- e-Participation benefits the disadvantaged, it has great potential benefits for elderly, disabled, young etc.
- The idea of direct democracy was voiced. Do we need representative MPs when people can represent themselves by continual public e-participation?

¹ The search results were correct as of the 10th of September, they may have changed after that date, e.g. websites previously not linking to the e-democracy.gov.uk site may have linked to it since then

² See the second bullet point in the 'e-voting' section for a corresponding point on how e-voting does not affect turnout at elections.

- Comments support the idea of government run policy consultation websites rather than independently run websites. One comment says: “to discuss [e-democracy] on independently run sites would appear to be rather of a waste of time for those of us who want to make our voices heard by Government Ministers and Departments.”³
- Politics needs to be made more appealing before any e-participation has any benefit. Attacking disengagement with ICT won’t solve the problem in the lack of interest in politics; people need to feel that their contributions will make a difference.
- There is a need to increase access to ICTs to promote e-participation for example Internet kiosks need to be as ubiquitous as telephone boxes.
- MPs should take the lead and develop websites that encourage e-Participation (e.g. online consultations), also have common e-mail addresses that are widely circulated and known
- The discussion forum needs to be publicised more widely amongst the general public. (e.g. more links from government websites, notices in public libraries etc.) There is a need for more people to enter into the debate.

e-Voting

- The majority of responses support the idea of e-voting.
- e-Voting won’t increase turnout at elections.
- Security of e-voting is a major concern, especially the security of remote access Internet voting.
- There is a feeling that e-voting will benefit higher socio-economic groups more than lower ones due to them having superior access to and knowledge of ICTs.
- In the long term e-voting is seen as being inevitable.
- There is a lack of trust in government in it being able to deliver e-voting (on time and on budget) due to its past record on IT projects.
- e-Voting is not the real issue, it is just a tool to make voting easier. There is a need to focus on increasing public participation in the democratic process.

Responses

There were 239 contributions published on the forum.

- There were approximately 20 regular posters (excluding the forum moderator). These 20 posters accounted for at least 50% of the responses.
- The majority of respondents only left a name (and it was often not a real name e.g. ‘broadsword’, ‘kestrel’ and ‘goldieb’). This meant it was very difficult to ascertain the profession of the respondents and their vested interests (if any).

³ Comment posted on the 18th July 2002 by Broadsword in the e-participation section of the forum.

- Some respondents did give their real name and job title however. The responses included replies from: 2 MPs, the head of BBC News Interactive, the Director of the International Teledemocracy Centre, the author of 'The Net Affect' and the project manager for 'Speak Out on European Citizenship' (a project of the Institute for Citizenship).

Other Forums

Other forums analysed were:

- 'Yahoo' groups, Steven Clift created this forum for the discussion of e-democracy in the UK. It was unused, as of the 12th September 2002.
- Steven Clift's website, this forum is for the discussion of Steven Clift's e-mail newsletters. The vast majority of the posting on the forum are by Steven Clift himself and there are virtually no responses to any of the posts on the entire forum.
- The Scottish Parliament's website, there were only two discussion topics on the forum, online bulletin boards and the broadcasting of the Scottish parliament's proceedings via the web. Below is a brief summary of the views on each.

Online Bulletin Boards

- The majority of responses support the idea of bulletin boards.
- Some respondents felt bulletin boards are not accessible to everyone however, only people with access to a computer and who are IT literate are able to use them. Access and participation is therefore an issue.
- The bulletin boards should be more widely publicised.
- Some respondents are sceptical that MSPs will actually read any of the comments and think that the board will have no real affect.

Internet broadcasting

- The majority of responses supported the idea of Internet broadcasting.
- Respondents liked the archive and reports section of Internet service. They pointed out that this would be unavailable on a TV broadcast service.
- Some responses felt that the service is too slow to view unless the viewer has broadband access.
- The Internet broadcasting service needs both more promotion and better/more effective promotion.
- There were responses supporting the idea of viewing broadcasts via TV the better quality and reliability being two main advantages of TV over the Internet service.

E-Mail Lists

Two e-mail lists dealing specifically with e-democracy were found. A further five e-mail lists that deal with e-democracy (although not exclusively so) were also found.

Specific

- Democracies Online newsletter
- Voxpolitics

Non-specific

- e-Government Monitor
- Headstar e-Government bulletin
- Politics Online
- Governments Online
- Kablenet

Analysis

- The two specific e-democracy newsletters were very detailed and contained not only relevant news stories on e-democracy but also articles and links to sites that dealt with it.
- The non-specific e-mail lists all dealt with e-government in general and had articles/news on e-democracy occasionally in them.
- There were some connections between the people involved in compiling these e-mail lists; (e.g. The director of Voxpolitics is the deputy editor of the e-government bulletin for Headstar. Another good example of a connection is that John Gøtze (Slashdemocracy) hosts Steven Cliff's discussion forum on his website)⁴

WEBSITES LINKING TO THE E-DEMOCRACY.GOV.UK SITE

Below is list of the websites found that linked to the e-democracy.gov.uk site.

Central Government sites

- Office of the e-Envoy
- Privy Council Office
- UKOnline
- Number 10
- Info 4 Local Government

⁴ See 'CONCLUSION' for more information on this.

Local Government sites

- Brent Borough Council
- e-Government Resource Centre

Commercial sites

- The Guardian newspaper
- BBC News
- You Gov
- Kahlenet
- e-Democracy Resources
- Voxpolitics
- Tagish⁵

Non-commercial sites

- International Teledemocracy Centre
- Institute for Public Policy Research
- FREE project
- Development Gateway
- Slashdemocracy

Important omissions

- Govtalk
- Local Government Information Unit
- SOCITM
- Parliament
- IDeA
- ODPM
- LCD
- The Electoral Commission

Summary of findings/analysis

- Few sites on the Internet link to the edemocracy.gov.uk website.
- Within government, only a handful of sites linked to it, far less than was expected.
- Some key sites do not link to the site (e.g. the Electoral Commission)
- Some sites that did have links to the website were only via a news story or press release, rather than a more obvious 'links' section.

⁵ Tagish is the company that administers the e-democracy.gov.uk website.

Visibility

Even though few sites link to the e-democracy site, this may not be an inhibitor to propagating the debate if people who want to access e-democracy.gov.uk are able to find it easily, even if they do not know the address of the website.

The aim of the exercise was to see how well publicised the e-democracy.gov.uk website was, (as of the 10th September 2002). Ten well-known Internet search engines were chosen and the words 'e-democracy' were searched for. The first five search results are recorded and the position of the e-democracy.gov.uk site if it was below the top five.

Analysis

- At the time of analysis, other websites and a significant proportion of the major search engines had not picked up on (and linked to) the e-democracy.gov.uk website
- Only two of the ten search engines found the e-democracy.gov.uk site in their top five 'matches' to the search term 'e-democracy'. A further two search engines found the website in their top ten matches.
- For six of the ten search engines the e-democracy.gov.uk website did not appear on the first page of search results (i.e. for a person looking for the website it would not be very easy for them to find it using those search engines.)
- Of all the fifty websites found, twenty-eight were run by Steven Clift an 'online strategist' and public speaker on e-democracy.
- It is possible that if someone was looking for the e-democracy.gov.uk website they would not have found it by typing in 'e-democracy' into a search engine.

Conclusion

- An analysis of the discussion forums indicates that people welcome the publishing of the 'In the Service of Democracy' consultation paper.
- A further analysis of the forums revealed that the majority of the discussion about the consultation paper is taking place on the 'official' consultation website on ukonline.gov.uk.
- A search of e-democracy related websites showed a variety of e-mail lists dealing with e-democracy providing a comprehensive information service on e-democracy.
- Searching the Internet for websites that linked to the e-democracy.gov.uk website revealed that very few websites do link to it and in those that do the link is often 'buried' in an archived news story.
- The e-democracy website is not very well promoted by other websites and if someone wanted to find it via a search engine it is possible that they would not be able to do so easily. This was shown after searching for websites that linked to the e-democracy.gov.uk site.

- The e-democracy community is a very small one with a high degree of linkage between its members. In this consultation the majority of the views heard have only been from this small community.

Lessons Learned And Recommendations For The Future

- On the basis of the evidence from the discussion forum on UK Online, it is not possible to conclude that the provision of a discussion forum on the Internet did result in more people being included in the e-democracy debate. There were a limited number of contributors to the debate at the time of analysis and the majority of these were part of the small e-democracy community that may have been expected to contribute anyway.
- There was no evidence to suggest that people who would not normally participate in the consultation process did so via the discussion forums.
- Although the nature of the discussion forums did allow respondents to come back at a later date and re-respond, there were frequent criticisms of the software on the discussion forum. Many respondents believed it was not advanced enough, limiting the development of discussion.

Recommendations

- Some e-democracy websites are highly publicised, for example Stephen Clift's *Democracies Online*, being well linked to from other e-democracy sites and consistently found by search engines. Owners of such websites may be able to offer advice in how to increase the profile of an online consultation which may be valuable in determining how to publicise online government consultations.
- Keep discussion forums and consultation papers on the same site. This should make it easier to find all aspects of the consultation process.
- Responses from the wider public are as important as those from those directly interested in the consultation. Efforts must be made to engage the wider public more in consultations. For example, the Government could encourage other organisations to link to the consultation site or to host specialist discussion forums on discrete topics that then feed in results to the main discussion forum.
- It should not be assumed that any consultation website will get a sizeable number of hits just by the issuing of a press release and a few speeches being made. The information should be much more actively disseminated, for example, an e-mail list could be set up prior to the consultation that would actively get people engaged before the consultation is launched.