



Political and Constitutional Reform Committee

Oral evidence: [Voter engagement in the UK](#), HC 1059

Thursday 27 February 2014

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Institute for Public Policy Research](#)
- [Professor Sarah Birch](#)
- [Democratic Audit](#)

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Members present: Mr Graham Allen (Chair); Tracey Crouch; Mark Durkan; Paul Flynn; Fabian Hamilton; David Morris; Robert Neill; Mr Andrew Turner

Questions 1-80

Witnesses: **Professor Sarah Birch**, Professor of Comparative Politics, University of Glasgow, and **Glenn Gottfried**, Quantitative Research Fellow, Institute for Public Policy Research, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning. It is very good to see you. You know what we are doing in terms of our current inquiry—one that is ever more important as we approach European elections, local elections, and indeed the general election in 432 days' time—about how we engage the voters more in the process of our democracy. It is quite a broad-ranging inquiry, quite deliberately. Is there anything that you would like to say to start us off, or shall we jump straight into questions?

Glenn Gottfried: I think we are quite happy just to jump straight into questions. We submitted written evidence a couple of weeks ago so hopefully you have all had a chance to look at our report. If you want to go straight into questions, that is fine with us.

Q2 Mr Turner: As you know, this is the first session looking at voter engagement. What would you say are the leading causes of low voter engagement in the UK?

Glenn Gottfried: I think you have two aspects to look at. First you have that the overall turnout level has been declining since the early to mid-1990s and, more importantly within that, you have imbalance between the groups turning out to vote. So, despite the overall turnout declining, it is not declining proportionally to age groups and income groups. You have an imbalance of young people particularly dropping out at much lower rates than older individuals. In our report we discussed

what we call this vicious cycle of engagement and turnout. Essentially what is happening is that you have young people turning out in lower numbers. Governments look at these groups that are not turning out to vote, and they are no longer focusing on their interests, because they know they are not winning groups. These are not groups that are going to come out and necessarily get them elected or re-elected. So what happens is that young people will see this. They see that political parties are not engaging with them, therefore what do they have to turn out to vote for if nobody is listening to them? One is reinforcing the other; people are turning out at lower rates while Governments are not necessarily following their interests.

Q3 Mr Turner: Why does it matter? If people don't feel it matters to them, why should it matter to us?

Glenn Gottfried: These are the very concepts of democracy.

Mr Turner: In the United States it is even lower.

Glenn Gottfried: It is a much bigger problem in the United States as well.

Mr Turner: But the United States is the most democratic country in the world.

Glenn Gottfried: I wouldn't necessarily say that. There are definitely arguments to say that there are severe issues with the American democratic system. What our research is trying to do is ensure that that sort of situation does not happen in the United Kingdom. In the United States particularly, groups are falling out at quicker rates than they are here, but the UK is not that far behind. It is an issue if a large segment of your society, of your population, just does not see that its democracy fulfils their needs, that it is ignoring their interests.

Q4 Mr Turner: You have not yet explained to me why it is bad that lots of people do not vote. I would presume, perhaps wrongly, that they are quite content. They have the ability to vote.

Glenn Gottfried: I don't think it is necessarily true that they are quite content. I think they are quite frustrated, and evidence is showing that people are upset with the democratic system. Some choose to step away from it, others choose to move towards more populist ideas, which is signified in the rise of UKIP at the moment.

Q5 Mr Turner: Are you saying that it is a good thing or a bad thing? This is what I am trying to understand. It seems to me now that you say it is a bad thing that they should go for a populist organisation.

Glenn Gottfried: I think it is a bad thing that they feel that democracy and main parties are not listening to their interests. They think that they are focusing on different interests within the population, those with better political resources.

Q6 Mr Turner: Are you saying that we in the most important two parties are trying to divert them from the things they are really interested in? Is that what you are saying?

Glenn Gottfried: I think that it is a bit more subtle than them saying, "They are not turning out, so let's not listen to them". I think it is a bit more subtle than that. It is a severe problem if a large segment of your population does not think that democracy is serving their interests.

Mr Turner: You have not explained why.

Glenn Gottfried: Explained why?

Mr Turner: Yes.

Glenn Gottfried: It is important that all individuals participate in democracy. It is a value that we hold.

Q7 Mr Turner: I still do not understand what it is that you feel is dangerous in a country where anyone can vote, or almost anyone. I agree that there are one or two who don't register. We try to make it possible for as many people to vote as want to, so what is it that you say is a bad thing about them not choosing to, those who are not voting?

Glenn Gottfried: It is our value of democracy. What separates us from many other countries is that we have this democratic system in which we think our voices count, and it undermines the system when certain groups are left out of the process.

Q8 Mr Turner: But they are not left out of the process. They choose to leave themselves out of the process. It is not us who are keeping them out.

Glenn Gottfried: But the thing is that they are feeling pushed to the side because political parties are not listening to them.

Q9 Mr Turner: Sorry, UKIP are populist. You used the word "populist" as a dangerous thing, but you are not explaining why.

Glenn Gottfried: Populist or UKIP—they move to other, smaller parties that will push them away from the mainstream parties. In some cases that could be good, in some cases that could be not good, and I won't say just it is within the UK. I mean across Europe, across Western democracies. It is an important value that all individuals' voices are heard and count and they should be reflected in Government output, and if individuals are not feeling this it undermines our democracy.

Q10 Mr Turner: You really can't blame the Government, or indeed the Opposition, for people not voting. You are saying now that the Government must find ways of engaging people who don't wish to vote, and who if they did vote would probably vote for the Opposition; in which case, why should the Government get involved? That is an arrangement between those people, who may vote for the Opposition. The Government's job is to find a way in which the majority can win. Isn't that so?

Glenn Gottfried: I don't think that that is what our values and ideals of democracy should necessarily be. The idea is that we have as much participation as possible, that all voices are heard within our system.

Q11 Mr Turner: Do you think it would be better if they were all forced to vote?

Glenn Gottfried: I think that is a way to ensure that all groups will come out in equal numbers, absolutely.

Q12 Paul Flynn: You have also drawn attention to voter inequality and inequality of the turnout. To what extent is this a problem compared with the low turnouts?

Professor Birch: I think there are two separate problems. Low turnout is a problem in and of itself as it indicates that there is disengagement with politics and disaffection. It indicates that people are not interested in politics, they are not grabbed by politics to engage, so they are not paying so much attention to what politicians are doing and they are not paying so much attention to holding them to account.

But turnout inequality, for the reasons that Glenn outlined, is also a significant problem because you have a distinct sector of the electorate whose interests are going unrepresented, and they don't see a way forward to co-ordinate with other people whose interests are going unrepresented to work together to get those interests represented. As an individual, if I know that people like me don't vote, what is the point of my going to the polling station and representing my interests when I know that lots of people who have similar interests to me are not going to be doing that? So I say, "Why should I bother?" If a very large proportion of people like me are going and having their interests represented, then there is an opportunity for people like me to get my interests represented. I think it is those interests going unrepresented in the current system and unequal turnout that is an additional problem over and above low turnout per se.

Q13 Paul Flynn: Which particular groups do you think are under-represented?

Professor Birch: Our research demonstrates that it is young people whose interests tend to be unrepresented, because they tend to vote with less frequency than older people, and less affluent people. To some extent it is also some ethnic minority groups. That mainly is due to under-representation among those groups.

Q14 Paul Flynn: Do you think a consequence of that would be, for instance, the current trend to take benefits from young unemployed people and give unneeded benefits to rich pensioners? Does that reflect the percentage of both groups who actually vote?

Professor Birch: It is difficult to attribute any particular policy to that type of trend, but that is the type of thing that we think is the consequence of the situation we see where politicians don't have so much incentive to pay attention to the voices of young people because they know they vote with less frequency. We are likely to see policies similar to that introduced by all political parties, and we have seen policies introduced by all political parties that tend to benefit the old disproportionately and disbenefit the young disproportionately.

Q15 Paul Flynn: Groups that have been mentioned as unrepresented are elderly groups in residential homes—although I don't know that that is true; they are often the easiest to get on the roll—and young people living in hostel accommodation or living in universities. If those are real problem areas, what can we do about it?

Professor Birch: There are two things we have to look at. We have to look at people getting on the electoral roll and then, once they are on the electoral roll, voting. Most of the analysis we have done in this particular piece of research is about people who are already on the electoral roll and the extent to which they vote, because the official turnout figures we have reflect that proportion of people who are already on the electoral roll. The problem you identify of certain groups of people not getting on to the electoral roll—certain ethnic minority groups, people who are highly mobile and people who are in residential homes and other types of homes—is also a problem. I know the Electoral Commission is doing some work now to address that problem to some extent, and the new system of individual voter registration will also go some way towards addressing that problem. I think it is best considered as two distinct problems.

Q16 Paul Flynn: Recognising that British democracy is a work in progress, how do you react to the call from Russell Brand, who has 7 million followers on his Twitter account, that young people should not vote? Do you think young people are likely to listen to him or listen to this august Committee?

Professor Birch: I should hope they would listen to this august Committee. However, Mr Brand did articulate a point of view that appears to be relatively common among young people. I imagine all of you, when you are on the doorstep canvassing people, encounter people who have this attitude. At least getting that viewpoint out into public debate is to some extent perhaps a step forward, because then politicians are obliged to provide an answer. They are obliged to provide a reason for young people to vote. They are obliged to answer that question that Russell Brand has asked as to why young people don't vote, and they are obliged to engage. I think the first step towards overcoming that type of attitude is for politicians to have to engage with those types of people.

But in addition to simply political debate and engagement, politicians have been exhorted for many years to engage more with people and get them out to vote. Ever since 2001 when we had very low turnout, trying to get politicians to engage more has been something that a lot of people have said should be a good idea. However, it does not seem to be addressing the problem, so I think that perhaps some institutional reforms would help to make it easier for politicians to engage with people—some of the institutional reforms that we outlined in our report.

Q17 Paul Flynn: Do you think politicians are the best people to adjudicate on these matters? Don't you think that we, as members of this Committee, are all biased to think that the electoral system is little short of perfect and it has elected all of us? That applies to all politicians. They must be biased in favour of the status quo.

Professor Birch: As Churchill said, democracy is the worst form of government except all the others. I think that that can be applied to this situation. In an ideal world we might have some perfect institutional design gods up there who could design perfect institutions for us, but the system we have is probably the next best alternative. We have politicians who we trust and we elect who we believe are wise enough at least to make those decisions and make them well.

Paul Flynn: Thank you. I am grateful to you.

Q18 Chair: Is part of this the focus that if you want to be in Government you have to win key marginals? In the differentials that you talk about, Sarah, is that evident? Does the effort that is put into those key marginals impact quite seriously on turnout?

Chris Ruane: Excuse me, Chair, can I come in on that, because that was my question as well, just to elaborate and expand on it?

Chair: Sure. What I am trying to get at is, would it actually make a difference if all political parties had a different set of values that applied to all constituencies and did the same amount of work that they do in the key marginals? Chris?

Chris Ruane: The main political parties chase about 200,000 voters—switchers, they call them—in 70 or 100 seats. Those seats are where the focus groups go and where the pulse is kept. In the meantime, we have 6.5 million people off the register. If those people were put back on the register, would it not change the dynamic of British politics? They are two steps away from influencing politicians. If they are on the register they are one step away from that and greater recognition, greater cognisance would be taken of their desires and their wishes.

Professor Birch: I will speak just to the issue of registration, because I have done some work on the new system of the individual voter register that is being introduced, together with the matching of people. That means that approximately two thirds of people will be put on the electoral register automatically through information that is held, as you know, by other state agencies, as happens in most continental European countries. So we are going to see, through that matching process, a dramatic change in the electoral register and an improvement. A lot of people who had not previously been put on the electoral register will be on, and I think that will change the dynamics of electoral registration.

What we are going to see, by definition, is a lot of people being put on the electoral register who were not there before, and those people won't have voted—they won't have been able to vote—and so there will be a lot more people who have little experience of the electoral process who will be available for mobilisation by political parties of all stripes. It will then be a challenge for political parties to try to convince all those additional people to vote. Potentially the problem that we were talking about, unequal turnout, will in some senses become even more acute because you will have this influx of new people on the electoral register who are non-voters.

Q19 Chris Ruane: Is that not quite a rosy view? There were 14 data matching pilots, and in Tower Hamlets only 55% of people were carried across. Those are in the poorer areas of the country, which is where the 6.5 million people are missing from. Data matching being taken automatically across in poorer areas is not working. I think it is a rosy picture that they are going to be put on there and political parties will address them. They are not even going to be put on the register.

Professor Birch: As far as I am aware from the figures I have seen, on average it is closer to two thirds of people who are carried over. That is not the only way in which people are going to get on the electoral register. The system of inviting people to put themselves on the electoral register, as we have had for quite a number of years now, will continue as well. There are going to be multiple avenues through which people will be able to get on the electoral register. But, yes, obviously it is not going to solve all of the problems. When you have highly mobile populations, as you have in parts of Tower Hamlets, there are going to continue to be some issues with electoral registration.

Glenn Gottfried: Just to add to that, although the electoral registration question is an important one and we should do all we can to ensure that people are registered, it is still not necessarily going to stop the declining turnout levels. All of our information is based on those who are already registered to vote that are not turning out to vote, so outreach by politicians is very important. There is research to say that it does work. In areas where there are marginals where people are going out doing more outreach to the public, turnout does tend to be higher than it does in safe seats.

Q20 Chair: Do you have some numbers on that, Glenn?

Glenn Gottfried: I don't have any with me. It is not from our particular research, but I have come across it.

Chair: It would be useful to see that impact. I am following the thread from Andrew's initial question, which is that if people have the right to vote they have the right to vote and there need to be strong arguments to make people vote. One of the arguments is about the interaction they have with politicians and parties. If politicians and parties are not completing that circle by doing that, because they focus all their energies on a small number of seats, then that is helping to break the link between the right to vote, which has been established, and the necessity that people themselves feel that they should be voting because they are being encouraged by parties. I think the numbers on this would be very helpful.

Professor Birch: We can supply those numbers.

Chair: That would be incredibly helpful, Sarah. Thank you. We will come back to this, and Chris has some further questions later. I know he is keen to ask them.

Q21 Tracey Crouch: Professor Birch, you have linked low participation with the decline in confidence of the public in politicians. Could you expand on that a little bit, please?

Professor Birch: I think we have to look at this in historical perspective and recognise that there is a generation of people who were mobilised into the electorate after the Second World War when there was a very high turnout. There was a history of people having died for their country, and going out to vote was not a big ask in comparison with that. What we have seen is a generational change in attitudes towards politics. There has been lots of research—not research that we have done, but other research—that has documented this generational change and a decline in the sense of a duty to vote. People have other things in their lives. They don't see politics as being so immediate to them; they don't see it as addressing their needs.

At the same time, we see an increase in perceptions of politicians as not always being that honest, unfortunately. Some of the research I have done has addressed that issue. We see an increase in people not seeing politicians as being that honest as a result of a number of factors. First, there is an increase in the extent to which the media is prepared to hold politicians to account and ask them difficult questions. There is a combination also of a general decline in engagement with politicians and political parties and falling political party membership and mobilisation by political parties, and that is also linked to the safe seats issue. If there are not so many party canvassers out on the ground engaging people, then people are going to be less attached to political parties. The decline of what we call party identification is one of the factors. Also, there have been a number of high-profile political scandals that have been reported in the media, and that has had a discernible impact on people's perceptions of the integrity of politicians.

Q22 Tracey Crouch: I can see your point around declining duty to vote and I can see from the statistics that we are seeing falling turnout, but where I don't buy your argument is a decline in the confidence in politicians as being some sort of recent phenomenon. It has always been the case that politicians have been pretty much distrusted and hated by the general public, and that goes back centuries. When reading stuff about William Wilberforce, it is quite clear that the public did not have much confidence in their politicians two centuries ago. Are you just linking recent scandals, perhaps the expenses, to falling turnout, or do you have some very firm data that shows that the reason why people are not going out to vote is because they don't like politicians as opposed to numerous other factors that might mean that people don't want to go out and vote?

Professor Birch: I agree it has always been a challenge for politicians to convince people that they are in politics to serve the public good. People sometimes have different ideas about why politicians go into politics. Some of the other research I have done, not part of this report, does demonstrate that people's propensity to vote is linked to their trust in politicians, even when you control for a variety of other factors. Our research shows that the recent MP expenses scandal did not have a significant impact on people's views of politicians in general. It polarised views slightly, but people already had a relatively low opinion of politicians, and their view didn't really change that much as a result of the expenses scandal, according to the research that I have done with my colleague Nicholas Allen.

Certainly it does seem that there is a link between people's trust in politicians and their willingness to vote, the MP expenses scandal aside. According to the data we have looked at, it seems to have really begun to decline back in the 1970s and 1980s, and there has been a gradual decline since that time in people's overall confidence in politicians. To some extent, that is linked to the decline in turnout.

Q23 Tracey Crouch: Has your research found that the public have ever been trusting of politicians? What is the highest trust score that politicians, as an industry, have ever achieved?

Professor Birch: In the research that I have done recently, as we didn't do surveys back in the day, we were relying on other people's research that has charted trust in politicians over time. If you look at some of the opinion poll data going back a generation or two, you do see that people had higher confidence in politicians.

Q24 Tracey Crouch: They might have had higher respect, but did they have more trust?

Professor Birch: The questions were asked in different ways. The research that has been done on this—and I can refer it to the Committee if they would like—is by Professor Pippa Norris of Harvard University, who has charted change in confidence in politicians, measured by different surveys and using different wordings in a variety of different European countries, and shown the most dramatic decline in Britain and Portugal, whereas in some other countries the confidence in politicians has remained more or less at high levels. On the details of the question wording, sometimes the questions are to do with trust and other times they have to do with confidence.

Q25 Tracey Crouch: What other countries have high levels of confidence or trust in their politicians?

Professor Birch: Scandinavian countries tend to have high levels of confidence and trust in their politicians and in some countries it goes up and down. It varies in places like France, Italy and Germany, but generally Scandinavian countries are the ones that over time have the highest levels.

Q26 Tracey Crouch: Of all the democracies in the whole of the world, Scandinavia, three countries, effectively have trust in their politicians, whereas everybody else basically hates us?

Professor Birch: No. That particular research looked mainly at European countries. There are other countries in the world where people have high levels of trust in their politicians. Smaller countries tend to be ones where there are high levels of trust in their politicians.

Q27 Tracey Crouch: What can we do to change it? What is your view? How do we engage with the voting public through increasing confidence in ourselves?

Professor Birch: There are a number of incremental reforms. I don't think a dramatic reform is really called for at this stage, because some reforms have been tried and have not been that successful. Legislating more and introducing more regulations is not necessarily the way to go. But I think it is continuing some of the things that have already been initiated in providing more mechanisms through which Members of Parliament can have greater engagement through communication strategies. We would like to see Members of Parliament look at some of the types of focus groups that we did that showed the way people think—not just what people think about politicians but the types of language they use and the way they understand politicians. Also, it is about continuing the types of research that we have done.

Over and above the engagement strategies, I think that having more groups that systematically report on what politicians have done, how they are voting in Parliament, the types of stands they are taking on particular issues and what politicians are doing for people—more scrutiny—would help inform people. It would mean that people were more accurately informed about what politicians were doing.

Most politicians are hard-working. When we did our research, we disagreed with most of the people that we surveyed, because we thought that they were wrong about politicians. We thought politicians were generally more honest than most people think they are. We were trying to work out how we get people to see the light. Obviously politicians vary, but we thought that if people had more accurate information, then they might have a better attitude, might have more confidence in politicians. That was a different piece of research. We outlined a variety of measures to make people better informed about their politicians.

Q28 Tracey Crouch: Do you think that the party whipping system contributes to that decline in confidence in our politicians? Have you found in your research that either independent or independently-minded politicians are more likely to have the trust and respect of their electorate than those who are perhaps constantly following a party line?

Professor Birch: That is an interesting question. We did not look at that particular question. If that is the case, and it quite possibly is, I think there is also a trade-off to be had. If there was no whipping at all then you would find it very difficult to get together majorities in Parliament to make decisions. There is a trade-off between politicians being able to have independence and vote with their conscience, effectively, and effectiveness in decision-making.

Chair: There may be other witnesses later who may want to pick up on a couple of those lines as well.

Q29 Chris Ruane: On the issue of trust, do you think it is not just a political issue, it is an economic issue as well? If you have a look at the words of Joseph Stiglitz in *The Price of Inequality*, Professor Wilkinson in *The Spirit Level* and Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, they all point to the issue of trust and that the more unequal societies have less trust. The countries that have welcomed the rampant laissez-faire economics of the 1980s have had lower turnout, lower trust. You mentioned the fact that the Nordic countries, which have not adopted that economic model, have greater political trust and greater economic trust of the people. Is there an economic inequality issue to the level of trust in politicians?

Professor Birch: Yes, I agree with your interpretation of the research. The research does point in that direction. Glenn, did you want to add something?

Glenn Gottfried: A lot of work has begun in this area of the correlation between economic inequality and political inequality, particularly in the United States. There are arguments to say that “fairer” societies, more economically equal societies, do have greater political participation. Again, the Nordic countries are a good example of that, where turnout is on the whole higher. That is essentially what led us to our report, to explore that a bit more in depth than we can here.

In terms of the Whip question, in the United States, where there is a weaker Whip system, trust is still low. It might explain it here, but it might not necessarily be the case, so I think that is something that is certainly worth doing more research into.

Q30 Chair: On the concept of people not voting because they feel that it will not make much of a difference, do they perceive, for example, that if they are voting for Members of Parliament their Member of Parliament is not going to be influential, that Government is influential rather than Parliament? Equally at local level, is there evidence that people say, “We are not going to vote for our local council, because they are told what to do by Whitehall and it actually doesn’t make much difference. They are all constrained to the same degree”? Is the powerlessness question one that is on your evidential radar?

Glenn Gottfried: It is certainly one that is on our radar. If you explore the Hansard Society’s data, they have a question, “Do you think that you could change things?” On the whole, that has also been declining over time. I think it is a true sense of powerlessness that is partly driving this. I hate bringing up Russell Brand again, but these are the points that he made, so perhaps these questions are the right questions that we should be exploring, yet his answer we think is incorrect.

Q31 Chair: Sarah, is there any real evidence on this? Otherwise it is just assertion or speculation.

Professor Birch: Yes. I am referring at the moment to appendix 1 in the report that was published, *Divided democracy: Political inequality in the UK and why it matters*, which we based our written evidence on. We have a statistical analysis in appendix 1 that has a variable that we refer to in political science jargon as efficacy. That is the extent to which people think they make a difference in politics, and people are asked questions and surveys on that. That is indeed associated with propensity to turn out to vote. People who have a higher sense of efficacy are more likely to vote.

Q32 Mr Turner: Does it have anything to do with where the decisions are taken? 80% of our decisions are taken in Europe; only 20% is here.

Glenn Gottfried: I can’t add to that. I don’t think the Europe factor is what has been driving low political efficacy over time necessarily.

Q33 Mr Turner: But you have just said about the public waking up to the existence of UKIP. Does that not have a lot to do with it?

Glenn Gottfried: I think UKIP is a bit more than Europe. Europe perhaps is part of this; Europe has not been explained by pro-Europeans enough, perhaps, and that is an issue. That could be part of the factor. Obviously there are many facets to this that contribute to the feeling of low political efficacy.

Q34 Chair: Where I strongly support Andrew is that executive power in Europe is unelected. There may be the direct election of Members of the European Parliament but the connection in terms of control from the European Parliament to the European Executive is even weaker—hard to believe—than our own legislature controlling the Executive in this country. I have already mentioned the local government example as well—that decisions, even down to when dustbins should be emptied, are in effect issued in guidance from Whitehall, which is unelected. There is this underlying thing of, “What is the point of voting in the European Parliament? We know they are all going to stitch it up anyway. What is the point of voting for your MP? At the end of the day it will be the Government and Whitehall that will drive legislation, barely unamended, through the House of Commons.” Is that again just assertion on my behalf, or is that borne out by your research, Sarah?

Professor Birch: I don’t think enough research has been done on the causes of low perceptions of efficacy. Some of the hypotheses you are suggesting would be interesting things to test. I am not entirely convinced that most people have as detailed an understanding of the political process as some people have been suggesting. I am not sure people have that clear sense of what proportion of major decisions are made in Brussels or Whitehall or at local level or national level or by Parliament or the Government. I think many people see politicians as a single group of people who are “them”, politicians on our behalf. You obviously all have a much better understanding of the political process.

But I agree that if more genuine powers were given to local government, then that would be likely to increase the ability of local councillors to be able to go back to their constituents and say, “We did this. It wasn’t like this before, but we have managed to deliver this to you”, whereas now they have limited ability to do that at election time. The messages that they are able to give to their constituents at the time of local elections are constrained. The ability of politicians to make certain decisions then conditions what they are able to say in an election campaign. It is probably those campaign messages that are the key in mobilising voters.

Chair: What I need witnesses to help us with, and those who read this transcript to help us with, is not to support the personal prejudices or opinions of myself or any other member of this Committee. It is about the hard science around what actually people’s perception is. Clearly, I think elected people at lots of different levels are blamed for various things. What I am trying to figure out is whether there is some further science, some data that we can refer to about how we might tackle a misconception, restore a degree of faith, trust and integrity, and therefore enable people, should they wish, to participate in the democratic process. Without that, we are not going to get very far in this inquiry. The science and the data is what I am after, and if there are studies out there, we need to get hold of them, because otherwise we all have lots of personal opinions about what we could do or couldn’t do.

Q35 Fabian Hamilton: When Tracey was talking about the historical mistrust of politicians, I was reminded of the story of the population south of the river when the Houses of Parliament were on fire in 1834, booing every time a politician was brought out alive from the burning remains. So I think it was ever thus. Perhaps we are more popular now than we were then, marginally.

I think you have recommended that young people be required to vote in the first election they are eligible to vote in. Could you expand on how this might work in practice?

Glenn Gottfried: The idea of first-time compulsory voting came from, first off, the overall idea of full compulsory voting. Our research showed that there is a problem with the inequality of turnout, and the only way to ensure that there is no inequality in turnout is through compulsory voting. We understand the arguments against the idea of requiring the entire population to turn out to vote, so

we developed this concept as a way in-between the libertarian argument of the right for somebody not to turn out to the polling box and at the same time having some element of compulsory voting involved in the population.

All the research that we have gone through and that we found showed that voting and not voting are both habitual. If you turn out to vote at your first election, you are very likely to continue to do so for the duration of your lifetime. What this does is that young people who are eligible at their first election to vote will be required to go out and vote, and the idea is that they develop this habit and they will do so at subsequent elections. If somebody still, after their first time voting, decides that voting is against their principles, they will be able to continue through the rest of their lives if they so choose. What we believe is that this will help alleviate the problem of turnout over time.

It does three things. First of all, it brings more young people out to vote, so it brings their numbers closer to the older generations' turnout levels. At the same time, where kids live in families where their parents don't vote, it might encourage their parents to go out with them to the ballot box, and so encourage turnout among their families. At the same time it encourages older generations, who see younger people coming out in higher numbers, to also turn out to vote. Over time, we don't think this competition between older and younger generations will exist, because at some point all the population will have experienced this compulsory voting in their first election.

Professor Birch: I don't have very much to add to that. One thing that probably is ticking away in your heads at the moment is, "Compulsion, that is a bad thing. People won't like that very much". This is something that we get asked often when we are asked about these proposals, "How can you force people to do something? People don't like to be forced to do something". But we feel that asking young people to go to the polling station once is not a very big ask in comparison with all the other things that young people are obliged to do, not least receive a formal education. We are all obliged, when we go into adulthood, to do things like get a TV licence, pay our taxes, get an MOT for our cars, register to vote, which is effectively compulsory, complete the consensus. There are lots of things that we are obliged to do, so I think asking people to do one more thing once—going to the polling station—is not a big ask.

I think the main element of compulsory voting of any kind, and this includes compulsory first-time voting, is that it forces politicians to pay attention to the interests of an entire sector of the electorate that they have relatively little incentive to pay attention to now. So it is not asking a lot of young people; it is asking a lot of politicians, and it is asking a lot of people like you, who will be obliged to rethink the way you engage with the population. I think the real compulsory aspect of compulsory voting is obliging politicians to engage. This is politicians from all political parties. All political parties would have to change the way they think about young people, and I don't think that there would necessarily be a partisan effect of the proposal that we have put forward. Certainly the research we have done suggests that there are large numbers of people from across the political spectrum who support this measure, young and old, left and right.

Q36 Fabian Hamilton: I would be delighted to spend more time trying to persuade young people to vote, and I am sure my colleagues would too. In countries where voting is compulsory generally across the board, very often that is not enforced. What sanctions would you put in place to enforce the rule that young people should vote the first time they are entitled to?

Glenn Gottfried: We suggest a very minimal fine, something in the range of £15, £20, something like that. It is not a hefty fine, because these are young people and they will say, "Well, that is £15 to you". In Australia I believe it is slightly higher. Is that correct?

Professor Birch: It is \$20. I am not sure exactly what that is.

Glenn Gottfried: So it would be very minimal. We are not forcing anyone to vote. We are requiring them to show up to the ballot box, because we do suggest that there should be the option of “none of the above”. They are not being forced to vote for any particular party, so they do have that option to not vote for any party.

Q37 Fabian Hamilton: What is the best, “none of the above” or Mickey Mouse or a write-in candidate? A lot of people might think, “I don’t like any of the above but I would really like to see so-and-so, or my class teacher or my mate as the local councillor or MP”.

Chris Ruane: Mickey Mouse might get elected. Then where would we be?

Fabian Hamilton: You would have to require them to be a real person.

Mark Durkan: Would anybody know the difference?

Fabian Hamilton: They may not know the difference, that is right.

Professor Birch: Some of these details would have to be up for discussion, but I know that in the United States each state organises elections differently. In a lot of states, I think, they have “abstain” on the ballot paper. In some states you are allowed to write in the name of a candidate. But I think what we are trying to do is to suggest that this proposal is something that should be debated, the details of enforcement and so forth, possibly following the Australian one. It would be something that would have to be worked out in the course of time.

Glenn Gottfried: Obviously there would be procedures for those who are not able to show up to the ballot box or perhaps for whatever reason decide that they can’t do it. There would be some sort of process for them to contact their local council to say that they are not able to do such a task, but nonetheless that would actually make them think about it. They would have to make the effort to make sure that they didn’t have to turn up for whatever reason it may be.

Chair: It may be worth pointing out that, as members of political parties, MPs can do a great deal personally by their own energy to increase turnouts. As Members of Parliament, we are very strictly limited, indeed prohibited, from engaging in that activity and using our incumbency or our resources to do that. I don’t know if that is something that needs to be examined, but I leave it on the table.

Q38 David Morris: I notice that it is very hard to get young people voting. Do you think it should be compulsory for first-time voters to go to the ballot box?

Glenn Gottfried: Yes. That is essentially what our policy recommendation is from our report.

Q39 David Morris: I have been looking at the figures. In 1997 it was a 71% turnout, in 2001 it was 59%, and then it went up in 2005 and went up again in 2010. That was probably a perception for change in the country of the economic downturn. But do you think to increase turnout even further we should make voting compulsory for all voter ages?

Glenn Gottfried: We understand that that would probably be a more radical step than first-time compulsory voting. We think that there is evidence to provide that doing it for first-time eligible voters would make a significant enough impact over time that perhaps full compulsory voting would not be necessary.

Q40 David Morris: Just going back to the Australian model, have you seen any evidence that even though the turnout is high because of compulsory voting, the actual number of people who do turn out to vote has been dropping? Is there any evidence of that or is it pretty static?

Glenn Gottfried: It is pretty static. It is quite high. You are talking well above 90% as the average turnout rate for the Australian elections.

Q41 David Morris: To go on to the Mickey Mouse vote, do you have any figures to suggest that?

Glenn Gottfried: There is no evidence to suggest that there have been any so-called donkey votes in Australia.

Professor Birch: It is less than 5%.

Glenn Gottfried: Yes. So it is very minimal.

Q42 David Morris: Why do you think that is? In the UK we see in our elections “none of the above” in various forms of description on the ballot paper in local as well as national elections. Why do you find that in Australia it seems to be a static portion that want to tick “none of the above” even though they are being made to vote? Why do you think that is? Without putting words in your mouth, do you think that their democracy is perceived to be healthier, or is it more of a demographic or geographical pattern that you see because of the way the population is situated in Australia?

Professor Birch: The evidence that we have suggests that there is a high level of satisfaction with democracy overall in countries, including Australia, that have compulsory voting across the board for all groups. So it does seem that those countries are happier with the way their democracy works. If you are happy with the way that your democracy works, then presumably you are going to be less likely to go to the polling station and spoil your ballot or vote in such a way that does not really indicate a genuine choice. I would say there is something about compulsory voting that makes everyone feel that their voice is heard.

Q43 Chair: One question from me. We obviously want to be careful about how politicians get involved in this, and one of the impartial bodies that is out there and set up to help in this field is the Electoral Commission. I think the last Electoral Commission report I saw was about the handful of people who committed voter fraud. There are some 30 million people who do not vote at a general election and over 6 million not on the electoral register. Do you think we need to look at the terms of reference of the Electoral Commission so that it has a stronger focus on improving participation in our democracy?

Glenn Gottfried: I think you need to question what in fact the Electoral Commission’s role is. Things such as voting fraud are very serious, but there are other aspects that the Electoral Commission can be looking into to ensure that we have a full, healthy democracy. Obviously registration is an important aspect. It is something that should be considered. Democracy progresses in one form or another and the Electoral Commission’s role will have to inevitably change over time. There is nothing wrong with a healthy overlook to see what its role is and what it should be doing, what it should not be doing and so on.

Professor Birch: When the Electoral Commission was first set up, it was in the wake of a dramatic decline in turnout, and one of the things that it did, as you know, quite a number of years ago was focus very much on the issue of voter participation. Then there was some concern that some of the

measures that had been suggested to deal with declining voter participation had possibly opened the door for certain types of voter fraud, so now there is more of an emphasis on voter fraud in the work that the Electoral Commission does. I think that the Electoral Commission, by definition because of its role, addresses the things that are of the greatest concern to the public and politicians, in their view the greatest problems of the moment, and I am sure you will be asking them about their role. I imagine that the Electoral Commission is bound by its democratic mandate to address concerns that are of public interest.

Q44 Chris Ruane: On the back of what Graham has just mentioned there, the statistic is—sent in a parliamentary answer to me—that between 2008 and 2012 there was one successful prosecution for electoral registration fraud. Between 2001 and 2013, a 12-year period, there was seven successful cases of postal ballot prosecutions. One case in those seven cases was absolutely terrible. But the Electoral Commission are putting forward proposals now to stop all of us around this table touching a postal ballot form, even handing one to our constituents. They are proposing photo IDs for people going to vote. These are barriers to greater participation, and I believe the focus of the Electoral Commission is totally imbalanced. The question is, to reinforce Graham’s question once again, do the Electoral Commission have the balance right between participation and registration and security?

Glenn Gottfried: I think you have to be cautious about what barriers you put in place. As I said, electoral fraud is a serious issue. You have to do what you can to eliminate that, but you also have to place precautions that are not barriers. Things like requiring to show up with a photo ID—how do you ensure that everybody has a photo ID so they can turn up to vote and their vote will be counted? I can’t comment per se on all the steps that the Electoral Commission has taken, but I do think that these are serious questions that need to be asked, and perhaps reviewed, to ensure that everybody still has the same access to the voting booth as before.

Professor Birch: Ultimately, the Electoral Commission makes suggestions, but it is Parliament that makes the law, and so those measures would not be brought in unless it was decided by a majority of you and your colleagues that that was a good idea. In the Electoral Commission’s recent report on fraud to which you refer, they specify that it is a small number of places that have these problems, and they compare that with Northern Ireland. It might be possible to have some system whereby if a problem is identified, special measures could be brought in just in those areas, to have requirements, as they have in Northern Ireland, to deal with the problems in those areas alone. There are different compromise solutions that might be introduced.

Q45 Chris Ruane: I agree entirely with you on that. It is one or two areas, one or two communities, one or two ethnic groupings, and the whole of the country is being punished for it and democracy will be weakened, I think, because of that.

My allocated question is, what is your view of wider reforms of the UK’s electoral system, such as extending the franchise? Not just extending the franchise, but what was mentioned before: how do we get more people to vote? If we have celebrities like Russell Brand saying “Don’t vote”, do we need some celebrities saying “Do vote” in the black community, Operation Black Vote? Do the churches and civic society need to be involved more, or is it just being left to the so-called independent Electoral Commission to shine the torch on whatever it sees fit?

Glenn Gottfried: I think there are people in the communities that you mention who are out there encouraging the vote. Perhaps they are not getting the media coverage that somebody like Russell Brand obviously gets, but nonetheless it is still important for people to hear this through the mouths of their politicians. That can’t be let go. Politicians are directly elected by the public. They are there to voice the concerns of the public and make laws for the people, therefore it is important for them

to play a part and keep going out there to encourage individuals to turn out to vote. Obviously this has not been the case for the past two decades, with voter turnout declining, and that is why we think this is becoming a radical problem and it is going to need a radical institutional solution to this. That is why we suggest the idea of first-time compulsory voting to help balance that inequality within voter turnout to ensure that all voices are equally heard.

Professor Birch: A lot of countries mobilise celebrities to help get people to the polling station. I think that is a good idea. As Glenn said, we think that our proposal for first-time compulsory voting is a radical solution. We think the problem is a radical problem and we need a radical solution to address it, but we recognise that that solution will have to be introduced together with other measures. You mentioned the issue of extending the franchise, and we have considered how first-time compulsory voting might potentially work, together with reducing the voting age to 16.

This is a question I started to look at relatively recently. I was completely agnostic on the idea. I had no idea what I thought, what was the best, but when I looked at the data it became clear that people are least likely to vote when they are 18. All the data we had from Austria, Germany and Norway, where they have introduced voting at 16—either for the country as in Austria or in parts of the country as in Germany and Norway—we see that voting among 16-year-olds is actually higher than voting among 18-year-olds. It is higher than among people who are 21. If you introduce people into the electorate when they are 18, you are introducing them into the electorate at the very worst time, because they very often have recently left home, they have recently left formal education, and they are often highly mobile. The research also suggests that if you vote the first time you are eligible, then you are more likely to continue voting throughout your life, as Glenn referred to. So if people enter the electorate when they are 18, they are less likely to vote throughout their life because they are less likely to vote when they are 18.

Moving the voting age to 16, as they are going to be doing in Scotland in the independence referendum—we will have to see what happens there—could potentially help to address the problem, together with measures like first-time compulsory voting. But also, we think that introducing voting at 16 would work quite well with first-time compulsory voting because, of course, many polling stations are in schools, and if young people were still in school at the age of 16, then it would be much easier for them to vote. They could just go along to a polling station that was potentially right near their classroom.

Q46 Mr Turner: You vote where you live, not where you go to work. The people who are voting would be at home not at a school.

Professor Birch: Yes, but they know where the polling station is because they go there every day.

Mr Turner: No, they don't. It is no good them recognising a school. They have to go to the correct school, which may well not be the school they attend.

Professor Birch: This may be the case for some people. I don't know the details of how many people would be voting at the school that they actually attend, but certainly the idea of going into a school and doing something in a school would not be so foreign to them as to somebody who is 18 and has left school for a while, and is no longer so familiar with going into a school and doing things. A school-type atmosphere is one that they would be relatively familiar with, and if they know where their own school is, presumably they will know where other schools in their area are as well, because they have friends who are at the other schools. So we think this is a good point in their lives to introduce them to voting. It is also a point in their lives when many more things are compulsory for them, not least attending school, and so the idea of being made to do something by

the law is something that perhaps would not be quite so foreign to them as it might be slightly later in their lives.

Chair: I am keen to move on relatively quickly, because I know that colleagues want to go and see Mrs Merkel, who is addressing the House later.

Q47 Chris Ruane: The last question is on funding. In terms of the inequality of turnout, the Government has recently announced that it will be funding several initiatives to try to increase voter registration, particularly by reaching out to groups who feel most distant from the political process. I think £4.2 million has been allocated for this, and the Electoral Commission have their budgets as well. We need to get value for money. The Electoral Commission campaigns for registration at each election, when it is cross-referenced with the download for the electoral registration forms. In 2005 it was £73 per download. Its best is £4.94 per download as a result of their awareness campaigns on registration. Do you think this £4.2 million that the Government has allocated, and the Electoral Commission's money, could perhaps be spent through other groups—civic society groups like Bite the Ballot, who have registered 20,000 pupils for next to nothing? Do you think that we should be looking at innovative ways of using this public money, this public procurement, to get people on the register?

Glenn Gottfried: I have spoken with Bite the Ballot before, and they are very effective. In the last voter registration data about two or three weeks ago, they did have a successful campaign. If anything, the Electoral Commission should be learning from what they do and how they do it to ensure that more people are registering to vote. I don't want to undervalue the idea of how important it is to get people to register to vote, but the other bigger problem that we are discussing here is about people not turning out to vote despite being registered, and that is what needs to be looked at more seriously. Obviously this Select Committee is part of that beginning.

Q48 Robert Neill: The trouble I have with your concept is the idea that at the age of 18 you are going to be fined £15; you can get that for putting your feet up on the bus, virtually. I suggest that might engender contempt for the process rather than respect for it. It is interesting to think about it, because that brings you back to enforceability and how you actually enforce the fine. Have you done any studies as to what the collection costs of the fine might be? You might run the risk, as very often courts find, that very low levels of fines, if they are going to be collected, cost you more to collect than imposing the fine, so you are putting a burden on the taxpayer. Have you done any work on that?

Glenn Gottfried: Of course these are the things that we need to discuss and have properly implemented. This is the first step—that we address the problem—and we are exploring ideas of how to address this problem. I think there are ways to do this, because other countries do enforce it, Australia being one of them, so we would have to look to examples of how it is done abroad.

Q49 Robert Neill: But you have not given any thought to enforcement costs yourselves.

Professor Birch: We have given some thought to it. We decided that the overall concept needed to be debated first, and we are proposing that people debate the overall concept. But certainly it would have to be self-funding, so the fine would have to be set at a level at which it could fund the collection. But most people obey the law. Most citizens of the UK are law-abiding citizens who will do something if it is a legal requirement. The fine would only be for the small minority who decide not to obey the law. Simply introducing the law would solve a lot of the problem.

Q50 Chair: One of the beauties of the evidence-taking stage in a Select Committee inquiry is that Members themselves and members of the public can engage with each other through the social media. On “voter engagement”—I am sure all my colleagues around the table will be in the Twittersphere immediately the Committee finishes, and I suspect some of them are in it already—we are getting quite a bit of traffic, very welcome traffic, and everybody is entitled to submit evidence to the Committee and members are entitled to engage with people they agree with or disagree with.

A final one, and a rather quick answer please: what do you think the media might be able to do to help us on improving voter turnout?

Glenn Gottfried: That is a very good question. Obviously you can’t tell the media what to do. Personally, I believe you focus on Russell Brand; you should be focusing also on voices that have come out in response to his suggestion to not vote. A more balanced debate, I guess would be my answer to that.

Professor Birch: Some of the other research I have done suggests that the one thing that voters really don’t like about the political debate is what they perceive as being spin. The media could have a better relationship with politicians, and politicians could have a better relationship with the media. Therefore, politicians would be confident enough to answer the questions that people are asked in the media, and the media would be respectful enough not to try to make the politicians look like they had gone off message or said something that was not entirely in keeping with other people in their party, and respect politicians when they are trying to be direct and truthful and answering questions in as honest a way as possible. A bit more respect between politicians and the media probably would go a long way towards reducing the perception that politicians are constantly spinning, which people really appear not to like.

Chair: Sarah, Glenn, thank you very much for your help this morning. We really appreciate you coming along and the strength of your answers.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Professor Patrick Dunleavy**, Co-Director, Democratic Audit, and **Richard Berry**, Managing Editor, Democratic Audit, gave evidence.

Q51 Chair: We are going to move quickly on to Professor Patrick Dunleavy and Richard Berry. Please come and join us. You have heard the debate this morning. No doubt there are things that you might want to pick up on in your own evidence, but we have colleagues who are going to kick you off by asking a couple of questions. Paul, I think you have the first one.

Paul Flynn: The 2012 Democratic Audit suggested certain improvements to the efficiency of our democracy. What are the most important ones?

Professor Dunleavy: We need to think about what arrangements we are thinking of. The 2012 Democratic Audit was designed to assess overall effectiveness, and we would say that changes to the electoral system were the key ones at that time, and they remain very important. Any change in the electoral system that would tend to bring more people into being involved in the election of representatives would be the suggestion that we would make.

Q52 Paul Flynn: In the first 1974 general election, the Liberal Democrats had a huge increase in votes without any relative increase in the number of MPs. For two general elections in

Wales, the Conservative Party secured 20% of the vote without a single MP of the 40 Welsh MPs. Isn't the lack of proportional representation the most outrageously unfair part of our democracy?

Chair: And therefore may have an impact on turnout, I think is your point.

Paul Flynn: The results in most constituencies were entirely predictable, have not changed in donkey's years, and the number of people who actually change Governments, whose votes matter, is tiny.

Professor Dunleavy: That is true, and there are very well rehearsed arguments for improving the electoral system, but I think we need to situate where we are now in terms of recent context, particularly the vote on the alternative vote proposal in 2011. At the moment we would suggest that the only really viable and effective cross-party-supported kind of change that would be feasible in British political settings would be possibly looking at proportional representation for local government, which has been introduced in Scotland and has worked well in terms of improving voter engagement and political diversity there. It is also being looked at in Wales, and it is likely to be considered by some of the political parties in their general election manifestos next year.

The one change that we would strongly recommend, which is a very minimal change that might well prove to be in line with British voters' attitudes, as expressed recently in the AV election, would be to think about something like the supplementary vote, the system that is used for the London mayoral election. This is a British system. It has been used many times in Britain for electing the London mayor and other mayors. It was used in the police commissioner elections very successfully nationwide in England and Wales. It is a very small change, but it would mean that a much larger proportion of voters would be engaged in the selection of representatives than is happening at the moment.

Q53 Paul Flynn: During the vote on AV, I drove through Vauxhall Cross every morning and saw a poster there that said that if we had AV in this country, more of our soldiers would be killed in Afghanistan and more babies would die in hospital. Do you think when public debate is on a level of that kind there is any real chance of getting reforms?

Professor Dunleavy: I can't quite see the logic of that particular advertisement.

Paul Flynn: The logic was that they were saying it was going to increase Government spending to run AV, therefore there would be less for spending on protective equipment for troops in Afghanistan and less money to spend caring for babies in hospital. It was a base political argument. This is rock-bottom—subterranean probably—in terms of political debate. But those arguments won and the public voted against AV for that reason.

Professor Dunleavy: I think that the public voted against AV because it was seen as more complex than it needed to be, and as potentially able to be manipulated and likely to produce representatives who were not genuinely enjoying majority support, whereas I think the supplementary vote is a very simple-to-use system. You can only win the election if you are in the top two, but it does encourage candidates who are likely to be winning candidates to reach out a little bit beyond their party and to actually get more than 50% plus one of the votes. That would be the great advantage.

Q54 Paul Flynn: Do you think that politicians are so deeply enmeshed in their own political aspirations and futures that there is a case for putting the decisions for how the electoral system is run to an independent body outside of political control?

Professor Dunleavy: I think there is a case for that, and if you look at the mayoral elections and police commissioner elections, Parliament did delegate the choice of the final system that was to be used in those cases to the Electoral Commission, and the Electoral Commission did come down in favour of the supplementary vote both times. As I say, it is a system we have used a lot. A lot of British voters have used it. There have been no criticisms that I know of that are of any substance about the system. It certainly does not cost any more to administer than ordinary voting procedures. We think that is an immediate step that would have very positive effects in making sure, for example, that every MP had majority support in their local constituency—genuine majority support and not just 45% or whatever.

Richard Berry: You mentioned the cost of moving to AV. I think it brings up an interesting point about the cost of elections generally. We had a quick look, and it is a rough estimate that over the past five years, the UK spent £687 million administering elections¹. That is over a wide variety of different systems and different levels, and it is a huge amount of money. I know there is room within that to do things a little differently and allow information on different systems, so I would not suggest that the cost should be a barrier to changing systems.

Professor Dunleavy: I think where the cost of elections is particularly important is that almost all of the £690 million, or whatever it is, is being spent on producing elections, if you see what I mean. If you were a company and you were running an activity that costs £135 million a year, how much would you spend on marketing and trying to engage customers with your system? If you were a charity and you were spending that amount of money or raising that amount of money, how much would you spend on marketing?

The public sector seems to be peculiarly averse to spending any money on election communications and encouraging people to vote, providing information to voters. Most of our written submission to you today deals with the very poor and ineffective means of election communication that are currently in existence, which we think is very largely responsible for some serious problems that we also identified.

Q55 David Morris: To what extent, relevant to turnover, is the problem of failing to get people registered and therefore able to vote as compared to people being disengaged with the political system more generally?

Professor Dunleavy: I think if you look at our written evidence you can see that the proportion of people who are voting in the over-55 group, among people who have degrees, is 91%, according to the British election study. That is probably slightly overstating it, but if we compare it on the same basis with young people of 18 to 34 with just GCSE or less qualification, the proportion voting is 44%. That is a huge difference, from 44% to 91%.

If you look at the OECD data, which just compares voting among young people and voting among older people, you will see that the UK has triple the OECD average age gap between young and old voters. It is three times worse in Britain, and it is much worse than any other country. The only two

¹ Having looked at this in more detail, we have revised our estimate of UK spending on elections over the past 5 years upward to £764 million. This does not include the cost to local authorities of registering voters. The details of this estimate are available online: <http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=3537>

countries that are even remotely close are Japan and Korea, which also have quite a problem with an ageing population. That is one and a half times greater than any other country in the EU.

That is a structural problem. You can't think of that as being a motivational problem. It is a structural problem. It is down to young people's position in the housing market, the fact that they are moving, the fact that people don't have jobs for life any more. They have portfolio careers where you have to move quite regularly to get jobs if you are a young person. Also, a lot of young people are in the rental sector, which has also much less structural registration.

These problems have been known for a long time. Very little that is effective has been done about them. We are urging you to ask the Electoral Commission to think about ways in which they can counteract these structural limits.

Q56 David Morris: Are there any specific causes you would see as having a particularly significant effect on voter registration and turnout?

Professor Dunleavy: Yes. Whenever we do focus groups, we always divide the focus group into two. We have one for people who are aged under 40 and one for people aged over 40. I can't tell you the extent of the difference. People over 40 have their children in school, they are engaged in the local community, they are using the health service, they are getting their granny looked after, they are driving around on roads with potholes and so on. They have lots of experience of how to deal with government, how to deal with public service agencies. They know the names of their local MP and so on.

People aged under 35 don't really know any of that. Young people particularly don't. They can't get that very diffuse, informal, multiple-channel, local community information about when elections are, who is standing and what the issues are. If they do go and vote, they never find out what happened to that vote. They never get any feedback from councils on what the results were.

It is quite a disappointing thing to show up at an old primary school that is empty, full of echoing halls, there is nobody else there, you vote, you go away and you never find out what happened. We have a lot of structural factors that are putting people off voting, especially young people, and are delaying people's engagement with the political process. What we are suggesting is a proper, modern, well organised, online digital communication strategy, spending a decent amount of money on marketing elections. Why produce something but not market it at all? It is a completely counterproductive stance at the moment from the Electoral Commission and from many local authorities.

Q57 Tracey Crouch: What are your views on the comments that we had earlier about the link between low participation rates and confidence in politicians? I could see you nodding in the gallery, so I just wanted to know what your views were on that.

Professor Dunleavy: I agree that there are certain problems with public trust in politicians, but if you look at modern Europe now you can see that countries that have high levels of overall trust in their institutional set-ups are perhaps the most Euro-sceptical countries. Britain has quite high

overall levels of trust in its institutional set-up, so I think it is a very specific, election-related thing. People have trust in their local representatives more than their remote national representatives and so on.

I think we could engage a lot more people and provide a lot more information before elections, and then provide feedback immediately after elections—what happened as a result of your voting in your ward and your area—and do that very accessibly. We would like to see a web app where you just put your postcode in and it updated you when the elections were coming up and told you who the candidates were. Maybe it could provide links so you can see what the issues are and what happened last time, you could go and vote and then you would get very speedy and timely updating. You don't want to know about it two months later. You want to know two or three days later what happened to your vote and whether it had an effect.

Q58 Tracey Crouch: Are you saying that people have trust in the institution—our parliamentary system and our local government system—but not trust or respect in the people who work within those systems, the politicians?

Professor Dunleavy: Yes. I think there is a lot more trust in the overall workings of the systems and how the different parts of the system interact: Parliament, Government, civil service, local councils. There is more trust in how they work in the aggregate, but there is a lack of trust in individual representatives, produced by, for example, many representatives not really having the moral legitimacy of 50%-plus-one support. Anything that could improve that, anything that could connect people a lot more effectively with representatives and what they are doing, we think could be very important.

Q59 Tracey Crouch: What about the question of party whipping? Do you think that politicians who are either independent or more independently minded are going to gain that confidence from their electorate?

Professor Dunleavy: I certainly think that the various moves that have been made in the House of Commons in the last four years to improve the independence of MPs have been very positively received by the public. Last time we were before this Committee we were pointing out the very radical improvements in media visibility of Select Committees and the positive impact of the Wright reforms. I do think that anything that shows that politicians are connected to voters and are acting on their behalf, and are not just there to represent the party, is going to be beneficial to electoral legitimacy.

Q60 Tracey Crouch: Richard, before I move on, do you have any comments on that specific issue?

Richard Berry: I would reinforce that and say that the first issue is probably a correlation between lack of trust and lack of knowledge. If you don't know who are the candidates standing in your local area at the next election, you might be more likely to say, "I don't trust the politicians who are

asking for my vote”, because you don’t know who they are. It is quite hard to find out who is standing for election until it is imminent.

National elections obviously have blanket coverage for years ahead of the election, but local elections don’t get much coverage in the local media. Also, the public authorities, the council itself and the Electoral Commission don’t give very much advance information that is locally relevant to people about who is standing and which elections are coming up. I think if people could access something like that online we might see a change, a shift in people’s attitudes with regards to trust.

Q61 Tracey Crouch: Do you think that engagement with voters is as important during elections as it is at election time?

Richard Berry: I think it is important throughout the electoral period and electoral process.

Q62 Tracey Crouch: Just very quickly, you heard the IPPR talking about voting being compulsory for first-time voters. What are your views on that proposal?

Professor Dunleavy: We think it is an interesting idea for discussion. We are in favour, as our written submission makes clear. We think the argument for lowering the voting age to 16 is a strong one and a very low-risk one, and could have very positive democratic gains and would not create any significant risk or partisan effects of any kind. We are in favour of that. We were not in favour of treating first-time voters differently from other people. If there was a general move towards compulsory voting, that would be fine, but I think we are long way off that and I think it would be highly invidious to impose a burden on young people at this stage.

Q63 Mr Turner: Do you think it is better to have different elections on different days or it would be, as I think happens in the United States, all the elections on one day?

Professor Dunleavy: Given the way the UK votes, it is quite likely that you are going to have several elections on the same election day periodically. For example, we are going to have local elections and European elections on 22 May. That is very good for turnout on these occasions. People seem to quite like having multiple elections on the same day. What you need to be sure of is to make sure that the voting systems are consistent in their design across these things. We are strongly in favour of X voting being all on the same day. If you were to have some other kind of system, such as you have in the Scottish local government, you need to be a bit careful there.

I think that generally speaking it is a very good idea to have elections in a regular cycle and a very good idea to have elections being communicated to people in a systematic and integrated way, because almost everybody here in the UK has six or seven tiers of representation. If you are in London, for example, you have a local councillor, you have a borough council; you are interested in how that is made up. You have a GLA Assembly member, you have a local member and you also have list members who are London-wide members. You have the London mayor, who is also kind of a police commissioner for London. Then you have your MP and then you have your MEP.

So there are a lot of elections happening all the time. We need to be presenting those as a coherent narrative that is constantly available to voters so that they know that these things are coming up every year, and we need to try to spread out the higher turnout from the general election to these other forms of election. Absolutely nothing has ever been done about that in Britain. It has been left to individual bodies to communicate their own elections. We are just pouring money down the drain on ineffective communication.

Q64 Mr Turner: Would you like to say what is the picture on the Isle of Wight or any other constituency, but not London? The trouble is, we are getting a London view and most of us come from outside London.

Professor Dunleavy: If you are outside London then usually you will have a district council and a district councillor, or you may have a county councillor and a county council. You have a police commissioner.

Mr Turner: Yes, but you are double-counting there. You are mentioning a member of the district council. That is only one; that is not two. We only have one between us. I am just pointing out that what you are saying to us for London does not apply to most of the country.

Professor Dunleavy: I think you will find there are six or seven contests that you are interested in.

Mr Turner: No, I am sorry, there are three in my constituency.

Professor Dunleavy: Which constituency?

Mr Turner: The Isle of Wight.

Professor Dunleavy: You have a council. Do you have a county council?

Mr Turner: No.

Professor Dunleavy: You have a district councillor.

Mr Turner: No.

Professor Dunleavy: You have a council?

Mr Turner: We have a council.

Professor Dunleavy: You have council wards.

Mr Turner: There is only one.

Professor Dunleavy: Is it just one ward?

Mr Turner: You only vote once for the—I am not clear that you are clear what is happening.

Professor Dunleavy: You might be interested in who represents me in my local ward, you might be interested in what is the balance of representatives on the council.

Mr Turner: I see. This is from the point of view of people voting.

Professor Dunleavy: Yes. Then you have an MEP, an MP and a police commissioner. You are probably a little bit simpler than everybody else.

Richard Berry: We are based in London but I am from Manchester, and I worked out that going forward between now and 2020 there will be an election in Manchester every year. Having those elections on different days would mean people being asked to vote twice a year. There is a general election, a city election and the PCC. The one question might be 2017, which may or may not be a European Union membership referendum, but going forward there is an election every year.

Mr Turner: I think you have answered the question about voting at 16—thank you.

Q65 Fabian Hamilton: Your written evidence says that the current provision of information about elections is “something of a scandal”. Could you expand a little on this and tell us how you think it affects voter engagement?

Professor Dunleavy: For example, the Electoral Commission has a website. We looked at it last week. We put in a Westminster postcode. It generated a result and it said there are no elections in prospect in your area, but there is a borough council election that is happening in May and there is a European Parliament election also happening in May. It is stunningly under-resourced, stunningly inefficient. It is very poor. The online provision of election information by the Electoral Commission and by a lot of councils is limited in various ways. They will give more information about elections for which they are directly responsible, and they won’t necessarily comment on other elections.

Q66 Fabian Hamilton: Most local authority websites will give details of when the next election is, though, surely.

Professor Dunleavy: Yes, but will they give timely details of who the candidates are? Will they tell people in a timely way after the election what happened in their ward?

Fabian Hamilton: They can’t give details of who the candidates are until the closing date for nominations, which is usually just a few days before the election. I know the Leeds site, for example, does publish the candidates immediately.

Professor Dunleavy: When people are nominated, why not put up the people who are nominated? Why do you have to wait until the last possible moment?

Fabian Hamilton: I suspect because the authorities feel they are giving unfair advantage to those who are nominated maybe a week before the deadline. You will find that most candidates will not be nominated until just a few days before the deadline.

Professor Dunleavy: In itself that behaviour by political parties inhibits voters’ access to information. You should encourage parties to have, for example, prospective parliamentary

candidates identified as early as possible and campaigning and active in the constituency they are seeking to represent.

Fabian Hamilton: To be fair, they do. Certainly my experience, and the experience of probably everybody in this room, would be that when we were nominated as prospective parliamentary candidates, we started campaigning immediately. Obviously nominations did not close until a few days before the general election, but I was nominated in September 1990 for the 1992 election and I started campaigning immediately. A lot of people would have known that I was the prospective Labour candidate a year and a half before the election.

Professor Dunleavy: Yes, that would be the suggestion we would make. Authorities and electoral law should encourage these kinds of behaviours and not discourage them by limiting information.

Fabian Hamilton: Forgive me, I don't think we need the Electoral Commission or any authorities to encourage us to do that. If you are anxious and desperate or really desire to get elected, which is why you have been selected in the first place, in a seat that is not already held by your party, then surely you are going to campaign immediately. I bet there is no Member in this room who did not start campaigning the minute they were selected, which is often a year, two years, sometimes three years before the general election.

Professor Dunleavy: Yes, but all I am suggesting is that if it is known that you are the prospective parliamentary candidate and you have already been nominated, why doesn't the local authorities convey that information to people via their website?

Fabian Hamilton: Because they are very frightened of being accused of being partisan.

Professor Dunleavy: The law needs to be changed in that respect.

Q67 Fabian Hamilton: I would agree with that. Can I ask you—you have elaborated to a certain extent—what other information you think should be provided? Do you think that local authorities, electoral registration authorities and the Electoral Commission should be taking much more of a lead? From what you have said, Professor Dunleavy, it seems you do think that. I think parties do take a lead because they want their people to have an advantage, but should the so-called neutral authorities also be much more proactive?

Professor Dunleavy: Yes, indeed. I don't think if you were running a £700 million business you would spend no money on marketing. I think a reasonable proportion of the budget needs to be allocated not to producing elections but to helping people get to the elections, find out where they are and so on. In modern times there should be a well developed phone app or tablet app that you can use. You just put in your postcode and it tells you what elections are upcoming, it tells you which ward you are in, it makes sure you are registered, links to political parties who are local in the area and so on, and provides as much information as it can to make participation attractive. Then, when you have voted, it updates you very quickly and lets you know what happened as a result of your voting.

Q68 Fabian Hamilton: I think that is a brilliant idea, and I hope anybody who is listening will take that one up. Mr Berry, do you have anything to add?

Richard Berry: I would say that the Government is very keen on open data, which most people welcome and we welcome. Election results are not open data. They are published by local authorities and by other bodies as well, but not in an open and accessible way. Some councils will upload a handwritten election result form and scan it in and publish it as a PDF, and that is the only way to find out who won your ward. Nobody else publishes the information in an open way. If we had some kind of open-data principles that all organisations, including councils, used when publishing election results, that would make it far easier for people to come along and create these apps. It does not necessarily have to be the Government or the Electoral Commission who do that legwork, but if they make the data available it would be far easier for others to do that.

We have seen some individuals who do that and get election results and put them into websites and make them quite accessible in a user-friendly way, but it is very hard to get the data to do that quickly.

Q69 Fabian Hamilton: I know from my own experience that all the elections that I have been involved in personally, and even the local authority elections, I have published on my website since I have been an MP and put the percentage breakdowns, turnouts and so on. You are right that it is quite hard to find them, especially in areas where the winning candidates don't publish them.

Professor Dunleavy: If you have a PhD in political science you can do it, but you need to know in great detail what the remit of different authorities is and how the different areas interleave and so on. Older, more skilled and better-educated people can cope with this complexity, but we are doing absolutely nothing to simplify that complexity and to transmit the information in the most accessible way. That really is a scandal. Nationally our practices are worse than, let's say, Ireland, and in many cases you could say they are almost worse than Bangladesh and places like that. It has been a very long-term decline.

Fabian Hamilton: I would agree.

Q70 Mark Durkan: You are suggesting improvements in the administration of elections, and that would include issues like online voting, getting individuals in a democracy, holding elections at weekends rather than on a Thursday. What changes do you think would be most important to increasing turnout in the first instance? Secondly, are there any particular issues in relation to registration that you would look at, based on experiences elsewhere including, as you mentioned, Ireland? Obviously there was an experience of moving some elections and referenda to a Friday, for instance, and other things like that.

Professor Dunleavy: I think if you look across Europe the general pattern is that elections that are held on the weekend have a 10% higher turnout than elections that are held on working days. We think that is a pretty easy win. It has costs in terms of higher overtime pay or something like that, but if you were interested in increasing turnout, that would be a useful thing. We think we should definitely have a sustained, serious experiment of using online voting on a larger scale than has been tried before, and that would help reduce many people's problems with it.

Finally we think there is a lot of scope for using elections, especially general elections, as community focus events, and at the moment that does not happen. You turn up to the school, there are maybe a couple of checkers or canvassers who are checking who has voted, you go in, everything is very sterile and there is no real sense of community life going on there. Whereas if you go to some Australian elections you can see that, if the school is closed, the PTA has a craft fair and they are selling things to raise funds. The local authority has come and has a stall. The social security has a stall explaining your rights and so on. It is used as a focus for outreach and community activity, and that encourages people to come along and vote, have a cup of coffee and participate in a wider community feeling.

These are not difficult things to do, they just require a bit of inventive approach by the Electoral Commission and other bodies and moving away from the 1884 practices and obsessions that we have that dominate the voting scene and make it rather unpalatable and off-putting.

Q71 Mark Durkan: Without falling into those obsessions, are content enough from what you understand from the business—and I have a firm in my own constituency whose business is electronic counts, electronic voting and all the rest of it—that that can all be done in ways that are fair and secure and that people are not going to suspect that the technology has been used or abused in any particular way?

Professor Dunleavy: There are some very big countries in the world that are using electronic voting. India and Brazil use it. You can design electronic voting systems that have high levels of audit capability to make sure you can analyse and track—

Mark Durkan: Extending that to online as well?

Professor Dunleavy: Yes, that is what I would say. You could easily get to that. You would not be able to do it all in one go. You would need to start by having some trials and working through it.

Q72 Mark Durkan: I go back to a question you answered earlier relation to this question of having elections on the same day. In the context of the debate we had here on fixed-term Parliaments, there was a very strong concern from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that there was a high risk in having devolved elections on the same day as a general election, not just because of the confusion that arises when you have two different voting systems—and we have had that experience in Northern Ireland and Scotland has had it—but also because in terms of election coverage and election debate, one will eclipse the other. The media, particularly the broadcast media, will find it easy to say that in respect of the obligations they have for balance and coverage, the easiest thing for them to do is be very selective and within that very selective coverage be balanced. But you will then find that many people will say that a whole side of one or more campaigns ends up not covered.

Professor Dunleavy: I agree that devolved Government and general elections would not be elections you would want to hold on the same day. I understand there will be extensions of the timescales for that.

Richard Berry: Local media coverage of local elections is not that great to begin with. There were borough elections in London in May, but despite reading the *Evening Standard* and the looking at

the BBC local news most days, you wouldn't know that. I think Patrick is right that there are issues with devolved and general elections, but the local election media coverage probably needs to be boosted somehow anyway.

Mark Durkan: Particularly as local media seems to be getting less and less local.

Q73 Chris Ruane: Individual electoral registration, as you know, will require the national insurance number. Data matching for IER is as low as 55% in Tower Hamlets. The Electoral Commission are proposing to forbid MPs and political parties from touching postal ballot registration forms because there have been seven successful prosecutions in 13 years, and the Electoral Commission are proposing voter photo ID to stop voter registration fraud because there has been one successful prosecution in four years. What cumulative effect do you think that these acts or proposals will have on registration and turnout?

Professor Dunleavy: We feel that the Electoral Commission has become a bit too obsessive about the regulation and production of elections and has given insufficient time and money and attention to the promotion and encouragement of voting itself. We would be very worried that introducing any document check at the polls would have serious adverse effects on turnout.

Chris Ruane: And the others?

Professor Dunleavy: We have not investigated electoral regulation. It is obviously very important that the integrity of elections should be beyond doubt, but I agree that it would seem a bit problematic to restrict parties' and candidates' abilities to encourage people to be registered.

Richard Berry: I would agree with that wholeheartedly. I think the bigger issue is probably that people who are very mobile in their lives, move around a lot and move house, especially young people, don't tend to register quickly in a new place. They move to a new area and they don't register and therefore are disenfranchised at the next election that takes place. I think that is the bigger issue. We need to make it easier for people to be able to register if possible. Some people who move house during election time—as is happening to me in May—won't be able to register, because there is a deadline cut-off to register. I am moving 16 days before the election, so if you move in that period you cannot register.

Q74 Paul Flynn: Should registration on election day be allowed?

Professor Dunleavy: Yes.

Richard Berry: Yes, that would help address that.

Professor Dunleavy: There might need to be a safeguard where you declare that you are not registered somewhere else, and there would be a penalty if you breach that, but we would be in favour of that.

Q75 Chair: I can see there would be a strong reason on that occasion to bring in some serious identification, because obviously this would be a last-minute thing and you would not want people bringing in disrepute. But to pick up Chris's point, it does seem rather odd that a handful of cases are generating such interest when the scandal of 30 million people not voting in the general election and over 6 million not being registered has not generated a proportion of that response. What is your view on that?

Professor Dunleavy: You are the key institutional shareholders who could ask the Electoral Commission to justify their stance. My personal position is that they seem to have become more and more concerned with party finances and regulation of elections and given less and less coverage and time and effort to encouraging a genuine participation in the voting process. That is a huge pity, I think.

Q76 Chair: Is that something that needs addressing through their terms of reference, or is it merely perhaps a nudge in the right direction and a cultural change that is required there?

Professor Dunleavy: I think it comes down to two things. The fact is that they have various legal burdens that are placed on them and they have had a restricted budget, so they have progressively focused down on doing the things that they legally are duty-bound to do. That is one thing.

The second thing is that if you look at the composition of the members themselves, it is entirely weighted towards the legal, regulatory, party finance orientation. I think that there is nobody at the moment on the Electoral Commission who is in the least bit credentialled or seems to be interested in encouraging voter participation and democracy efficacy. That seems to me a huge shame. I would like to see a half-and-half balance in people who are interested in regulation and legal controls and party finances and people who are interested in trying to make elections work. That is just not represented on the Electoral Commission at the moment.

Q77 Chair: I mentioned to previous witnesses the question about the over-concentration of power in non-elected institutions. No. 10 Downing Street is not directly elected, and no one is elected in Whitehall or the media, yet institutions that are elected—your local Member of Parliament and your local councillor—are labouring under an immense burden of over-centralised power, which this Committee has looked at over a number of years. Do you feel that that is one of the reasons why people feel, “What is the point of voting? We are not going to change anything because our representatives are not in a position to change things in a way that might be satisfactory”?

Professor Dunleavy: In some parts of the country we have introduced devolution, and in other parts of the country we have, for example, a London mayor and a London Assembly. The London mayor has been quite effective in providing a focus for people to be interested in politics and to look at issues.

I think that England itself, as a country with 55 million people, is a very large unit. If you look across the western world it is one of the largest undeveloped bits of population that you can find. I think if people had more information about local elections and regional, national and other elections, even European elections, and they had more sense of being able to connect with those representatives—which they are not being given at the moment because of electoral

communication being very focused on the general elections—that might have some positive effects. That might encourage people to ask Whitehall for more devolution, but I think you need to have that working with the grain of public opinion.

Q78 Mark Durkan: Further to the point on the powers that seem to lie with unelected institutions, you can go back to this whole issue about trust in politicians and relevance in terms of people's vote and currency. The Houses of Parliament, of course, have two Chambers. One is unelected and the other is elected. I sometimes find it bizarre why all the main parties in this place have locked themselves into a convention that basically says amendments won't be done in the House of Commons, amendments will be done in the House of Lords. When we find ourselves dealing with questions coming from people, including young people, about, "What do you do, what is your role as MP?" we are left with a situation where the claim rate for success in terms of amendments or Bills and all the rest of it is seen to be in the House of Lords rather than in the House of Commons.

Politicians invariably—the elected politicians—end up pleading powerlessness on most of the issues about which they are asked, because they did not get time to vote: "Yes, this big Bill was passed but there was very little time because the vote was guillotined". Things are not guillotined in the Lords. Do you not think there is a fundamental issue that, yes, we are right to look at the Home Office reform, we are right to be looking at the issues about engagement and all the rest of it, but we need to be looking at the credibility and relevance of our own processes as elected legislators?

Professor Dunleavy: Yes, I think you have expressed it very well. Obviously I think it is very important for democratic institutions to be constantly trying to be as good as they possibly can be rather than just running along in a familiar mode.

All I would say is that we have seen various changes in the Select Committee area. With the coalition Government, we have seen a higher level than normal of intra-party dissent over the last four years. We have seen, for example, the vote on Syria, which arguably had an immediate and dramatic effect on British Government policy, and that change then arguably had a pretty dramatic effect on US Government and international policy. So it is perfectly possible for a powerful House of Commons that is voting independently and looking at issues on their merits to have worldwide impacts. That is a very good example of such an effect.

Mark Durkan: Then we go back to guillotines and supported amendments never getting put.

Q79 Chair: Patrick, a final question is one that I asked witnesses previously about the media. Do you think it has a corrosive effect on our democracy? Do you think it could have a very positive effect in improving our democracy, in particular voter turnout? What is your view on the role that the media might play?

Professor Dunleavy: We are very strongly in favour of introducing more direct communication as a form of competition with the media. The problem with any media is that they are there as an intermediary, and the intermediary has their own values and their own ways of looking at things. Journalists have tended to say, "We don't like covering politics" or, "We are going to cover it only very superficially and we are not going to give people detailed information. We are not going to give them local information, we are going to keep it very nationally focused. We are only going to

cover very selected issues and will not give any enduring coverage”, and so on. There are a lot of very strong structural problems that are introduced if you rely completely on the media.

What we would like to see is Parliament, councils, the Electoral Commission, everybody who is in charge of elections, having a very much more active role in direct communication to citizens, bypassing the media. We think that would have good effects in forcing the media to improve their coverage of elections and the election process.

To give you an example, we are just starting a new project where we are trying to put together a library of images that shows people voting and that shows democracy in Britain in action. At the moment it is almost impossible to find any images that people can use or that people can look at that convey some of the degree of excitement and interest that people have in politics. You have this rather jaded core of journalists sitting between you and citizens, constantly imposing a pall of journalistic values, which we think deserves to be competed with. It is the same thing with academics. We are now doing a lot more blogging and direct communication with a much wider range of people and we are less reliant on the media than we used to be. I think the same could be true for voting and politicians’ relations with the public.

Q80 Chair: I get the sense in many of your remarks that you yearn for a more celebratory, exciting, lively system, where the civic duty of going to vote is something that gives you a real kick as an individual elector. I don’t want to go back to the days of Hogarth where it was bunting and beer and fistfights and the rest of it. That was exciting in its own way, I guess.

My own local council, coming up to election time, just put up loads of stuff, decorated the council house, not with parties and slogans but with, “Voting coming up in May. Now is your big chance. Get out there”. There were lots of pictures of citizens. I found that really exciting and it was a tremendous thing that they were doing. Is there a way that ultimately we can try to lift people? That has to be a very quick answer.

Professor Dunleavy: We have to reduce drastically the costs of voting, the costs of finding out where to vote, who is standing, what happens after you vote. I think all of that would be tremendous. We could do a lot very cheaply and effectively via digital communications. We can get a lot more of a pro-voting, pro-participation message into the public domain, and we think there is a huge potential for making voting a lot more attractive than it is at the moment.

Chair: Fantastic. Richard, Patrick, thank you so much for your contribution this morning. Our inquiry goes on. Our hashtag is “#voterengagement”. Anyone who is following our proceedings who wishes to comment on anything they have heard, or indeed send evidence to the Committee, is very welcome to do that. Thank you so much for your time this morning.