

**Dr John Boswell, Dr Roger Tyers and Mr Joshua Huckins – written evidence (FGU0014)**

**House of Lords Constitution Committee  
Inquiry into the Future governance of the UK**

We welcome the Constitution Committee's Inquiry on the Future Governance of the United Kingdom. These are crucial questions to ask in a period of declining trust in the efficacy and legitimacy of Britain's governance arrangements. To restore this trust, we believe that citizens themselves must be at the heart of effort to rethink, reform and renew institutions and practices of power sharing, multi-level governance, and democratic accountability. Our submission draws directly on insights from [our recent report on innovative forms of citizen engagement in the UK](#). Our big idea to address the Committee's questions and tackle declining trust head-on is to ask citizens to take on the task themselves, through a dedicated Citizens' Assembly.

1. A Citizens' Assembly on Constitutional Reform would be feasible. Citizens' Assemblies offer a proven method of engaging citizens to come up with creative solutions to some of the most challenging policy issues and constitutional questions. They gather together up to 150 randomly selected citizens, who represent a cross-section of the community, and ask them to discuss complex and contested political issues. They have been successfully trialled in places like Canada and Australia to address complex questions of constitutional reform.
2. A Citizens' Assembly on Constitutional Reform would be timely. Citizens' Assemblies are an increasingly familiar and popular tool in innovation in the UK. In our report, we find that a distinct blueprint and set of competencies has emerged in just the last 5 years. Citizens' Assemblies in the UK operate within a consistent framework, cemented by the support of charities and a rapidly developing democratic sector. In short, there is the expertise, experience and capacity to deliver a world-leading Citizens' Assembly in the UK.
3. A Citizens' Assembly on Constitutional Reform would be high-profile. We find that the so-called #Delibwave of Citizens' Assemblies has had significant impact on public debate about British democracy. The increase in the use of Citizens' Assemblies in Britain has led key actors in Parliament and the media to take notice of the effects that these participatory processes can have. The number of mentions of Citizens' Assemblies within Parliament has dramatically risen since 2015. A similar pattern can also be identified from the number of mentions of Citizens' Assemblies in the news and media.
4. However, we also find that the impact of Citizens' Assemblies on real-world outcomes thus far remains piecemeal and partial. In response to these findings, we recommend taking several steps to consolidate the progress made in the #Delibwave, and to maximise the chances of a Citizens' Assembly convened on Constitutional Reform with potential for meaningful impact.

A) Increased attention requires significant investment in robust methods and practices, tapping into UK's world-leading expertise in practice and research in this field. As Citizens Assemblies in the UK have grown in number and prominence, they have begun to attract more critical scrutiny and attention. Sound investment to uphold standards in deliberation time, methods of selection, and expert facilitation can ensure an event is robust to common criticisms, and gains widespread legitimacy.

B) Citizens' Assemblies need buy-in from a diversity of stakeholders. Support from across the political spectrum, and from key stakeholders across the UK, is crucial.

C) There is a need to clarify the goals of any Citizens' Assembly in advance, and connect it to deeper and broader forms of democratic participation. In essence, a Citizens' Assembly can ideally become a key catalyst for transforming and progressing a wider public conversation – but it is not a 'magic bullet' to replace or forego that wider conversation.

D) There is a need to follow through on citizen recommendations and evaluate long-term impacts on constitutional change. There is a risk that a Citizens' Assembly on Constitutional Reform may become a 'feelgood' one-off event. Taking steps to ensure 'follow through' will ensure the impact is more meaningful and lasting.

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