

democracy **2.0**

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# forewords

areeq chowdhury

cat smith mp

emma mulqueeney obe

## Areeq Chowdhury

We're in a new era. An era where digital technology has a tangible impact on our lives and our politics. It's 'Democracy 2.0'. We need to clamp down on the abuse and exploit the potential. There are a lot of positives, and negatives, of the internet, and we need to take action on both.

In 2015, the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, reported the findings of his Commission on Digital Democracy and called for the introduction of online voting and greater political education. Within the Palace of Westminster, there has been some limited progress on modernising its inner workings, but with regards to action by the Government on voter engagement, it has been severely lacking.

By failing to ensure that our democracy is keeping up-to-date with technology, the Government risks leaving our political process stuck in the 1900s. Zero action can only lead to zero change.

As this report sets out, there is still much to be done on the issues highlighted by the Speaker's Commission such as our outdated method of voting, poor or non-existent political education in schools, and the inaccessibility of politics to the

people. Since then, new challenges have arisen. Challenges such as the rise of fake news or the so-called social media echo chamber. Alongside this, internet-trolling has continued to disease social media and online debate.

It cannot, however, be left to volunteers to scrutinise the actions of Westminster, or to be solely relied upon to keep the pressure up on the Government. That is why this report advocates the creation of a Digital Democracy Czar to take the lead on these challenges on behalf of the Government.

The biggest challenge to technological advancement in politics has always been the same. It's political will. It is our hope that our group of Political Ambassadors, being announced alongside the publication of this report, will act as champions of digital democracy within Parliament. We look forward to them pushing forward the recommendations set out in this report and garnering that all-important political will.

**Areeq Chowdhury**

*Chief Executive, WebRoots Democracy*

## Cat Smith MP

The EU referendum has presented a historic opportunity for our democracy. Not only did it demonstrate to everyone the importance and power of democracy in the UK but we also saw young people becoming increasingly politicised.

Over 700,000 people under 25 applied to register to vote online in the month prior to the EU referendum. 64% of this age group cast their vote in the referendum, a 20% increase from the General Election a year earlier. The big question facing us all now, is how we harness this enthusiasm to renew our democracy and engage younger voters longer term.

I welcome this report produced by WebRoots Democracy, a youth-led organisation which seeks to address many of the challenges young people face with our voting system. The report reflects on the progress made since the Speaker's Commission published their report on Digital Democracy two years ago and presents a strong set of recommendations for the Government.

As Labour's Shadow Minister for Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs, I want to encourage greater participation in politics, be it from young people or any other age or social

group. Our young people are leaving school without a solid understanding of the political system. This can present barriers at elections and referendums, when young people are expected to be engaged and cast an informed vote. Voters also rely too much on information from the third sector, with no official voter advice provided by the state.

At a time when we see the rise of 'fake news' and internet trolling, it is more important than ever to strengthen our democracy by increased participation. The online abuse which candidates face must be addressed to encourage participation from groups which can be targeted by these trolls. I look forward to working with WebRoots Democracy in the future to address these issues.

**Cat Smith MP**

*Shadow Minister for Voter  
Engagement and Youth Affairs*

*Labour Member of Parliament  
for Lancaster and Fleetwood*

## Emma Mulqueeny OBE

It is great that WebRoots Democracy have taken on the challenge of keeping our collective feet to the fire. I remember when I was asked by Mr Speaker to join the Commission that I said that I would do so on the proviso that it was not going to be a report that ended up on a dusty digital shelf.

All of the Commissioners felt the same way and it is critical that the recommendations are not allowed to be ignored. So I am hugely pleased to see this independent report.

It is slightly disheartening to read that the public-facing changes have not yet become apparent, and that simple recommendations such as mobile phones in the public galleries are still banned - but great to see the successful use of the YouTube channel and online videos.

Changes to the way we engage with the Parliamentary process is always going to be a long-term effort and I know that there is determination to achieve successful digital democratic engagement, and there are significant

efforts being made in the digital literacy of Parliamentary members - we must start there.

However, as with all change, there has to be a double-sided affront to the status quo and teaching those too young to vote yet how important it is that they engage, is fundamental. We need to teach them in senior schools how to choose to vote, and as is clearly laid out in this report, how to discern the difference between real and fake news. To become the 5th Estate where necessary. Knowing how to make that choice, and then how to register and actually vote when the time comes is what makes a democracy actually work. Digital tools make this a far easier and more iterative and intelligent process, and I would love to see this be a priority.

**Emma Mulqueeny OBE**

*Chief Executive of Rewired State  
Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy*

# executive summary

purpose and background  
recommendations  
key findings

# executive summary

## Purpose and background

Two years on since the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy (DDC) published its findings in 'Open Up!', the challenge facing politicians and policymakers has significantly evolved. 2015 was the most *digital* election in British history with millions of pounds spent on online campaigns by political parties in the run up to the General Election. 2016 was an even more momentous year with the referendum on EU membership. New digital democracy challenges have arisen since, such as the plague of fake news and the intensification of internet trolling. The onus is on politicians to listen and help solve them.

This report aims to set out in simple terms the progress that has been made over the last two years towards achieving the key recommendations set out by the Digital Democracy Commission. It also sets out a range of new recommendations for the UK Government and public institutions to build upon Mr Speaker's work.

It is our hope that this report will act as a reminder of the work undertaken by the Speaker's Commission and that it will continue to drive momentum towards creating a democratic system fit for 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

## Recommendations

1. The Government should create a new post called the Digital Democracy Czar. The Czar would have responsibility for advancing a progressive digital democracy agenda and lead on the Government's response to issues such as fake news and internet trolling.
2. The Government should initiate pilots of online voting as a matter of priority for electoral reform. These pilots should take place in 2017 or 2018 with a view to an online voting option being in place for the 2020 General Election.

3. The Prime Minister, Secretaries of State, and Ministers should initiate monthly Facebook Live question and answer sessions as part of a Digital PMQs/MQs.
4. Parliament's Restoration and Renewal Programme should publish specific details on how technology could be integrated into its plans to ensure Parliament is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
5. Political education should be made compulsory across all schools in the UK up to and including GCSE level. The Government should look into introducing this as a distinct subject with a qualified teacher. With regards to tackling the rise of fake news, students should be taught how to critically analyse what they read on the internet and in the media.
6. The Electoral Commission should develop an official, independent voter advice application ahead of the 2020 General Election. This should be developed in cooperation with political parties, academics and citizens, and coordinated with the publication of election manifestos. This application should then be widely promoted across all media to ensure that as many voters as possible can take advantage of the tool.

## Key findings

Progress toward achieving the recommendations set out by the Speaker's Commission is mixed. With regards to improving public understanding of the inner workings of the House of Commons and the language used in parliamentary debates, there is still some way to go. There is an even further distance to go towards ensuring the Commons is understandable to those with disabilities such as a hearing impairment. 0.6% of videos uploaded to Parliament's YouTube channel are signed with British Sign Language.



There has been some significant improvement with regards to effective use of social media by Parliament and Select Committees, particularly on Twitter.

Over two years, there has been very little progress made towards creating a process in which members of the public can meaningfully participate in Parliamentary debates, online. The potential of the internet to help Westminster reach the masses has not yet been tapped into. Equally, there appears to have been very little, if any, progress made towards tackling internet abuse of politicians, despite mass interest in doing so.

Marked progress has been made within Parliament towards a greater use of digital technologies such as with the introduction of electronic counting at divisions. However, externally, there is a lot more to be done. Initiatives such as a 'Cyber Chamber', in which debates are held on Twitter in advance of Westminster Hall debates, show promise, but this is still only scratching the surface. In addition, Parliament's Restoration and Renewal Programme presents a perfect opportunity to radically advance the digital capability of Parliament, but there is a more general and noticeable lack of movement on digital solutions to voter education and participation.

There has been no progress made towards the headline recommendation of introducing online voting by 2020, nor has there been much progress on the use and promotion of voter advice applications. The lack of publicly available

information on the work that Parliament is undertaking towards achieving the ambitions set out by the Speaker's Commission has been a problem when compiling this progress report. It is here in particular that the introduction of a Digital Democracy Czar would be beneficial.

The Speaker's Commission stated that they wanted to 'open up' Parliament. The Commission may have unlocked the door, but Parliament is yet to pull it open.

### About this version

This is an archived, second edition version of the Democracy 2.0 report. The formatting of this version differs to the previous edition published in 2017, however the content remains the same.

For any queries please contact [hello@webrootsdemocracy.org](mailto:hello@webrootsdemocracy.org).

# understanding the commons

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# understanding the commons

## Jargon-busting

**DDC recommendation:** The House of Commons should take action, during the 2015-16 session, to make parliamentary language and communications easier to understand. This should include:

- simplifying and clarifying parliamentary language, including procedural terms;
- developing digital tools such as jargon busters to help readers understand parliamentary language and processes, including the law-making process;
- clarifying and simplifying online and printed communications; and
- the wider use of aids for people with disabilities and sensory impairments such as British Sign Language translations and subtitles for video material to help the hard of hearing to engage with Parliament.

**Progress:** The DDC was all about ‘opening up’ Parliament making it accessible to all. It’s difficult from the outside to measure or judge whether parliamentary language or procedural terms have been simplified or clarified. With regards to a digital ‘jargon buster’, the only evidence of such a tool is a glossary of terms on the Parliament website.<sup>1</sup> This is relatively simple to access on the main Parliament page, however the definitions themselves are lacking in simplicity.

Many definitions would require visitors to search for the meanings of the terms within the definitions themselves before understanding the original term. Take for example the second term in the glossary ‘Acts of Parliament’. The definition is presented as follows:

*Acts of Parliament are known as primary legislation. Collectively, they make up Statute Law which along with conventions, court decisions and treaties is seen as the basis of the UK constitution. If a Bill is passed by both Houses of Parliament and*

*receives the Royal Assent it becomes an Act of Parliament and part of UK law.*

This definition would not effectively explain the term in an understandable manner for someone outside of the political sphere. “Primary legislation”, “statute law”, “conventions”, “treaties”, “constitution”, “bill”, and “royal assent” are all terms that would likely require subsequent definitions before the user can understand what an “Act of Parliament” is. This is an area that would benefit from a review.

Again, it is difficult to measure whether any progress has been made on clarifying and simplifying online and printed communications. On the more important point of incorporating a wide use of aids for users with disabilities or sensory impairments, it is disappointing to see little progress made in this area. There does not appear to be a version of Prime Minister’s Questions for example which includes a British Sign Language translation. This is another priority that needs to be pushed forward during this Parliament.

As of the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2017, just 0.6% of videos uploaded to the official Parliament YouTube channel are signed with British Sign Language.<sup>2</sup>

## Infographics and visual data

**DDC recommendation:** The Commission recommends that Parliament’s website should use more infographic and visual data to help provide alternative methods of accessing content and to improve transparency. While the Commission acknowledges the need for intellectual rigour in parliamentary reports and other publications, lengthy documents can act as a barrier to citizen engagement with democracy, particularly for those with learning difficulties, special needs or just limited time. For example, the Register of Members’ Financial Interests could be transformed into a more accessible document for voters by the use of icons to represent data.

**Progress:** There appears to be little use of infographics on the Parliament website or on its social media outlets. However, there has clearly been some excellent explainer videos produced which have thousands of views. Infographics, however, can be a very effective medium for presenting the contents of a report or piece of research in a digestible and shareable format. The Commission was correct to point out that lengthy documents can act as a barrier to citizen engagement, and Committees should look to produce infographics alongside the production of future reports.

## Search

**DDC recommendation:** The Commission recommends that improving the search function on the Parliament website should be a priority for the new parliamentary digital service. It should also provide tools to help people track Parliament's activities on specific issues. These should be easy to find and register for.

**Progress:** Finding information on the Parliament website needs to be as user-friendly as possible. The DDC was correct to highlight this, however there appears to have been little progress made on improving this function.

It appears to be the same as before, with uncategorised results. For example, a search of the term "Brexit" brings up 580 results with no helpful information for a first-time visitor.<sup>3</sup> An improvement could be to have results categorised with an explainer video appearing at the top for certain key terms, such as Brexit.

Equally, there appears to be no progress in providing a tool to help individuals track Parliament's activities on specific issues. Not everyone uses social media, and thus it should not solely be relied upon.

## Parliament Live

**DDC recommendation:** The House of Commons should make more real-time information available online, including details of who is speaking in debates. It should also experiment further with live social media coverage of what is said in debates.

**Progress:** There has been an excellent use of live-streaming online, particularly Prime Minister's Questions on Facebook Live. Additionally there has been a good use of Twitter with regards to creating specific accounts for Committees delivering real time information of reports and debates. Whilst Parliament TV is now much more navigable, searching for specific Members' speeches, at specific times or dates, remains difficult.

## Selfies in the Chamber

**DDC recommendation:** The Commission recommends that the current restrictions on members of the public taking mobile electronic devices into the House of Commons chamber and Westminster Hall debates are removed.

**Progress:** This was trialled for three months from December 2015.<sup>4</sup> However, there appears to be no public update on this measure. Parliament's guidelines on this area states that 'the use of cameras and mobile phones is not permitted in the public galleries.' With it being over 10 months since this trial ended, it seems that this basic reform has been rejected.

## Our recommendations

Recommendation 1: Parliament's online glossary should be rewritten in laypersons' terms. Consideration should be given to including a link to the glossary in social media posts of Parliamentary debates.

Recommendation 2: Resources should be employed to enable a British Sign Language version of all major Parliamentary debates and explainer videos. These should be uploaded to Parliament's YouTube channel.

Recommendation 3: Committees should produce informative and shareable infographics which summarise lengthy reports. These should be published on relevant social media channels.

Recommendation 4: The parliament.uk search function should be revamped with a focus on categorising results and incorporating use of explainer videos at the top of the results page for key terms.

Recommendation 5: A subscription tool should be provided to help individuals track Parliament's activities on specific issues. This tool should be separate from updates provided on social media channels.

Recommendation 6: The excellent use of live-streaming Parliamentary debates should be continued, and the Parliament TV site should continue to improve.

Recommendation 7: The results of the trial lifting the ban on mobile devices in the Commons' public gallery should be communicated clearly and published online.

# a fully digital parliament

- online questions
- digital select committees
- 21<sup>st</sup> century restoration
- interaction with constituents
- internet 'trolling'
- electronic counting
- our recommendations

# a fully digital parliament

## Online questions

**DDC recommendation:** The House should experiment with new ways for the public to put forward questions for Ministers and contribute to different stages of the law-making progress, primarily by digital means.

**Progress:** There appears to have been no progress made on this. Crowdsourced questions for Prime Minister's Questions is something which the Leader of the Opposition has adopted on occasion, and is perhaps an approach which other shadow ministers and MPs should adopt. Beyond that, regular online Q&A sessions with Ministers could be done through Facebook Live or other live-streaming tools.

## Digital Select Committees

**DDC recommendation:** Select committees should make greater use of social media and online advertising to reach out to new audiences and raise awareness of their work. They should also experiment with using digital to involve people more in committee work.

**Progress:** There has been significant progress on the use of social media to promote the work of select committees.<sup>5</sup> Equally, members of the public are able to submit evidence to select committee enquiries using an online form.

## 21st century restoration

**DDC recommendation:** The Digital Democracy Commission recommends that Parliament should seize the opportunity that restoration and renewal work provides to improve facilities to assist MPs in their work for the public and ensure the fabric of Parliament is fit for the future.

**Progress:** The restoration is still in the early stages however one of the 'major elements' of the proposed Restoration and Renewal Programme is the installation of 'information and communications technology necessary for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Parliament.'<sup>6</sup> It is not clear what these installations will include specifically, nor any indication of whether this will include the

introduction of electronic voting for Parliamentarians. The restoration programme is an opportunity to redesign Parliament with citizens in mind. Serious consideration should be given for the creation of public spaces that enable and encourage (especially young) visitors to visit Parliament and make use of digital technologies to engage with the work of the Houses, Members, and committees.

## Interaction with constituents

**DDC recommendation:** The new Parliamentary Digital Service should identify tools to help increase the volume and quality of interaction between MPs and their constituents. It should involve MPs and constituents in the development of these tools to ensure that an increase in communications is manageable by everyone involved.

**Progress:** It is unclear what, if any, progress has been made to identify tools to help increase the volume and quality of interaction between MPs and their constituents. However, the Parliamentary Digital Service have partnered up with *Doteveryone*, set up by Baroness Lane Fox, and are keen to scale up their 'Digital MPs' project. The 'Digital MPs' project placed four digital mentors in MPs' offices for two months to help them 'get more out of internet-era technologies.' In their final interviews, the four MPs agreed that their staff had benefited from the project and that their own digital skills had improved.<sup>7</sup>

## Internet 'trolling'

**DDC recommendation:** The Commission recommends that political parties urgently review what measures they have in place to support candidates at the next General Election who may be subjected to abuse of digital technology in the form of cyber harassment. It recommends that the House urgently reviews measures to support MPs subject to cyber harassment.

**Progress:** It is not clear whether political parties have undertaken such a review, and judging by

news reports since the DDC published its report, this problem has only gotten worse with some MPs resorting to police protection at their homes.<sup>8 9 10</sup> It is equally unclear whether the House has undertaken such a review. Cyber-harassment is not mutually exclusive to politicians and is a societal issue. Abuse of social media platforms should be resolved by the providers (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), who, in turn must seek to engage Parliament and the main parties in its plans to prevent and tackle ‘trolling’.

## Electronic counting

**DDC recommendation:** During the next Session of Parliament, the House of Commons should move to record votes using MPs’ smart identity cards but retain the tradition of walking through division lobbies. It should also pilot an electronic version of the practice of ‘nodding through’ MPs who are physically unable to go through the division lobbies, which would enable MPs who are unwell, or have childcare responsibilities, or a disability, to vote away from the chamber.

**Progress:** As of March 2016, the House of Commons has been using tablet devices to record MPs’ votes in divisions, instead of pen and paper.<sup>11</sup> According to Parliament’s website, as MPs file out of division lobbies, House of Commons clerks use custom software on a tablet to record the names of those voting. The reform means that it should no longer take two to three hours for division lists to appear in the rolling Hansard. It is unclear whether an electronic version of ‘nodding through’ MPs who are physically unable to go through the lobbies has been tested.

## Our recommendations

Recommendation 8: Shadow Ministers should crowdsource some questions from the public in their departmental question times in the Commons.

Recommendation 9: The Prime Minister, Secretaries of State, and Ministers should initiate monthly Facebook Live question and answer sessions as part of a Digital PMQs/MQs.

Recommendation 10: Select Committees should continue their good work in promoting their activities via social media. They should continue to grow their online followings, and seek to attract alternate forms of digital submissions to inquiries.

Recommendation 11: Parliament’s Restoration and Renewal Programme should publish specific details on how they will use technology to ensure it is a Parliament fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and beyond.

Recommendation 12: Parliament Digital Service should scale up the *Doteveryone* Digital MPs project and place a ‘digital mentor’ in every MP’s office.

Recommendation 13: The Government should commission a review on internet abuse of Parliamentarians and within society more generally. Social media platforms should also play an active role in tackling this issue.

Recommendation 14: Parliament should build on its progress with electronic counting in divisions, and enable electronic voting for MPs who are unwell, have childcare responsibilities, or a disability, to vote away from the House.



# the cyber chamber

digital house  
our recommendations

# the cyber chamber

## Digital House

**DDC recommendation:** We believe the public want the opportunity to have their say in House of Commons debates; we also believe that this will provide a useful resource for MPs and help enhance those debates. We therefore recommend a unique experiment: the use of regular digital public discussion forums to inform debates held in Westminster Hall. This innovation might be known as the “Cyber Chamber” or “Open House”. If at the end of the next Parliament it has been successful, it could then be extended to debates in the main House of Commons chamber itself.

**Progress:** Whilst, undoubtedly, an interesting idea in theory, it remains unclear as to what a Cyber Chamber actually entails. Writing for *New Statesman* in November 2015, Mr Speaker cited an example of the “Cyber Chamber” being tested as part of a Westminster Hall debate entitled “Access to drugs for ultra-rare diseases.” In this test, the Cyber Chamber took place the day before the debate for two hours on Twitter using the hashtag #RDdebate. Greg Mulholland MP - who was leading the debate - took part in the Cyber Chamber responding directly to Twitter users. This experiment saw over a thousand tweets posted, and one million Twitter accounts reached. During the actual debate in the Commons itself, visitors in the public gallery were allowed to tweet for the first time.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this, the Cyber Chamber does not appear to be very different from a generic Twitter debate. It is unclear whether these Twitter debates will be signed into law as part of Parliamentary debates, and if so, should Twitter be the chosen medium? It is a worthy idea however, and should continue to be trialled with

other items of parliamentary business, and on other social media platforms.

## Our recommendations

**Recommendation 15:** Trials of the Cyber Chamber should continue on a variety of online platforms. The idea of engaging thousands more members of the public online in Westminster debates is a good one and should be pursued.

**Recommendation 16:** The Cyber Chamber should take place with every e-petition which is then (selected and) debated in Parliament. Currently, signatories to petitions which reach the threshold are informed that a debate will be taking place but receive no guidance as to how they themselves can participate. They are however sent hyperlinks to the video footage and the Hansard transcript after the debate has taken place. MPs who take part in such debates should be encouraged by the House to engage with citizens in this way – and offered training in how best to do so, if necessary.

# online voting by 2020

political education

## voter advice applications

digital results bank

online voting

## our recommendations

# online voting 2020

## Political education

**DDC recommendation:** The Speaker's Commission wishes to encourage increased efforts in voter education and recommends a fresh, bold, look at the national curriculum in this regard.

**Progress:** Citizenship education is only compulsory at certain state comprehensive schools, and with a move towards forced academisation and expanded grammar schools, the subject is at risk of being dropped altogether. It would not be overstating the matter to say that it is a subject which is not taken seriously by students and teachers alike, despite the best efforts of many teachers, NGOs, and campaigners. Equally, GCSEs in subjects such as politics are not widely available, which leaves few students able to choose to study politics at A Level. This means we currently risk allowing pupils to leave the school system without a basic understanding of the political system. This becomes a problem at elections and referenda, when we expect young people to cast an informed vote.

Since the DDC two years ago, the rise in so-called 'fake news' has become a pressing issue, with some commentators claiming it may have even affected the result of the 2016 US Presidential election.<sup>13</sup> Whilst fact-checkers and Facebook may have a role to play in tackling the problem, the real solution is to ensure our young people are taught how to critically analyse what they read online.

## Voter advice applications

**DDC recommendation:** The Commission strongly encourages the political education bodies and charities to consider how to make available and publicise trustworthy information about candidates and their policies, including by means of voter advice applications.

**Progress:** Since the DDC published its findings, there have been a flurry of voter advice websites and applications, particularly in the run up to the

2015 General Election, and to a lesser extent, ahead of the EU referendum.<sup>14</sup> These have largely relied upon information provided in the manifestos published by political parties, and the applications are self-promoted.

They have proven to be incredibly popular. 'Verto', an app from the organisation, Bite The Ballot, amassed over 400,000 users within the four weeks leading up to the 2015 General Election.<sup>15</sup> This type of voter education, however, could easily be a responsibility of the state using primary information to populate the app, rather than the third sector (often) relying heavily on unverified secondary information and sources.

Moving forward, and drawing on international comparisons, the Electoral Commission should look into developing an official, independently-verified and researched voter advice application for the 2020 General Election. This app can draw upon impartial survey information prepared by academics, tested by voters, and completed directly by political parties. It could be limited to parties with MPs or with a certain number of votes won in previous elections, or those polling above a certain threshold ahead of election day.

## Digital results bank

**DDC recommendation:** The Digital Democracy Commission recommends that the Electoral Commission should consider how best to establish a digital election 'results bank'.

**Progress:** The Electoral Commission has an elections results page, however, this consists mainly of pdf reports and charts rather than easily downloadable data on elections.<sup>16</sup> It is not clear whether the Electoral Commission is looking into changing this. A good model to replicate would be the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's 'Voter Turnout Database'. This database contains a wide range of statistics related to voter turnout all over the world. It allows the user to customise the data and to download the data in Microsoft Excel and CSV format.<sup>17</sup>

## Online voting

**DDC recommendation:** In the 2020 General Election, secure online voting should be an option for all voters.

**Progress:** Whilst a significant amount of research has been undertaken by organisations such as the WebRoots Democracy, there has been little to no progress made in achieving online voting by 2020. Since the DDC, every major UK political party has used online voting for their own elections. The Conservative Party used online voting to elect Zac Goldsmith as their 2016 London mayoral candidate and were planning to use it to elect their new leader, Prime Minister Theresa May MP, until Andrea Leadsom MP withdrew from the race.<sup>18 19</sup> The Labour Party have used online voting in its 2015 and 2016 leadership contests, with an estimated 90% choosing to vote online.<sup>20</sup>

Trade unions have made some progress in ensuring that their members can vote online in strike ballots. The Government has initiated an independent review into online voting for strike ballots as part of the 2016 Trade Union Act.<sup>21</sup> However, there seems to have been very little action from the Government to follow through with this key recommendation from the DDC. Introducing online voting is a recommendation that was also made by the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee.<sup>22</sup>

A poll carried out by WebRoots Democracy and YouGov following the referendum on EU membership found that an additional 1.2 million young people would have voted had online voting been available.<sup>23</sup>

For an online voting option to be put in place for the 2020 General Election, pilots would need to take place in 2017 or 2018.

## Our recommendations

Recommendation 17: Political education should be made compulsory across all schools in the UK up to and including GCSE level. The Government should look into introducing this as a separate subject with a dedicated teacher. With regards to tackling the rise of fake news, students should be taught how to critically analyse what they read on the internet.

Recommendation 18: The Electoral Commission should look into developing an official voter advice application to be ready ahead of the 2020 General Election. This should be developed in cooperation with political parties and coordinated with the publication of election manifestos. This application should then be widely promoted across all media to ensure that as many voters as possible can take advantage of the tool.

Recommendation 19: The Electoral Commission should develop a digital results bank modelled on the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's 'Voter Turnout Database' with data downloadable into Excel and CSV format.

Recommendation 20: The Government should initiate pilots of online voting as a matter of priority for electoral reform. These pilots should take place in 2017 or 2018 with a view to an online voting option being in place for the 2020 General Election.

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