

Sortition Foundation – written evidence (FGU0020)

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

About the Sortition Foundation

1. The Sortition Foundation is a not-for-profit social enterprise whose mission is to promote the empowered use of citizens' assemblies, and the like, to strengthen our democracy.
2. Over the last few years, we have partnered with several organisations to help deliver the Climate Assembly UK¹, the government's COVID-19 Public Advisory Group², and many regional citizens' assemblies on various topics ranging from hate crime to alcohol pricing, assisted dying, and reducing traffic congestion, to name just a few.³

Future Governance of the United Kingdom

1. The questions outlined in the Future Governance review's mandate are timely and highly important. Our submission addresses how any governance review could best include views from the public in an inclusive, informed and deliberative manner.
2. In particular, we would like to highlight the mounting evidence⁴ of benefits arising from the use of citizens' assemblies, and deliberative mini-publics in general, in the UK, Europe, and around the world; namely that they are:
 1. **Legitimate**: by using a democratic lottery, citizens' assemblies are demographically representative, inclusive of diverse voices, and **independent** of political parties and vocal pressure groups. They often engage individuals who are apolitical and whose voices are unheard in normal politics. The aim is to ensure that everyone in the country has the same chance to be selected to participate, introducing **a new form of political equality**.
 2. **Trusted**: people trust the outcomes of citizens' assemblies as they are made by a diverse microcosm of everyday people. The participants in deliberative mini-publics are not the "usual suspects" and it is precisely because the public can see "people like me" in these assemblies that they are so inspiring⁵.
 3. **Better**: Research by Hélène Landemore and Scott Page⁶ demonstrates that diverse groups of people **make better decisions** when confronted with a wide array of complex issues. Citizens' assemblies, engaging a representative sample of people in an informed environment, gather much more than public opinion: they deliver **the public's informed judgement**

¹ <https://www.climateassembly.uk/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-public-advisory-group-taking-part>

³ https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/our_clients

⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/innovative-citizen-participation.htm>

⁵ see, for example, the 2.5-minute film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDGp5eGnnxI>

⁶ HL: "Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many" and SP: "The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies"

on issues. Citizens' assemblies answer the question about **what people would think**, if everyone had the chance to deliberate together with a diverse group of people in an informed environment.

4. **Established:** With two citizens' assemblies having taken place at the UK national level⁷, several assemblies at the devolved level, a development program funded by a governmental department⁸, and countless assemblies at the local level, the process of a citizens' assembly has now been tested extensively across all levels of government in the UK and on many different topics. Citizens' assemblies in the context of democratic reform have been much welcomed in other countries, such as Canada and Germany.
5. **Effective:** A recent report by the OECD⁹ concludes that in 76% of studied deliberative mini-public processes over half of the recommendations were implemented.
3. Listed here are a few recent examples of citizens' assemblies from the UK and beyond:
 - **Scotland's Citizens' Assemblies:**
 - on the future of Scotland - <https://www.citizensassembly.scot/>
 - on climate change: <https://www.climateassembly.scot/>
 - **Welsh Assembly on the Future of Wales:**
 - <https://yourwales.senedd.wales/wales-first-citizens-assembly>
 - <https://devolution20.wales/citizens-assembly>
 - **Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies** (on many and multiple issues, including constitutional and other topics):
<https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/>
 - **French Citizens' Convention on Climate:**
<https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/en/>
 - **German Citizens' Assemblies:**
 - on Germany's Role in the World:
<https://www.buergerrat.de/en/news/recommendations-for-germanys-role-in-the-world/>
 - German Citizens' Assembly on Democracy:
<https://www.buergerrat.de/en/citizens-assembly-on-democracy/>
4. For the above reasons we believe that a **National Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy**, as proposed by CCUK¹⁰, should be an essential part of any UK governance review and would, moreover, **open up the necessary political space for democratic renewal**, which is so greatly needed.

⁷ Climate Assembly UK (<https://www.climateassembly.uk/>) convened by six select committees and Citizens' Assembly on Social Care (<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/citizens-assembly-report.pdf>) convened by two select committees of the House of Commons.

⁸ The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government set up the **Innovation in Democracy Programme** in 2019, which delivered three citizens' assemblies for local government across the UK and a handbook that can act as a guide for future work: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/innovation-in-democracy-programme-launch>

⁹ The OECD published its report "Catching the deliberative wave" in June 2020 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions_339306da-en

¹⁰ <https://www.ccukdemocracy.org/>

5. We would be very pleased to respond to any further questions or enquiries.

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