

The Common Ground – written evidence (FGU0023)

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

The Common Ground

1. The Common Ground is campaigning to restore unity, realism and hope in British politics by rallying people around shared goals for climate action, social justice and democratic reform. We aim to build a people-powered movement based on the common ground that people share across their political divides. We will invite people to see beyond their political preferences in favour of the common good and unite our audience to demand that politicians think and act differently.

Our Submission

2. People are increasingly disillusioned with politics in the UK. They feel that politics is something that is done 'to them' rather than something that is done 'by them'. Surveys show that almost two-thirds of people feel their views are not represented in British politics today - and more than a third of people say 'the labels of left and right in politics feel irrelevant to me'. Therefore, there is a growing divide between politicians and the people.
3. Citizens' Assemblies create a powerful mechanism to actively reengage people in the democratic process - and a channel for people from different backgrounds to come together and find their common ground in democratic ways. They bridge the divide between politicians and the people, and provide a platform for ordinary people's voices to be heard and acted upon.
4. Citizens' Assemblies have the potential to save our ailing democracy, reinvigorating it for the serious and complex challenges of the 21st century, and empowering people and communities across the country to take ownership of the decisions that affect their daily lives, both locally and nationally. We would therefore strongly encourage the Lords to embrace deliberative democracy and establish Citizens' Assemblies as part of their inquiry into the future governance of the UK.

Other Contributions

1. We also asked our subscribers for their brief thoughts on Citizens' Assemblies. Here is a selection of their responses:
2. "My experience being part of two citizens' juries (as a climate expert) and witnessing the work of others is that they are transformative and act to accelerate both action and ambition rather than slow things down. They are a democracy accelerator, really." J Steinberger
3. "Citizens' Assemblies bind up democratic rights with democratic responsibilities: they create a learning situation where people take account of diverse knowledge

and the circumstances of others to determine the likely consequences of their decisions - e.g. on climate.” Catherine Heinemeyer

4. “Coming at this from the climate point of view, Citizen’s Assemblies allow people to examine evidence without the distorting noise and distraction of the media. They won't be subject to the same party 'discipline' as MPs, and are free to come to conclusions that might be outside the Overton Window.” Anna Orridge
5. “I'm on the oversight panel for the North Tyne Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change. It has brought a diverse group of local people together; extended understanding using independent experts; and allowed them freedom to make their own recommendations for local Climate Action.” Meryl Batchelder
6. “So they feel heard, that their views count, it increases a sense of being part of society and of being involved in democratic process, and may increase motivation to vote. But only if the Citizens’ Assembly recommendations are acted on. Otherwise, there is a risk of disillusionment.” Mandoline Blue
7. “(It’s vital) to have different people coming together, working together and having dialogue. We do desperately need to talk about political change with people different in order to forge consensus and overcome division.” Dr Ben Newton
8. “Our present democracy doesn’t represent every constituent. MP's follow the party line leaving a large number, sometimes a majority, with their needs or opinions unrepresented. Citizens’ Assemblies meeting to discuss policies and suggest solutions would ensure wider representation.” Lynne McNulty

30/04/2021