

Written evidence submitted by Dr Christopher Pich, Associate Professor in Marketing at the University of Nottingham [MEL 226]

Overview

1. This written evidence is submitted in response to the Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee's inquiry into the health of electoral democracy in the United Kingdom, in the context of the Representation of the People Bill (2026). It addresses a number of the questions set out in the Committee's terms of reference, with particular focus on democratic engagement and the modernisation of elections.
2. The submission draws in part on findings from an ongoing three-phase research project, *Strengthening Sustained Democratic Engagement: A Co-Developed Toolkit for Cross-Context Application*, led by Dr Christopher Pich (University of Nottingham) and Dr Guja Armannsdottir (Nottingham Trent University). For the United Kingdom, the Jersey case study offers a relevant international comparator with clear policy implications. The submission further considers the role of collaboration and coordination among policymakers, practitioners, educators, and citizens in sustaining meaningful democratic participation.

Author Bio

3. Dr Christopher Pich is an Associate Professor in Marketing at Nottingham University Business School, University of Nottingham. His research focuses on democratic engagement and political communication across a range of contexts, including the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Guernsey, and Jersey. Dr Pich has published research in peer-reviewed academic journals including the Journal of Vocational Behavior, Journal of Business Research, European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Management, International Journal of Market Research, Journal of Politics and Policy, and the International Journal of Small States and Territories.

Summary of Submission

4. This submission addresses specific questions set out in the Committee's terms of reference relating to democratic engagement and the modernisation of elections. In particular, it provides insight into the current state of electoral democracy in Jersey, identifies key challenges facing Jersey's democratic system, and presents a co-developed, research-led toolkit. This toolkit sets out a long-term, collaborative, and

coordinated roadmap for increasing democratic engagement. As an international comparator, the Jersey case offers insights that have the potential to be replicated and scaled in other jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, to support the co-creation of knowledge, strategies, and practical interventions that are community-focused and coordinated.

- This submission draws on research that sets out a practical, research-led approach to the co-design of a toolkit to strengthen democratic engagement, with applicability beyond the original Jersey case study.
- Strengthening democratic engagement requires a long-term, inclusive, and evidence-based approach, developed collaboratively and implemented coherently across institutions and communities.
- Co-developed strategies can be understood as a flexible toolkit comprising activities, initiatives, and programmes designed to support democratic participation across different settings and demographic groups.
- Targeted, co-designed educational programmes have the potential to support sustained democratic engagement and would benefit from structured piloting, robust evaluation, and the systematic dissemination of learning.
- Addressing declining trust in, and participation with, democratic institutions requires a whole-systems approach, recognising these challenges as structural and societal in nature rather than issues amenable to isolated or short-term interventions.

The Crown Dependency of Jersey – Phase One

5. To address the specific questions set out in the Committee's terms of reference relating to democratic engagement and the modernisation of elections, this submission draws on an ongoing collaborative research project led by Dr Christopher Pich (Associate Professor in Marketing, University of Nottingham). The project focuses on the co-development of an island-wide toolkit to strengthen democratic engagement in the Crown Dependency of Jersey and is structured around three interrelated phases.
6. Jersey consistently records the lowest voter turnout in general elections among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, with average turnout standing at approximately 42 per cent (Policy Centre Jersey, 2026). In 2008, the States Assembly of Jersey lowered the voting age from 18 to 16 (Adetunji, 2008). However, subsequent evidence indicates that this reform has not led to a corresponding increase in electoral participation (Boleat, 2023).
7. In 2022, a collaborative research project was undertaken by Dr Pich and the States Greffe the administrative department supporting Jersey's Parliament, to identify the key barriers to, and drivers of, democratic engagement (Pich, 2023). As part of this first phase, a series of focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholder groups between November 2022 and February 2023. Phase one of the research identified several logistical and systemic barriers to democratic engagement, including:
 - Confusion surrounding the electoral system.
 - Uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives.

- Perceptions of the irrelevance of democratic participation.
 - Insufficient knowledge of political institutions and processes in Jersey.
 - Feelings of apathy, mistrust, and disconnection between islanders and policymakers.
 - Limited knowledge of candidates and difficulty distinguishing between political positions.
 - The effects of a transient and socially divided population; and
 - A perceived lack of accountability and transparency within political institutions (Pich, 2023).
8. In addition, the findings indicated that education was perceived as a significant barrier to democratic engagement in Jersey. The majority of participants suggested that many of the knowledge gaps identified in the research (Pich, 2023) could be addressed through the provision of targeted educational programmes focused on democratic engagement within educational institutions. On this basis, two key recommendations were made.
9. First, the research proposed the design and implementation of tailored educational programmes for different stakeholder groups, including young voters, newly enfranchised voters, returning islanders, long-term disengaged voters, and currently engaged voters. Second, it recommended that independent research be conducted on a regular basis to monitor attitudes, perceptions, and trends relating to democratic engagement. Such ongoing evaluation would support the timely development and adaptation of strategies and programmes aimed at sustaining engagement, encouraging re-engagement, and reaching those who remain disengaged from the democratic process. Both recommendations were subsequently endorsed by representatives of the States Assembly of Jersey.

Investigating Current Provision – Phase Two

10. Prior to the design and implementation of tailored educational programmes for different stakeholder groups, it was necessary to establish an understanding of the existing provision of democratic engagement educational activities in Jersey. At the time the research commenced, there was no publicly available record or published evidence mapping current provision.
11. To address this gap, Dr Christopher Pich secured external funding to support Phase Two of the study, which aimed to assess existing provision and to identify current and envisaged strategies and activities for strengthening democratic engagement (Pich et al., 2025). This phase was informed by the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups, including policymakers, educational institutions, organisations across the public, private, and third sectors, and voters.
12. Representatives from approximately 70 per cent of Jersey's secondary schools, including both public and independent institutions, contributed to Phase Two. Data collection was undertaken between January and July 2025 and consisted of a series of

in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Pich et al., 2025). The findings from Phase Two revealed that:

- Stakeholders across all sectors including academia, the third sector, policymakers, and citizens believed that educational provision for democratic engagement in Jersey requires significant reform, coordination and support.
- Participants highlighted the need for these programmes to be adequately resourced and embedded within a long-term, transparent, and consistent strategy.
- Young people for example expressed a clear desire for meaningful, authentic interaction with politicians and decision-makers and wanted to be recognised as active citizens rather than passive recipients of engagement campaigns.
- Stakeholders across sectors expressed a desire for greater coordination among stakeholder groups, increased awareness of existing democratic engagement initiatives, and the co-development of an island-wide strategy to address persistently low engagement.
- There was a widespread perception that current provision is fragmented and inconsistent, with no coherent long-term strategy in place to strengthen democratic engagement in Jersey.
- The research also identified a range of creative, inspiring, and targeted democratic engagement initiatives, often developed and delivered by individual educational institutions and third-sector organisations.
- Limited awareness of the current provision on offer and desire for coordination and a minimum level of democratic engagement education in all educational institutions in Jersey (Pich et al. 2025).

13. Overall, there was a strong consensus among participants that *education* represents a critical driver in addressing low levels of democratic engagement in Jersey. Participants emphasised the importance of providing voters with unbiased, accessible, and relevant education on democratic processes, civic responsibilities, and political institutions. Such education was viewed as most effective when delivered on a regular basis by knowledgeable and experienced stakeholders, enabling citizens to develop the skills and confidence required for informed and sustained engagement.

14. A further consistent finding was the central importance of co-creation. Participants indicated that sustained and meaningful democratic participation is more likely when citizens are actively involved in the design and delivery of democratic education programmes, rather than positioned solely as recipients of information.

Co-Designing Programmes – Phase Three

15. Building on insights into the current and desired provision of educational programmes to strengthen democratic engagement in Jersey (Pich et al., 2025), the next stage of the research (Phase Three) focuses on the co-development of a strategic toolkit entitled *Engage Jersey* (Pich and Armannsdottir, Forthcoming). This

community-supported strategy is intended to provide policymakers, practitioners, educators, and third-sector stakeholders with a systematic and practical roadmap for strengthening sustained democratic engagement.

16. Additional external funding was secured to support the delivery of Phase Three, which runs from January to July 2026. The Engage Jersey framework is structured around four core elements.

16a) Strategic collaboration (January 2026 – April 2026)

- Phase Three commenced with a period of strategic collaboration involving partners and supporters from across Jersey’s public, private, and third sectors, including educators, policymakers, charities, business and industry representatives, and voters. The purpose of this phase was to co-design targeted educational programmes to strengthen democratic engagement.
- This strand of work comprised a series of meetings and workshops with strategic partners, focused on the co-design of content and the development of appropriate activities for young people aged 14–16 (school years 10 and 11). As outlined earlier in this submission, the research identified a range of distinct stakeholder groups for whom tailored educational provision would be beneficial. However, due to resource constraints, the scope of this phase focused initially on one priority group. The co-design of educational programmes for additional stakeholder groups forms part of the longer-term ambitions of the toolkit.
- Feedback from strategic partners was captured at the conclusion of each meeting and workshop using Microsoft Forms. This feedback informed the iterative co-creation process and provides underpinning evidence for the project’s pathway to impact. The content of the workshops was also informed by the knowledge gaps identified in earlier phases of the research, ensuring that each session addressed clearly defined learning outcomes and enabled the assessment of impact.
- In total, five one-hour workshops were developed as part of the targeted programme. Each workshop incorporated a range of pedagogical activities and provided impartial, relevant, and accessible information designed to educate, empower, and engage participants. Supporting materials were produced for each session, including presentation slides, guidance notes for educators, and signposting to further resources to enable participants to expand their knowledge following each workshop.

16b) Trialling and Piloting the Co-Designed Workshops

- All co-designed workshops were trialled with a strategic partner secondary school in Jersey between February and March 2026. The programme was delivered to more than 90 Key Stage 4 students by four educators at the partner school.
- To assess impact, students completed a pre- and post-programme questionnaire designed to capture their understanding of democratic engagement and to identify knowledge gaps at the beginning and end of the

programme. In addition, both students and educators were invited to provide qualitative feedback not only at the start and conclusion of the programme, but also following each individual workshop. This feedback informed iterative amendments and improvements to the content and delivery of the workshops.

- Continuous co-development was identified as a core principle underpinning both the workshops and the wider Engage Jersey strategy. This iterative approach was intended to support the ongoing refinement and effectiveness of the programme, strengthen community buy-in, and ensure inclusivity in the design and delivery of democratic engagement interventions.

16c) Establish a cross-sector Democratic Engagement Network Event (DEN)

- The Democratic Engagement Network (DEN) was inaugurated at an in-person event in Jersey on 16th March 2026, ahead of the Island's 2026 General Election on 7 June 2026. It is envisaged that DEN will become an annual event, designed as a forum to bring together stakeholders from across sectors to raise awareness of existing democratic engagement initiatives, research projects, and activities. The network also aims to provide space for discussion and debate, while addressing the current lack of coordination, collaboration, and opportunities for knowledge exchange relating to democratic engagement.
- In addition, DEN is intended to operate as a community of changemakers, enabling participants to identify opportunities for co-designing new initiatives and coordinating and championing collaborative research projects to strengthen sustained democratic engagement. The inaugural DEN event was well received, with delegates expressing strong support for an island-wide, targeted, co-developed, and coordinated strategy to enhance democratic engagement in Jersey.
- Delegates overwhelmingly supported the continuation of DEN, noting its value in addressing the need for a coordinated, cross-sector community to unite stakeholders, co-create solutions, and identify opportunities to tackle Jersey's historically low levels of electoral participation.

16d) Establish a Democratic Engagement Working Group (DEWG)

- The establishment of a Democratic Engagement Working Group (DEWG) endorsed by the Jersey Curriculum Council represents the final element of Phase Three. The Jersey Curriculum Council (JCC) is a statutory body established in 1999 under the Education (Jersey) Law, with responsibility for advising the Minister for Education on the content, delivery, and assessment of education in Jersey. The JCC ensures that the Island's curriculum remains relevant by reflecting Jersey's distinctive culture and context while maintaining alignment with recognised educational standards.
- The Democratic Engagement Working Group (DEWG) will co-develop impartial, non-statutory guidance and resources to support educators in Jersey in relation to democratic engagement. This will include the co-developed democratic engagement programmes, which will be made available to all schools and educational institutions following completion of the pilot phase.

- The DEWG will be co-chaired by Dr Christopher Pich and co-researcher Dr Guja Armannsdottir (Nottingham Trent University). A small number of cross-sector and interdisciplinary stakeholders will also be invited to join the group. The case for establishing the DEWG builds directly on gaps identified across phases one to three of the research (Pich 2023; Pich et al. 2025; Pich and Armannsdottir, Forthcoming), particularly in relation to the absence of coordinated guidance, resources, and strategic oversight for democratic engagement education.
- The rationale for establishing the DEWG has received broad support from stakeholders across Jersey, including policymakers, educators, organisations within the public, private, and third sectors, and voters. Formal consent to establish the DEWG was granted by the Jersey Curriculum Council on 18 March 2026.

Summary and Solutions

17. This submission addresses specific questions set out in the Committee's terms of reference relating to democratic engagement and the modernisation of elections. It provides evidence-based insight into the current state of electoral democracy in Jersey, a jurisdiction that introduced *votes at 16* in 2008. It further identifies key structural and cultural challenges affecting participation and sets out a co-developed, research-led toolkit offering a long-term, collaborative, and coordinated approach to strengthening democratic engagement.

18. For the United Kingdom, the Jersey case study provides a relevant international comparator, with clear policy implications. It demonstrates the value of sustained, cross-sector collaboration, the importance of co-designed, impartial democratic education, and the benefits of coordinating engagement efforts across institutions rather than relying on isolated or short-term interventions. The findings suggest that similar approaches particularly the use of research-led toolkits, structured piloting and evaluation, and community-centred co-creation could inform UK policy responses aimed at addressing declining trust, growing apathy and disengagement among specific demographic groups. As such, the lessons emerging from Jersey may support the development of more coherent, inclusive, and evidence-based strategies for strengthening electoral democracy across the UK.

19. Policy Implications for the UK

- The evidence suggests that fully resourced, age-appropriate democratic education delivered from Key Stage 3 through to post-18 education, and through both formal and community-based provision could support more sustained patterns of democratic engagement in the UK.
- The findings indicate the value of a long-term, co-created national framework for democratic engagement that promotes collaboration, co-creation, and coordination across central and local government, education providers, civil society organisations, and community groups, rather than fragmented or short-term initiatives.
- The research highlights the potential benefits of establishing a regular, cross-sector forum at national and/or regional level to support coordination, share best practice,

raise awareness of existing programmes, and enable the joint development of engagement strategies and research activity.

- Ongoing, independent research to monitor democratic knowledge, attitudes, and emerging barriers to participation would support evidence-based policymaking and enable engagement strategies to be adapted in response to social, political, and technological change.
- The Jersey case also raises questions for UK policymakers regarding ministerial responsibility and strategic oversight for democratic engagement. Greater clarity and coordination at ministerial level potentially across local, regional, and national democracy may help support more coherent and joined-up policy responses to declining participation and trust.

20. **References**

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April 2026