



BRIEFING PAPER

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Constitutional Conventions and Citizens' Assemblies: power to the people?

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Summary

In recent years, there has been a growth in support for deliberative democracy. This is where individuals (sometimes including elected representatives) participate in informed discussions before reaching considered conclusions on often complex issues. Constitutional conventions and citizens' assemblies have typically been utilised as approaches to deliberative democracy.

A constitutional convention is a representative body convened to draw up or propose changes to a country's constitution. There is no fixed model for a constitutional convention. In recent years they have been held in several countries each using a slightly different form. Types of constitutional convention have included: directly elected constituent assemblies sometimes involving an elected constituent or citizen assembly working alongside the regular legislature; 'mixed' model conventions of elected citizens and selected politicians; and civil society conventions where citizens are represented by groups from civil society.

Citizens' assemblies, which consist of randomly selected citizens, have also been used as a form of constitutional convention. More recently, however, citizens' assemblies have been established in order to secure public engagement to address a range of controversial policy areas. These areas have not always been limited to addressing a country's constitution, for example, citizens' assemblies on adult social care and climate change have been launched in the UK and Ireland.

This briefing paper provides a summary of the theory and academic discussion behind the use of constitutional conventions. It also provides a concise history of constitutional conventions that have taken place in the British Isles and overseas, including the Scottish Constitutional Convention of 1989 and Irish Constitutional Convention of 2012. It also sets out the recent support for constitutional conventions in the UK, for example, the proposals made by the 2007-10 Brown government and the renewed interest in this form of deliberative democracy following the Scottish Independence referendum (2014).

This paper also summarises several, notable citizens' assemblies that have taken place. This includes those that were held in Southampton and Sheffield in 2015 as a form of constitutional convention, and other assemblies which addressed specific policy areas such as adult social care and Brexit. This paper also provides information on several citizens' assemblies that are currently taking place in the UK. Overseas examples of constitutional conventions are also addressed towards the end of this paper.

The House of Lords Library Note, [*Constitutional Conventions: Possible Options in the New Parliament*](#) (20 March 2016) sets out some of the key issues when a process of constitutional review of reform is being devised and briefly highlights examples of the different structures used. The Lords Library Note [*Citizens' Assemblies: An Introductory Guide*](#) (8 February 2019) also provides detail on the theory and growth in support citizens' assemblies have recently received in the UK.

1. What is a constitutional convention?

A constitutional convention is a representative body convened to draw up or propose changes to a country's constitution.¹ More broadly, they are based on the idea that authentic discussion between citizens can enable consensual decision-making which has legitimacy and is much less vulnerable to the nature of party politics.²

In a [blogpost](#) for the UCL Constitution Unit, Professor Robert Hazell suggested several reasons why a constitutional convention may be established, these include to:

- build cross party consensus for further constitutional reforms;
- harness expert opinion to chart a way forward;
- develop a more coherent overall reform package, rather than further piecemeal reforms;
- bring in ideas from outside the political elite;
- create greater legitimacy and support for the convention's proposals; and
- generate wider participation through innovative methods of public engagement.³

The NGO, Unlock Democracy, has argued that constitutional conventions generally work in one of two ways. Constitutional conventions will either be restricted to focusing on a number of specific points or their remit will include a series of things to consider but will have the power to add more things to this if they see fit.⁴

There is, however, no fixed model for a constitutional convention.⁵ They have been held in several countries each using a slightly different form. Recent discussions have largely focused on the following types:

¹ See, for example, Peter Crane and Joanne Conaghan, *The New Oxford Companion to Law* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Similarly, in 2013, the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee defined constitutional conventions as a "representative body collected together to discuss constitutional change" as part of its inquiry into whether there is a need for a constitutional convention for the UK. See: House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do We Need a Constitutional Convention for the UK?](#), 28 March 2013, HC 371 of session 2012–13, p 9

² David Van Reybrouck, *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy*, Bodley Head; UK edition, 2016

³ Robert Hazell, '[You Want a Constitutional Convention? This is What You Need to Think Through First](#)', UCL Constitution Unit Blog, 8 October 2014. Professor Robert Hazell does, however, note in this blogpost that "A constitutional convention is not the only means of achieving these purposes".

⁴ Unlockdemocracy.org, [Guide to a Constitutional Convention](#) [accessed 7 October 2015]

⁵ See, for example, House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do We Need a Constitutional Convention for the UK?](#), 28 March 2013, HC 371 of session 2012–13, p 9 and Robert Hazell, '[You Want a Constitutional](#)

- citizens' assemblies – consisting of (randomly) selected citizens;
- directly elected constituent assemblies – involving an elected constituent or citizens' assembly working alongside the regular legislature;
- "mixed" model conventions of elected citizens and selected politicians; and
- civil society conventions – where citizens are represented by groups from civil society.⁶

Suggested characteristics of constitutional conventions

Despite there being no set model for constitutional conventions, there has been much academic discussion on the form and characteristics constitutional conventions ought to take.

Professor Robert Hazell, in a blogpost for the UCL Constitution Unit entitled: [You want a constitutional convention? This is what you need to think through first](#), discussed the different factors that ought to be considered when establishing a constitutional convention. These are:

- Purpose
- Scope and terms of reference
- Timetable
- Selection of members to participate in the Convention
- Practical arrangements for setting up the Convention, such as budget and staffing
- Working methods of a convention
- Links to representative government and legislatures and the political process.⁷

Professor Hazell emphasised that a balance would need to be struck between these factors for a constitutional convention to be successful. He argued:

[...] a [constitutional] convention established hastily, overloaded with too many tasks, inadequately staffed or required to report too quickly is almost certain to fail. That will be damaging to the cause of deliberative democracy as well as to constitutional reform. Those who call for a constitutional convention have focused almost exclusively on its membership, and how those members would be selected. As much thought needs to be given to its purpose, terms of reference, timetable, budget, leadership

[Convention? This is What You Need to Think Through First](#), UCL Constitution Unit Blog, 8 October 2014

⁶ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), April 2014, pp 8–9. Other types of constitutional conventions discussed in this report include "expert commissions" which explore issues to do with devolution and "negotiations among leaders".

⁷ Robert Hazell, [You Want a Constitutional Convention? This is What You Need to Think Through First](#), UCL Constitution Unit Blog, 8 October 2014

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and staffing, as well as its links to government and parliament. If equally careful thought and planning is given to all those things, a convention stands a much greater chance of success.⁸

Dr Alan Renwick, Deputy Director of the UCL Constitution Unit, in part one of his paper, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), set out six key areas that “need to be thought about when a process of constitutional design or reform is being devised”.⁸ He described the first of these:

1. What is the purpose of this process? Is a wholly new constitution being devised, is the existing constitution being comprehensively reviewed, or is the review restricted to specific aspects?⁹

He concluded that this first area “is perhaps the most fundamental: what is the purpose of instituting a constitution-making process in the first place?”.¹⁰

Dr Renwick explained that the following four points focus on the design of the body or the set of bodies responsible for creating constitutional proposals.¹¹ These are:

2. Who is represented in this process? It should be taken as a given that the people in a democracy are sovereign and their representation is therefore essential. But who are “the people”? Are there particular groups that especially deserve or require representation? And to what extent is there a case for following the non-representative principle that expertise should count?
3. What is the basic structure of the body or set of bodies that debates the options and makes recommendations? [...] At the least inclusive end of the spectrum are expert commissions. These are followed by negotiations among political leaders, indirectly elected assemblies, and civil society conventions. Directly elected assemblies, as their name suggests, integrate citizens more directly into the process. Citizens’ assemblies go still further by removing the intermediation of politicians. Finally, these pure models can be mixed, either by establishing constitution-making bodies with mixed memberships or by creating processes that incorporate multiple bodies of differing composition.
4. Who can influence the constitution-making body’s deliberations? In particular, who sets its agenda and with whom does it consult, on what basis, through the course of its work?
5. What are the body’s operational procedures? Most importantly, how does it make decisions: by simple majority, qualified majority, consensus, or some other principle?

Dr Renwick explained that the sixth and final point is important because it “looks at how proposals are translated into final decisions: who is involved and what roles do they play?”.¹² The sixth point is:

⁸ Robert Hazell, [‘You Want a Constitutional Convention? This is What You Need to Think Through First’](#), UCL Constitution Unit Blog, 8 October 2014

⁹ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, p6

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 17. See pages 17–29 of the paper for a more detailed discussion of the issues listed here in summary.

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*

6. What happens once the constitution-making body has made its recommendations? Does that body have the capacity to enact its recommendations into law itself? Does it merely recommend to parliament? Is a referendum held? Do the recommendations automatically go to a referendum or can parliament decide after the recommendations have been made?¹³

¹³ Alan Renwick, [*After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention*](#), 2014, p6

2. Constitutional conventions in practice in the British Isles

Historically, constitutional conventions have not frequently taken place across the British Isles. Most notable, however, were the Scottish Constitutional Convention (1989) and the Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-14).

In Scotland in 1989, the Constitutional Convention was established to consider a scheme for a Scottish Assembly or Parliament, following a recommendation in the 1988 report, *A Claim of Right for Scotland*. It consisted of various civil society groups, politicians, church leaders and the Scottish TUC.

In 2012, the Dáil established the Irish Constitutional Convention which met over 18 months between 2012 and 2014. This was a “mixed model” constitutional convention, consisting of directly elected citizens. The Assembly addressed eight different issues in total.

There are many international examples of constitutional conventions, citizens’ assemblies and other forms of representative engagement, these are discussed in section 6. Further discussion of the recent rise and use of citizens’ assemblies is discussed in section 5.

Scottish Constitutional Convention (1989)

The establishment of a constitutional convention had been a recommendation of the 1988 report, *A Claim of Right for Scotland*, which was published by the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly. The report recommended that a convention should be established to draw up a scheme for a Scottish Assembly or Parliament. In January 1989, a cross-party meeting was held to consider proposals for a convention.

The constitutional convention for Scotland, which was grass roots led rather than established by Government, held its first meeting on 30 March 1989. It was boycotted by the Conservatives and the Scottish National Party. Dr Alan Renwick has labelled this convention a “civil society convention” because it provided for indirect representation of the people. In Scotland’s case, the people were represented “not only by those whom they have chosen in public elections, but also by leading figures from organized civil society”.¹⁴

The convention had 159 members with Canon Kenyon Wright as the Executive Chairman, and reaffirmed the Claim of Right. The Claim of Right stated that the will of the Scottish people was sovereign. Members of the Scottish Constitutional Convention included the Scottish Labour Party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Democratic Left, the Orkney and Shetland Movement, the Scottish Green Party, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Regional, District and Island Councils, and the Campaign for a Scottish Parliament.

¹⁴ Alan Renwick, [*After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention*](#), 2014, p48

Membership also included the main Scottish Churches, the Federation of Small Businesses, ethnic minority representatives and the Scottish Women's Forum.¹⁵

The Convention agreed from the outset that it should reach its decisions by consensus and not by majority vote.

At the initial cross party meeting on establishing a convention, the Scottish National Party had expressed their concern that the convention would not consider the issue of Scottish independence, and later withdrew. The Conservative Party had already made it clear that they would take no part in the proposed convention, as they were not in favour of a devolved Parliament for Scotland.

As the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee noted in its 2013 report, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), the Scottish Constitutional Convention's report in 1995 formed the basis of proposals which were brought forward in a White Paper, *Scotland's Parliament*, by the Government in 1997. Those proposals received considerable support in a referendum on 11 September 1997, with 74% of those voting favouring the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament. The Committee stated that:

23. The Scottish Constitutional Convention was highly successful in achieving its aim. The Convention had a clearly defined remit of making the case for an Assembly or Parliament for Scotland. Nonetheless, the example of the Scottish Constitutional Convention shows that there is a need for clarity about the questions that the convention would seek to answer. Although the Scottish Constitutional Convention did not initially have support from all the political parties, support for its proposals grew over the course of the Convention's six years of deliberations.¹⁶

Dr Alan Renwick also acknowledged the success of the Scottish Constitutional convention. However, he also highlighted two criticisms:

First, it was far less inclusive than at first it might have appeared. Civil society presence was skewed towards the left: the business community was only marginally represented, and even then only by a "small business pressure group which has been a frequent critic of the Conservative Government". More importantly, despite the presence of Canon Kenyon Wright as Chair of the Executive Committee, the Convention was in practice dominated by the politicians and, specifically, by the significant political parties that opted to take part: Labour and the Liberal Democrats.¹⁷

¹⁵ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), 25 March 2013, HC 371, para 21; House of Commons Library, [Citizens' Assemblies and Constitutional Conventions](#), 19 March 2015, p4

¹⁶ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#) Fourth Report of Session 2012-13, HC 371

¹⁷ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, p55

The Irish Constitutional Convention (2012)

The Irish Constitutional Convention was established by the Dáil in July 2012. The Convention met over 18 months between 2012 and 2014.¹⁸ Its remit was wide ranging with participants examining eight issues fixed by the government and two others selected by its own members. This included matters such as: reducing the Presidential term of office to five years and aligning it with the local and European elections, the voting age, and the removal of the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution. The most notable subject assessed by the Convention was same-sex marriage. The Assembly published its [final report](#) in 2014.

The convention had 100 delegates, 66 of whom were selected as representative of the population of the Republic of Ireland via a somewhat complex system instituted by a polling company called Behaviours and Attitudes for the Constitutional Convention (B&A).¹⁹ In addition to the core group of 66, a “shadow” panel of 66 citizens was recruited as a back-up. B&A indicated that a “multi-staged sampling procedure was utilised to select the Core and Shadow panel members”.

This included ensuring a representative geographical spread covering all of the main urban and rural population centres across the country. Detailed quotas were also set in relation to age, gender, socio-economic status and working status. These quotas were set in accordance with population estimates from the Central Statistics Office. No monetary incentives were provided to participating members and no exclusion criteria were imposed on the panel of citizens in terms of membership of political parties or lobby groups.²⁰ Issues arose as to whether citizen members could remain anonymous to avoid being lobbied by groups or individuals.²¹

The other members were made up of a chair; 29 members of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) and 4 representatives of Northern Ireland political parties. Political parties and groups in the Dáil and the Seanad nominated representatives on the basis of their relative strengths in the Oireachtas. Political parties in Northern Ireland were invited to nominate one representative each (the Alliance Party, the Green Party, Sinn Féin, and the SDLP chose to participate). The independent chair, Tom Arnold (an economist who was chief executive of the charity Concern) was appointed by the Government.

The convention first met in Plenary on 1 December 2012 and had to conclude its task within 12 months. Plenary meetings were held on each topic, where the delegates heard from experts and external speakers.

¹⁸ Citizens Information, [Convention on the Constitution](#), 26 November 2019

¹⁹ For further background, see: *The Irish Times*, “[Constitutional convention will have its remit severely pruned](#)”, 25 February 2012, *The Irish Times*, “[The way politics is done](#)”, 12 July 2012, *The Journal*, “[Constitutional Convention to begin in October](#)”, 21 September 2012, *The Journal*, “[Change we can believe in? Ireland’s Constitutional Convention has delivered](#)”, 27 July 2013

²⁰ Behaviour and Attitudes for the Constitutional Convention, [Constitutional Convention - Members of the Public Recruitment Process](#) (last accessed 18 August 2019)

²¹ *The Irish Times*, “[Citizens on Constitution body to have anonymity](#)”, 15 November 2012

They then voted on the issue. Submissions were also taken from the public. The Convention published its final reports on Dáil Reform, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Conclusions and Final Recommendations on 31 March 2014.²²

Changes to the Irish Constitution need to be ratified by a referendum and of the recommendations, it appeared that 18 of the 38 would require referendums if they were to be adopted. Only two of those recommendations for constitutional change were to be put to referendum, namely: referendums on same-sex marriage and on reducing the age of eligibility for presidential candidates.²³ These two referendums took place on 22 May 2015. The same-sex referendum passed by a majority of 62.1%,²⁴ while the referendum on reducing the age of eligibility of presidential candidates from 35 to 21 did not pass with 73.06% voting against. The *Irish Times* reported that the referendum on reducing the age of eligibility for presidential candidates was “sidelined” with greater media coverage and voter attention put on the same-sex marriage referendum.²⁵

Following the success of this Convention, a subsequent Citizens’ Assembly was established by the Irish Parliament in 2016. This Assembly addressed five different issues, most notably the legalisation of abortion. This is discussed in more detail in section 4.

²² See: Convention on the Constitution, [Seventh Report of the Convention on the Constitution: Dáil Reform](#), March 2014; Convention on the Constitution, [Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, March 2014](#), and Convention on the Constitution, [Ninth Report of the Convention on the Constitution: Conclusions and Recommendations](#), March 2014

²³ *The Irish Times* “[Only two proposals for Constitution referendum](#)”, 26 January 2015

²⁴ The Citizens Assembly, [Convention on the Constitution](#), 26 November 2019

²⁵ *The Irish Times* “[Presidential age vote defeated by three to one margin](#)”, 23 May 2015

3. Recent support for constitutional conventions in the UK

3.1 The Governance of Britain Green Paper

The Labour Government's July 2007 Green Paper, [*The Governance of Britain*](#), made a number of proposals for constitutional reform which were intended to shift power from the executive to Parliament and the public, make the executive more accountable, and reinvigorate democracy. The Green Paper also emphasised the need to involve the public in constitutional change. In a speech to the National Council of Voluntary Organisations on 3 September 2007, the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, announced that there would be a Citizens' Summit on a British Statement of Values. He said:

[...] a Citizens Summit, composed of a representative sample of the British people, will be asked to formulate the British statement of values that was proposed in our Green Paper on the future government of Britain, a living statement of rights and responsibilities for the British people. It won't take root anyway unless there is a real sense that it has been brought forward by people themselves.

In July 2008, the Ministry of Justice published [*A national framework for greater citizen engagement*](#). This discussion paper set out a proposed constitutional framework for the use of a number of engagement mechanisms, including deliberative methods such as citizens' summits and juries. It recognised that representative democracy in the UK had come under pressure from the decline in political parties, the decrease in participation in formal politics, and the impact of technological, social and economic changes.

The main outcome of the *Governance of Britain* review was the passage of the [*Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010*](#). Although specific events were proposed (such as a citizens' summit on whether Election Day should be moved to the weekend²⁶) little progress was made in relation to guaranteeing significant citizen involvement in constitutional reform.

Many of the major constitutional reforms proposed by the Coalition Government during the 2010-15 Parliament, such as fixed-term Parliaments, House of Lords reform, voting reform and consideration of a new Bill of Rights were not subject to substantial citizen engagement initiatives prior to their announcement.

3.2 The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee Report

On 28 March 2013, the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee published its report [*Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?*](#)

²⁶ HM Government, [*Governance of Britain: Election Day Weekend Voting*](#), CP 13/08.

which considered the idea of citizens' assemblies and other forms of voter engagement.

The Committee's inquiry was held in the context of devolution of power to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and the anticipated independence referendum in Scotland. The Committee noted that there had been a series of appointed commissions which had considered these issues (including the Calman Commission, which looked at further powers for Scotland; the Holtham, Richard, and Silk Commissions, which looked at devolved powers for Wales; the McKay Commission, which looked into solutions to the West Lothian Question; and the Commission on a British Bill of Rights, which looked at whether the UK should have its own Bill of Rights).²⁷

In evidence to the Committee, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Cabinet Office, Chloe Smith appeared to reject the idea of establishing a constitutional convention. She said:

[P]ublic concern and Government policy is focussed on tackling the economic challenges as a top priority and it might therefore be difficult to justify a convention that looked at the whole of the UK constitution at the present moment.²⁸

The Committee examined the impact of the devolution settlement and argued that there was a "need to consider both how the increasingly devolved parts of the Union interact with each other, and what we, as residents of the UK, want the Union to look like going forward." The Committee suggested:

[...] the Government consider, among other options, preparations for a UK-wide constitutional convention, including decisions about its form and organisation, and the process of calling for evidence.²⁹

The Committee's report noted that views on the idea were split, both amongst the witnesses who had given evidence and the members of the Committee:

47. There is a range of very different opinions. This is true, not only among the witnesses but also among the members of our Committee, some of whom do not accept either the need for further review of constitutional arrangements or that a constitutional convention would be the right vehicle for any such review. We have debated our report carefully, but all our recommendations to the Government must be considered with the caveat that they do not represent the unanimous view of the members of our Committee.³⁰

The Government [responded](#) to the Committee in November 2013. The Government reiterated the then minister Chloe Smith's position that

²⁷ House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#) Fourth Report of Session 2012-13, HC 371

²⁸ *Ibid.*, [Written evidence submitted by the Cabinet Office](#), para 28

²⁹ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#) Fourth Report of Session 2012-13, HC 371

³⁰ *Ibid* para 47

“limited resources and time mean the Government needs to prioritise its activities.”³¹

It stated that the question of establishing a constitutional convention “does not exist in a vacuum—context is crucial. If the time is not right, or other priorities mean resources are focused elsewhere, such a convention risks being ineffective and even detrimental”.

The Government argued that:

Without public demand for a constitutional convention, it is difficult to anticipate the strong public engagement necessary for a constitutional constitution to have a lasting impact.³²

It went on to say that in its view there was not currently sufficient public interest to justify a constitutional convention. Moreover, at that time, the Government’s stated that the economy was its priority and “Therefore the Government has not commented on the potential remit or composition of any constitutional convention”.³³

3.3 The aftermath of the Scottish Independence referendum

The conclusion of the Scottish Independence referendum in September 2014 seemed to generate a new impetus in favour of the idea of holding a constitutional convention. The NGO, Unlock Democracy, has argued that:

One of the inspiring things about the Scottish referendum debate was that it started a national conversation about the way we are governed. This is something we should build on rather than step back from. There are a wide variety of issues that people may want to raise in the convention that would not necessarily be considered important by government negotiating teams. If we are to build a new constitutional settlement then it needs to involve the people of the UK and not just be another deal done behind closed doors.³⁴

Professor Robert Hazell considered the renewed interest in constitutional conventions in a post on the UK Constitutional Law Blog. He said that a constitutional convention was not the only means of achieving considered constitutional reform, noting that:

If the main objective is to build cross-party consensus, then cross-party talks are the obvious vehicle (as in the cross party talks which preceded the Belfast agreement, or the current talks on further devolution to Scotland led by Lord Smith of Kelvin). If the main objective is to harness expert opinion, then the best vehicle

³¹ HM Government, Government Response to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee Fourth Report of Session 2012-13, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), Cm 8749, November 2013

³² HM Government, Government Response to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee Fourth Report of Session 2012-13, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), Cm 8749, November 2013, p5

³³ HM Government, Government Response to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee Fourth Report of Session 2012-13, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), Cm 8749, November 2013, p14

³⁴ Unlock Democracy, [Guide to a Constitutional Convention](#) (last accessed 14 July 2016)

may be an expert commission. In recent years expert commissions have been successfully used to chart the way ahead for further devolution, with the Calman Commission in Scotland leading to the Scotland Act 2012, and a series of commissions leading to the grant of further legislative powers to Wales.³⁵

Professor Hazell went on to suggest that “the extraordinary levels of public engagement during the referendum campaign in Scotland have created an expectation that for proposals to command legitimacy, there must be greater citizen involvement in producing them”.³⁶

He also argued that there were a large number of constitutional issues which could be considered, including: an In/Out referendum on the European Union; the need for a British Bill of Rights; reform of House of Lords; changing the voting system; votes at 16; reform of party funding and a written constitution for the UK. However, he warned that:

A convention charged with resolving such a wide range of different issues would face an impossible task. Each issue has proved intractable; in combination they are insuperable.³⁷

Professor Hazell examined a number of other issues (e.g. cost, staffing, timetable and links to representative government, legislatures and the political process) and concluded that:

A constitutional convention sounds an attractive idea. But a convention established hastily, overloaded with too many tasks, inadequately staffed or required to report too quickly is almost certain to fail. That will be damaging to the cause of deliberative democracy as well as to constitutional reform. Those who call for a constitutional convention have focused almost exclusively on its membership, and how those members would be selected. As much thought needs to be given to its purpose, terms of reference, timetable, budget, leadership and staffing, as well as its links to government and Parliament. If equally careful thought and planning is given to all those things, a convention stands a much greater chance of success.³⁸

Dr Alan Renwick also considered the issue of constitutional conventions, having special regard to international experiences (discussed further below).³⁹ He concluded that proposals in the UK should best be developed by a convention comprising a mixture of ordinary members of the public and politicians, arguing that any agreed proposals should be put to a referendum. He said that this approach offers the best route to high-quality debate, stronger democratic engagement, and, ultimately, deeper legitimacy for our governing structures. He stated:

Such a convention has the potential to be a powerful forum not only for recreating the Union in a manner that fits the realities of devolution and the complexities of governing in the twenty first century, but also for stimulating public discussion of and engagement with questions of how politics works and how it might be made to work better. Claims should not be exaggerated.

³⁵ Robert Hazell, [You want a constitutional convention this is what you need to think through first](#), UK Constitutional Law Association Blog, 15 October 2014

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ *Ibid*

No constitution-making process can generate a democratic utopia of active, thoughtful citizens. But a convention along the lines proposed here would be a major event, attracting interest and engagement among politicians, the media, relevant scholars, and the wider public. There is no guarantee that it would succeed. But it would certainly be worthwhile to attempt it.⁴⁰

Unlock Democracy has argued that a constitutional convention “should have direct citizen involvement but that there should be defined roles for other groups including parliamentarians, civil society and constitutional experts.”⁴¹ It claims that the “most pressing issue that should be considered by a constitutional convention is the impact of devolution on the UK and the future governance of England.”⁴²

In [The Implications of Devolution for England](#) published in December 2014, the then Coalition Government (2010-15) noted that:

There are a large number of issues which could potentially be in scope for a constitutional convention, including: the UK-wide implications of devolution, both national and by region; devolution within England (and other nations too); reforms at Westminster, including electoral reform on voting age; the case for a written constitution.⁴³

The paper indicated that decisions would have to be taken on any convention’s terms of reference; composition and timescale, stating that:

There are a number of ways a convention could be approached, ranging from an exercise carried out by an Independent Chair and panel of experts to a body made up of citizens and representative of the nations and regions, and local Government, and with a strong element of public consultation. Parliament could decide how those on the convention from such groups would then be selected and what proportion was independent or belonged to political parties.⁴⁴

At that time, the major political parties all addressed the idea to some extent.

Political party positions

The Conservative Party set out its position in a party political segment of [The Implications of Devolution for England](#) (December 2014). It argued that any convention should be concerned with the “effective working of the constitutional arrangements for each part of the Union including the new arrangements for England, to build a better and fairer settlement within our United Kingdom.”⁴⁵ It did not provide any detail on issues such as composition or terms of reference, but stated that:

⁴⁰ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), The Constitution Society, 2014

⁴¹ Unlock Democracy, [Guide to a Constitutional Convention](#) (last accessed 14 July 2016)

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ HM Government, [The Implications of Devolution for England](#), Cm 8969, December 2014, p21

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ HM Government, [The Implications of Devolution for England](#), Cm 8969, December 2014, p27

Such a body could consider the case for a 'Statute of the Union' to enshrine and reinforce the constitutional arrangements for each part of the Union, and to assist in achieving a stable, long-term settlement across the United Kingdom. The establishment of any such convention or commission should not delay the implementation of the Smith Commission in Scotland and equivalent changes in the rest of the United Kingdom, including the introduction of English Votes for English Laws, or English and Welsh Votes for English and Welsh Laws.⁴⁶

On 19 September 2014, the Labour Party announced that, if elected, it would bring forward a "full Constitutional Convention rooted in our nations and regions, to address the need for further devolution in England and political reform of Westminster."⁴⁷ It said that it would "look at new ideas for representation including reforms at Westminster and the case for a Senate of the Nations and Regions."⁴⁸

The Liberal Democrats supported the idea of a constitutional convention in their party political segment of the Command Paper [The Implications of Devolution for England](#). They argued that the remit of any such convention should be decided by Parliament through legislation and that it should be composed of representatives of the political parties, academia, civil society and members of the public.⁴⁹

In the 2015-16 Parliamentary session, the former Chair of the Political and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee, Graham Allen, introduced a presentation Bill to establish a Constitutional Convention. The [Constitutional Convention \(No. 2\) Bill](#) set the terms of reference of a Constitutional Convention as: (a) the devolution of legislative and fiscal competence to and within Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland; (b) the devolution of legislative and fiscal competence to local authorities within the United Kingdom; (c) the reform of the electoral system; (d) the reform of the House of Lords; (e) constitutional matters to be considered in further conventions, and procedures to govern the consideration and implementation of any future constitutional reforms. The Convention would be made up of representatives of registered political parties, local authorities, the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. It specified that at least 50% of the members of the convention must not be employed in a role which can reasonably be considered to be political. Lord Purvis of Tweed introduced an identical [Bill](#) to the House of Lords in the same Session which progressed to Committee stage.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Labour Party, [A Constitutional Convention for the UK; a dynamic new political settlement for England and for Britain](#), Press Release, 19 September 2014

⁴⁸ See also: J. Hand and D. Coffey '[Miliband's senate of the regions and a constitutional convention conundrum.](#)', U.K. Const. L. Blog (23rd November 2014)

⁴⁹ HM Government, [The Implications of Devolution for England](#), Cm 8969, December 2014, p31-31

4. Citizens' Assemblies

4.1 What are citizens' assemblies?

A citizens' assembly can be one form of constitutional convention, that is, it is established to consider constitutional reform. However, more recently, citizens' assemblies have been enacted to consider other complex issues.

A citizens' assembly usually involves bringing together members of the public who receive talks and briefing on an issue(s) and then debate them in order to reach conclusion(s) and recommendation(s) about what they believe ought to happen next. The aim is to give individuals the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic, before reaching conclusions.⁵⁰ Commenting on this aspect of citizens' assemblies in a [blogpost](#) for the Electoral Reform Society, Doug Cowan wrote:

These aren't just focus groups or consultations though. The goal isn't to just hear what people already think – but for the members to engage in serious, informed reflection on important policy matters with people they may never normally meet.

Numerous citizens' assemblies have taken place in the UK and internationally, having been praised for i) giving decision-makers a detailed understanding of informed and considered public opinion on complex issues; and ii) opening up the space for political consensus to be found.⁵¹ On 24 January 2019 and in a [blogpost](#) for the UCL Constitution Unit, Dr Alan Renwick described the overarching potential benefit of citizens' assemblies. He wrote:

[Citizens' assemblies] foster conversations among people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives who normally wouldn't even meet each other. If they are integrated effectively into the wider policy-making process, they can transform the quality of public debate and decision-making.

Who is selected to participate in Citizens' Assemblies?

Individuals who are selected to participate in the citizens' assembly are typically chosen to reflect the wider population in terms of demographics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, social class) and sometimes relevant attitudes (e.g. preferences for a small or large state, how the public voted in a referendum).⁵² In this way, assemblies often employ stratified random sampling to ensure assembly members are representative of the public.⁵³

⁵⁰ Parliament.uk, [What is a citizens' assembly](#), [webpage] (accessed on 26 November 2019)

⁵¹ Sarah Allan and Rebecca McKee, [Why do citizens' assemblies work? Evidence from the citizens' assemblies on Brexit and Social Care](#), 28 February 2019

⁵² Parliament.uk, [What is a citizens' assembly](#), [webpage] (accessed on 28 November 2019)

⁵³ Investopedia, [Stratified random sampling](#), [webpage] (accessed on 28 November 2019)

However, despite this, societal barriers and practical issues may prevent individuals from participating in assemblies. For example single parents, carers and people with additional needs may face challenges in taking part or attending for the full duration of the assembly especially if it is unpaid - therefore limiting how well an assembly can effectively represent the wider public.⁵⁴

Other constitutional conventions and citizens' assemblies have come under criticism for their selection process for participants. For example, during the Irish Constitutional Convention (2012) a husband and wife and two neighbours were all selected.⁵⁵ The Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016) had seven members dismissed when it was discovered they were not randomly selected.⁵⁶

How are Citizens' Assemblies organised?

Dr Renwick has characterised citizens' assemblies as having three stages: a learning phase, a public hearing (or consultation) phase and a deliberation phase.⁵⁷ In his [blogpost](#) for the Electoral Reform Society, Doug Cowie elaborated on these stages:

A citizens' assembly will typically go through three phases: learning; consultation; deliberation and discussion.

Firstly, a learning phase where participants get to know each other and how the assembly works and what its aims are. In this phase, relevant facts about the issue at hand are presented to the participants, who get to ask questions of experts and access background and contextual information.

Secondly, during the consultation phase, campaigners from each side get to present their arguments, and be questioned on them. Sometimes, the assembly might run a public consultation during this phase to understand what the broader public thinks about an issue.

Thirdly, the participants deliberate amongst themselves – discussing which arguments they found convincing and which they saw straight through. Generally, assembly members will make recommendations at the end of this phase.

He explained that the information provided to participants is balanced and often vetted by an Advisory Board. The Board typically consists of independent experts and specialist speakers representing different positions on the topic being discussed. More broadly, discussions will likely be facilitated to ensure all participants have the opportunity to raise their views, although the facilitators themselves do not comment on the matters under discussion.

Mr Cowie explained the value of this structure:

Deliberative processes emphasise the importance of reflection and informed discussion in decision-making. This allows people to

⁵⁴ Sarah Allan and Rebecca McKee, [Why do citizens' assemblies work? Evidence from the citizens' assemblies on Brexit and Social Care](#), 28 February 2019

⁵⁵ *Irish News*, "[Concern as couple and set of neighbours are 'randomly selected' for constitutional body](#)", 1 February 2016

⁵⁶ *The Irish Times*, "[Seven Citizens' Assembly members not randomly recruited](#)", 21 February 2019

⁵⁷ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, pp68-69

adopt more nuanced positions on the issues at hand, with a better understanding of the trade-offs inherent in a given decision.

4.2 Pilot citizens' assemblies – Southampton and Sheffield (2015)

Two pilot citizens' assemblies were held in 2015 – one in Southampton; one in Sheffield – which were set up not only to discover what people thought about moving a range of options that move more UK decision-making and responsibility to the local level, but also to examine the best ways of running this type of deliberative democracy process. Citizens' Assembly North and South were organised by the Electoral Reform Society and academics from the universities of Sheffield, Southampton, London and Westminster. Their aim was "to contribute not only to the many public conversations about constitutional reform, but also [to] make a significant contribution to the future possibilities for deliberative and participatory democracy in the UK".⁵⁸

Each Assembly was intended to include 45 participants: in the event, in Southampton, six participants were politicians (local councillors) and 23 were non-politicians selected on a semi-random basis by an independent polling company. In Sheffield, the assembly consisted of 32 members of the public selected on a semi-random basis by an independent polling company. It was not possible for people to apply directly to be on either assembly. However, both assemblies accepted written submissions from the public. Questions assembly members were asked to debate and decide included: what policy issues should be decided locally (i.e. should be devolved); what geographical areas should be covered; and who should be involved in decision-making. Each assembly took place over two weekends in autumn 2015.

A report on the project was published in March 2016.⁵⁹ It included a number of findings around the practicalities of running such events, and about the experience of participants:

- Participants were engaged with, and enjoyed, the deliberative process. In Sheffield, they challenged the structures proposed by the organisers and considered questions in a different order to that expected;
- A majority of participants overall agreed that they had changed their opinions as a result of participating;
- It was difficult to obtain sufficient participants, or a balanced sample of participants, at short notice for an in-depth deliberative event. However, retention of members from the first to the second weekend was very high in both assemblies;
- The participation of politicians was perceived negatively by some members of the public, though not by a majority;

⁵⁸ Democracy Matters, [About the Project](#) [webpage] (accessed 12 October 2015)

⁵⁹ University of Sheffield, [Democracy Matters: lessons from the 2015 citizens' assemblies on English devolution](#), March 2016

- Research and project management are distinct elements of the process of delivering an assembly. In-depth preparation is crucial, and costs money: the total budget for the pilots was just over £200,000.

4.3 Citizens' Assembly on Social Care (2018)

Following the announcement that the Government will publish a Green Paper on social care for adults,⁶⁰ the Commons Select Committees on Health and Social Care, and Housing, Communities and Local Government jointly held an inquiry to influence the proposed Green Paper by identifying a broad consensus for funding reforms in the area of social care reform.⁶¹ As part of this inquiry, the two Committees co-commissioned [Involve](#) (a public participation charity) to design and run the [Citizens' Assembly on Social Care](#). The Assembly's recommendations contributed to the Committee's final [report](#) which was published on 27 June 2018. This Assembly was the first of its kind to be commissioned by the UK Parliament.

The Citizens' Assembly was launched to gather a range of evidence on the options for funding social care sustainably for the beyond 2020. The Committees sought to organise the citizens' assembly to focus on the interdependence of the health and social care systems and how best to reach political and public consensus on a potential solution.⁶² This included addressing issues such as how much individuals should have to pay themselves versus how much should be publicly funded. It covered adult social care for both older and working age adults.⁶³

The Assembly was made up of 47 randomly-selected citizens. Participants were selected in order to be a broadly representative sample of only the English population (as social care is a devolved issue).

Structure of the Citizens' Assembly

The Citizens' Assembly occurred over two weekends in Birmingham consisting of three stages: learning, deliberation and decision-making.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Adult social care is the support provided to adults with physical or learning disabilities, or physical or mental illnesses. It includes support for older people, and also for some working age adults with disabilities or illnesses. The support could be for personal care (such as eating, washing, or getting dressed) or for domestic routines (such as cleaning or going to the shops). For further information see the Commons Library paper [Adult Social Care: the Government's ongoing policy review and anticipated Green Paper \(England\)](#) (30 September 2019).

⁶¹ Parliament.uk, [What is a citizens' Assembly](#), [webpage] (accessed on 28 November 2019)

⁶² Involve, [How can we find a sustainable solution to funding adult social care?](#), 1 May 2018

⁶³ UK Parliament, [What is a citizens' assembly?](#), [webpage] (accessed on 28 November 2019)

⁶⁴ The Assembly proceedings were carefully designed to enable the full participation of all members. Small group work ensured that all participants were able to contribute and had time to reflect and develop their own opinions, particularly those less confident in public speaking. The exercises and techniques that were used were specifically designed to support Assembly Members to engage with complex information and feel able to put their opinion forward, with no prior knowledge needed.

Participants were assisted throughout the process by two experts on social care. These were Professor Martin Knapp and Professor Gerald Wistow.⁶⁵ These professional facilitators were responsible for ensuring “everyone could be heard and felt comfortable, as well as to explain each of the exercises”.⁶⁶ The facilitators only explained and answered questions about the Assembly’s process. An Advisory Panel was also set up to support preparations and to ensure that the Assembly’s materials were “factually accurate, comprehensive, balanced and unbiased”.⁶⁷

During the first weekend, the “learning stage” involved the participants hearing from and questioning a range of experts on both public and private models of social care funding. Participants were also able to factor in people’s lived experience into their deliberation, as they heard directly from people who access social care.⁶⁸ After, participants discussed what had been said in small groups, identifying the issues and arguments that they felt to be most important.⁶⁹

During the second weekend, participants discussed the information they had received further and reached a set of recommendations. In doing this, they worked through a series of exercises in small groups, and then voted and ranked various options.⁷⁰

Outcome of the Citizens’ Assembly

Committee members considered the Assembly’s work alongside other evidence submitted to the inquiry, with the Assembly’s final recommendations and conclusions presented and utilised in the Committees’ joint [report](#). The Chairs of the two Committees, Clive Betts and Sarah Wollaston, praised the Assembly and said:

The process has been invaluable in gauging informed public opinion on the difficult questions facing social care and has helped us as we debated the recommendations we set out in our own report. In particular, hearing Assembly members express strong support for social care free at the point of delivery and for the transparency and accountability that earmarked taxation would bring to spending on social care closely informed our proposals on these key issues of reform.⁷¹

In response, Lucy Campbell of the Institute for Government wrote a [blogpost](#) (27 June 2018), which assessed what options were consequently available to the Government. Rebecca McKee wrote a [blogpost](#) (26 June 2018) for the UCL Constitution Unit which assessed the success of the Assembly.

⁶⁵ Involve, [How can we find a sustainable solution to funding adult social care?](#), 1 May 2018

⁶⁶ Parliament.uk, [What is a citizens’ assembly?](#) (accessed on 28 November 2019)

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁸ University of Leeds (Centre for Democratic Engagement), [How can deliberative democracy solve pressing policy issues?](#), 1 November 2018

⁶⁹ Parliament.uk, [What is a citizens’ assembly?](#) (accessed on 28 November 2019)

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁷¹ Involve, [Citizens’ Assembly on Social Care: recommendations for funding for adult social care](#), p4, June 2019

As noted earlier, the joint inquiry was timed to influence the Government's Green Paper on the funding of social care for adults. However, the publication of this Green Paper has since been delayed.

On 5 September 2018 and in response to the joint report, Caroline Dinenage, the Minister of State for the Department of Health and Social Care, [wrote](#) to the Chairs of two Committees. She said:

...many of the issues raised [in the joint report] relate to policy that government is still developing through the Green Paper process. It would be premature to respond to the committee's recommendations on funding reform in advance of that.

We therefore propose to send you the Government response to the report in the autumn. This will ensure that our response is aligned to the policy proposals that the Green Paper sets out on the long-term funding of social care.

As of January 2020, the Green Paper has still not been published.⁷²

4.4 Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland (2018)

The [Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland](#) was established to address the issue of social care by the charity Involve. It did not possess and legislative or statutory powers – the Assembly was set up in a “purely advisory capacity.”⁷³ It met for two weekends between October–November 2018. These two weekends consisted of “learning, deliberation and decision-making” which was designed to ensure participants received appropriate evidence in order to make informed recommendations.⁷⁴

The Assembly members examined options for the future of Northern Ireland's social care system for older people and was intended both to “break the deadlock” on this issue, to pilot new mechanisms for democratic engagement and influence Northern Ireland's politicians.⁷⁵ The Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland was set up to:

1. Explore aspirations for social care for older people, including the role the health service, communities and individuals need to play.
2. Develop useful, realistic recommendations for delivering a sustainable, fit-for-purpose social care system for older

⁷² See previous Government commitments at, for instance, [HC Deb 7 Jan 2019 cc62-84](#); Gov.uk, “[Boris Johnson's first speech as Prime Minister: 24 July 2019](#)”, [webpage] (accessed on 5 December 2019)

⁷³ Involve, [Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland to meet this Autumn](#), 12 September 2018

⁷⁴ Involve, [Unanimous support from citizens' assembly for Northern Ireland for better conditions for carers](#), 19 November 2018

⁷⁵ Involve, [Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland](#), [webpage] (accessed on 9 December 2019). It was also intended that the Assembly pilot a model of deliberative engagement that may be adopted by the Northern Ireland Executive, the Northern Ireland Assembly and/or the Northern Ireland Office, to address further contested issues.

people, future-proofed to cope with the needs of the next generations (within the context of finite resources).⁷⁶

The Assembly consisted of 75 citizens, selected to be broadly representative of Northern Ireland's population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, regional spread, and socio-economic status.⁷⁷

The Assembly participants received a series of presentations and support from facilitators and an academic team of social policy experts led by Professor Ann Marie Gray from Ulster University. These groups were responsible for ensuring information was disseminated impartially and effectively to facilitate deliberation between citizens.⁷⁸

Participants also worked through a series of exercises in small groups and voted on and ranked different proposals. At each stage of this deliberative process, the arguments and conclusions were recorded to "enable decision-makers to fully understand the rationales behind the recommendations."⁷⁹

The Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland developed and agreed [27 recommendations and 3 high-level resolutions](#) across three themes: person centred care, systems and structures, and care providers.

4.5 Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016)

[The Irish Citizens' Assembly](#) or An Tionól Saoránach was the successor to the [Irish Constitutional Convention](#) (2012-14) discussed earlier in section 2. The Irish Citizens' Assembly and its terms of reference were [approved](#) by both Houses of the Irish Parliament (Houses of the Oireachtas) in July 2016, prior to the start of the Assembly's first meeting.⁸⁰ The Programme of a Partnership Government 2016 committed the Irish Parliament to establishing the [Irish Citizens' Assembly](#) and to form "within six months and without participation by politicians, with a mandate to look at a limited number of key issues over an extended time period."⁸¹ The Assembly agreed its own rules of procedure for "the effective conduct of its business in as economical a manner as possible".⁸² The terms of reference also committed the Assembly to producing reports and recommendations on each of the topics it considered.

The Assembly considered the following topics in the order listed below:

- 1 The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution - ([Final Report on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution](#))

⁷⁶ Involve, [Recommendations and Resolutions](#), 18 November 2018

⁷⁷ Involve, [Unanimous support from Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland for better conditions for carers](#), 19 November 2018

⁷⁸ Involve, [Citizens' Assembly for Northern Ireland meets for the first time to discuss social care for older people](#), 29 October 2018

⁷⁹ Involve, [Unanimous support from citizens' assembly for Northern Ireland for better conditions for carers](#), 19 November 2018

⁸⁰ The Assembly's terms of reference determined: the topics which Assembly members discussed, the number of Assembly members, the timelines of the Assembly and the voting process and substitutions.

⁸¹ Irish Parliament, [The Citizens' Assembly Fact Sheet](#), (accessed on 2 December 2019)

⁸² Irish Parliament, [Resolution approving establishment on the Citizens' Assembly](#), July 2016

- 2 Challenges and opportunities of an ageing population - ([Final Report on Challenges and opportunities of an ageing population](#))
- 3 Making Ireland a leader in tackling climate change – ([Final Report on Making Ireland a leader in tackling climate change](#))
- 4 Manner in which referenda are held - ([Final Report on the fourth and fifth topics: The manner in which referenda are held & Fixed term Parliaments](#))
- 5 Fixed term parliaments - ([Final Report on the fourth and fifth topics: The manner in which referenda are held & Fixed term Parliaments](#))

The Assembly comprised of 100 individuals which included the former Supreme Court judge, the Honourable Mary Laffoy, who was appointed by the Government as the Chairperson.⁸³ The Chairperson only voted when there was a tie and was principally responsible for facilitating debate.⁸⁴

The remaining 99 Assembly members were made up of Irish citizens who were entitled to vote at a referendum⁸⁵ and were broadly representative of Irish society and in terms of factors such as age, gender, social class, regional spread. The members were selected using a polling company.⁸⁶

An Expert Advisory Group was established to prepare information and advice to participants. The Assembly did invite members of the public, representative groups and other interested stakeholders to provide written submissions on the topics under consideration by the Assembly.⁸⁷ All decisions before the Assembly were decided by a majority of the votes of the participants present.⁸⁸

The Irish Parliament set out, in the Assembly's terms of reference, how it would respond to the Assembly's reports and recommendations:

- the Assembly will first make a report and recommendation on the matter[s]...[the Assembly has considered] to the Houses of the Oireachtas, which on receipt will refer the report for consideration to a Committee of both Houses which will in turn bring its conclusions to the Houses for debate;
- the Assembly will report and make recommendations to the Houses of the Oireachtas on each remaining matter as soon as it has completed its deliberations, but in any event not later than one year from the date of the first Assembly meeting.

[...]

⁸³ Irish Parliament, [The Citizens' Assembly Fact Sheet](#), (accessed on 2 December 2019)

⁸⁴ Irish Parliament, [Resolution approving establishment on the Citizens' Assembly](#), July 2016

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

⁸⁶ Involve, [The Irish Citizens' Assembly](#), (accessed on 5 December 2019). Throughout the process some members left for various reasons, and some of these were replaced. More information is available [here](#).

⁸⁷ Citizens' Assembly, [Resolution approving establishments of the Citizens' Assembly](#), (accessed on 6 December 2019)

⁸⁸ Irish Parliament, [Resolution approving establishment on the Citizens' Assembly](#), July 2016

- the Government will provide in the Houses of the Oireachtas a response to each recommendation of the Assembly and, if accepting the recommendation, will indicate the timeframe it envisages for the holding of any related referendum.

The [Irish Citizens' Assembly's consideration of abortion](#) received substantial attention and is considered to be a particular instance of a Citizens' Assembly being used successfully.⁸⁹ In April 2017, the Assembly recommended that there should be no restrictions on abortion in the early stages of pregnancy and that terminations should also be allowed in specified circumstances at later stages. After the Assembly's report on this matter was debated by the Oireachtas, it was supported by the Eighth Amendment Referendum Bill and referendum on whether to legalise abortion was put to the public on 26 May 2018. The Assembly's recommendation was accepted: 66.4% of the public voted to legalise abortion.⁹⁰

4.6 Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (2017)

The [Citizens' Assembly on Brexit](#) took place in the UK and met over two weekends in September 2017. The Assembly was organised by Dr Alan Renwick of the UCL Constitution Unit in partnership with an independent consortium of universities and civil society organisations. The Assembly was an [ESRC-funded project](#) which received support from figures across the political spectrum. This included, for example, Remain's Chuka Umunna and Will Straw to Leave's Bernard Jenkin and Suzanne Evans.⁹¹ The Assembly's final [report](#) states that the purpose of the Assembly was:

...to provide much needed, robust public input into the Brexit process and show the value of informed and in-depth public engagement on controversial areas of public policy.

The report also stated that, while respecting the outcome of the 2016 Referendum result, the Assembly sought to clarify "...what the public thinks our [the UK's] future relationship with the EU should be". The Assembly organisers believed this was of particular importance because, in their view, the Government was "negotiating with the EU with limited knowledge of the priorities of the UK electorate".

Recruitment for Assembly participants was conducted by social research company ICM. In total, 50 participants were randomly selected

⁸⁹ See, for example: RSA "[Read about it here – you won't anywhere else](#)", 3 July 2018; *The Irish Times* "[The Citizens' Assembly – a canny move on the road to repeal](#)", 27 May 2018; The Journal, [Analysis: Six reasons why Ireland was a landslide Yes for repeal](#) 26 May 2018; and *The Irish Times*, [Abortion referendum: the political winners and losers](#) 26 May 2018

⁹⁰ See, for example, *The Guardian* (Jon Henley), [Irish abortion referendum: yes wins with 66.4% - as it happened](#), 26 May 2018 and On 22 January 2019, *The Guardian* published an opinion piece '[Transparency and fairness': Irish readers on why the Citizens' Assembly worked](#).

⁹¹ The Constitution Unit, [The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit: Public to debate UK's exit terms](#), 12 July 2017

individuals based on gender, ethnicity, social class, the region of the UK in which they live and their vote in the 2016 Brexit Referendum.⁹²

Structure of the Citizens' Assembly

Assembly members met over two weekends and heard from experts and received briefing materials. The Assembly's design, selection of expert speakers and briefing materials were vetted by an [Advisory Board](#) which represented a range of views on Brexit. This was to ensure the presentation of balanced information on controversial policy issues.⁹³

The first weekend focused on "learning". Assembly Members were introduced to trade and migration issues in the context of Brexit. Members heard from and questioned a range of experts who had differing viewpoints on these issues.⁹⁴

The second weekend focused on "deliberation and agreeing recommendations."⁹⁵ Members heard from two MPs with opposing views which they then discussed and debated. Members determined their own priorities for Brexit and created guidelines for the UK government and made recommendations on a variety of areas relating to the UK's post-Brexit relations with the European Union. This included matters of trade relations with the EU and non-EU countries, migration and the status of the UK and its relationship with the EU in a "no deal" scenario.⁹⁶

Outcome of the Citizens' Assembly

The Assembly's final [report](#) which included conclusions and recommendations, was published in December 2017.

Assembly members were surveyed on a variety of areas pertaining to the processes and effectiveness of the Assembly, at the start and end of each weekend. Overall, the survey showed that individuals were positive about their experiences with the event being rated 4.6 out of 5 on average. Survey results also showed that participants were positive about the fairness and balance of the information they received and that they had ample opportunity to express their views. There was strong agreement amongst participants that citizens' assemblies ought to be used more frequently to inform government decision-making.⁹⁷

In its *Monitor* publication, the UCL Constitution Unit reported that the Assembly and its final report were well-received from individuals of different political viewpoints.⁹⁸ It highlighted praise from Suella Braverman, the then Chair of the European Research Group of pro-Brexit Conservative MPs, at the report's launch in Westminster. Mrs

⁹² The Constitution Unit, [Citizens' Assembly on Brexit](#), [webpage] (accessed on 5 December 2019). The Assembly was comprised of more Members who voted "leave" than "remain" in the 2016 referendum but had a lower proportion of non-voters than the wider population: see [Summary Report](#).

⁹³ The Constitution Unit, [Citizens' Assembly on Brexit: Summary Report](#), 2017

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ The Constitution Unit, [Citizens' Assembly on Brexit: Summary Report](#), p7, 2017

⁹⁸ The Constitution Unit, [Monitor 68](#), March 2018, p17

Braverman described the Assembly as a “brilliant project” and said its “very rigorous, extensive, and robust” processes meant that its recommendations should carry substantial weight.⁹⁹ Polly Toynbee’s [article](#) in the *Guardian* claimed that “Citizens’ assemblies are wonderful – if only the whole population could be given the chance for such serious, informed deliberation.”

Further debate on Citizens’ Assemblies and Brexit

The idea of facilitating further public engagement with Brexit, particularly via a further citizens’ assembly, saw some support during the Parliamentary deadlock that prevailed during 2019.¹⁰⁰ This included:

- An article in the *Guardian*, on 20 January 2019, by the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, entitled [A citizens’ assembly is now the only way to break the Brexit deadlock](#).
- Two blogposts from Jim Gallagher, published on [18 January 2019](#) and [5 April 2019](#);
- A [blogpost](#) from Tim Hughes, the director of Involve, on 13 December 2018;
- a blog from Dr Alan Renwick at UCL, on 24 January 2019, entitled [Could a citizens’ assembly help the Brexit process?](#);
- An [article](#) from James Blitz in the *Financial Times* in January 2019;
- Evidence to the House of Commons Exiting the European Union committee, on [23 July 2019](#) and [24 July 2019](#).

Several MPs spoke in favour of further citizens’ assemblies on Brexit.¹⁰¹ For example, Stella Creasy spoke in support of a citizens’ assembly in the House of Commons in January 2019:

Citizens’ assemblies are not about replacing MPs, or about cancelling or giving up on Parliament. They are not about saying parliamentary democracy cannot work; they are about making it work with the public. They are also about stopping the games that we have seen being played in this place: the horse trading and the unicorn hunting that has meant that we are in this gridlock. Parliaments around the world have used citizens’ assemblies as a circuit breaker to all the bad habits that now inhabit this place. Everybody here claims to know the will of the people on these issues when the truth is that nobody does, because nobody has actually asked them. It is 250 people randomly selected to represent the British people [...] sorted by their age,

⁹⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, *The Guardian*, “[MPs alone won’t solve the Brexit deadlock. We need a citizens’ assembly](#)”, 16 January 2019; Institute for Government, [After the meaningful vote, what next for Brexit?](#) [video] February 2019; and Twitter, [Caroline Lucas](#), (accessed on 6 December 2019). For other notable figures who have previously shown support for the idea, see: *The Guardian* “[A citizens’ assembly could break the politicians’ Brexit deadlock](#)”, 16 December 2018; *The Financial Times*, “[Unlock the Brexit logjam by learning from other nations](#)”, 19 January 2019; and *The Guardian*, “[The Guardian view on Brexit: the government has failed – it’s time to go back to the people](#)”, 8 January 2019

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Caroline Lucas: [HC Deb 9 April 2019 vol 658 c255](#); Deidre Brock: [HC Deb 1 April 2019 vol 657 cc276-77WH](#); Rachel Maskell: [HC Deb 1 April vol 657 cc258-9WH](#); Wera Hobhouse: [HC Deb 4 February 2019 Vol 654 cc7-8WH](#)

ethnicity, gender and social class, excluding politicians and those who work for them [...] looking at the priorities and feeding back into our discussions. We would be free as a Parliament to say no to what they said, but after just 10 short weeks of deliberation we never know what a pair of fresh eyes might bring to this debate.¹⁰²

On 11 April 2019, in response to the Prime Minister's statement on a European Council meeting, Stella Creasy asked the then Prime Minister Theresa May:

...The Prime Minister said one of the things she wants to do with the time now available to her is to hear what businesses and the public think about all the things in front of us. Does she recognise that the fairest, most inclusive and most democratic way to do that would be to learn from other countries and have a citizens' assembly?¹⁰³

In response, the then Prime Minister said:

As we have indicated, we are obviously looking at establishing a more formal forum in which it is possible to bring people together. We have been listening to business, of course, and we have been talking and listening to trade unions and civil society, but we are looking at a more formal way of doing that. Arrangements for that will be set out in due course.¹⁰⁴

During the 2019 Conservative Party leadership contest, Rory Stewart supported a citizens' assembly on Brexit as part of his campaign.¹⁰⁵ In late August 2019, *The Times* reported that Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had liaised with a cross-party group of MPs to hold a citizens' assembly on Brexit. This has received various support and opposition from MPs.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² [HC Deb 29 January 2019 cc747-8](#)

¹⁰³ [HC Deb 11 April 2019 vol 658 c536](#)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *The Guardian* "[If we really want change, we have to face reality](#)", 9 June 2019; *The Independent*, "[Rory Stewart: Tory leadership contender unveils proposal to break Brexit deadlock](#)", 28 May 2019

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, *The Times*, "[Justin Welby warned not to interfere with Brexit](#)", 27 August 2019 and *The Times*, "[Welby in talks over citizens' assembly to avoid no-deal Brexit](#)", 26 August 2019

5. Citizens' assemblies: current initiatives in the UK

The Scottish Government and the National Assembly for Wales both established citizens' assemblies in 2019, aiming to secure public engagement in helping to address the respective countries' futures.

Also, following the success of the Health & Social Care Committee and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's joint Assembly on adult social care, a further Assembly was launched in 2019 on climate change by six other House of Commons Committees.

5.1 Scottish Government's Citizens' Assembly

On 24 April 2019, the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon [announced](#) that the Scottish Government will establish a Citizens' Assembly. This Assembly will consider three broad questions:

1. What kind of country is Scotland seeking to build?
2. How can Scotland best overcome the challenges it faces, including those that arise from Brexit?
3. What further work needs to be carried out to give people the detail they need to make informed choices about their future?¹⁰⁷

In this announcement, Nicola Sturgeon gave support to the concept of a citizens' assembly by referring to the Irish Citizens' Assembly as a useful template for finding "consensus on issues where people have sharply divided opinions." The UCL Constitution Unit [reported](#) that "the constitutional crisis caused by Brexit stimulated the political interest necessary for the creation of Scotland's own assembly."

On 26 June 2019, the Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations, Mike Russell, provided a [statement](#) to the Scottish Parliament on the Assembly. He outlined seven principles which will govern the Assembly and other arrangements which will ensure the independence of the Assembly:

It is important to establish at the outset a clear set of principles that will underpin the work of the assembly, and I can confirm those principles today. The first is independence from Government, which will be achieved through the appointment of impartial and respected conveners, an arm's-length secretariat and expert advisory groups. The secretariat will be located outside Scottish Government offices. In addition, we intend to establish a politicians panel for the assembly to call on as it wishes, so that all the parties in the Parliament and not just the Government are a resource for the work of the assembly.

A second principle is transparency. That will apply at all levels of the operation of the assembly, from the framing of the questions, to the selection of members and expert witnesses, through to

¹⁰⁷ Scottish Government, [Brexit and Scotland's Future: First Minister statement](#), 24 April 2019

proactive publication and live-streaming of deliberative sessions and clarity about what the outputs will be used for.

A third is inclusion, which will extend not just to who is invited to take part as members but to the operations of the assembly itself.

A fourth is access. The wider public must be able to see and comment on the work of the assembly, and stakeholders must feel that they and their interests have a route into the assembly.

A fifth is balance. The information that is used to build members' and the wider public's learning must be balanced, credible and easily understood.

A sixth is cumulative learning, which will be embedded into the design of the assembly to ensure that members develop a rich understanding of the issues considered and have time to do so.

Finally, there is open-mindedness. The assembly will be a forum for open-minded deliberation between participants, ensuring that the public see it as a genuine process of inquiry and to help ensure that it receives an open-minded response from the Parliament and the Government.

I have touched on the role of conveners. The Government is determined that the assembly will be led by people who are trusted and respected across the political spectrum.

In this statement, Mike Russell confirmed that the Scottish Government will ensure that the Assembly's recommendations will be respected "as far as is practicable". He explained that this would involve "reviewing and learning from the process and considering whether citizens' assemblies should become part of the next 20 years of Scotland's story."

[The Assembly is meeting on six weekends](#) between autumn 2019 and spring 2020. It comprises over 100 members, selected at random but reflecting the Scottish adult (aged 16 and over) population in terms of age, ethnic group, socio-economic background, geography and political attitude. MSPs, MPs, MEPs, councillors and members of the House of Lords, political party staff, public appointees and senior public and civil servants were ineligible to participate.

Assembly members will receive reimbursements for their travel, accommodation and other reasonable costs; and will receive a payment of £200 per weekend in recognition of their contribution.¹⁰⁸

The Assembly originally had two conveners: David Martin and Kate Wimpres. David Martin is a former Scottish Labour Member for the European Parliament, and Kate Wimpres has worked in the third sector is currently the Director of North Edinburgh Arts.¹⁰⁹ Mr Martin resigned in mid-December for personal reasons.

This Assembly has not received support from all parts of the political spectrum. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in Scotland have both refused to support the Assembly, criticising it as a means for the SNP to popularise Scottish Independence. For example, on 26 June

¹⁰⁸ Scottish Government, [Citizens' Assembly of Scotland](#), 14 June 2019

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*

2019, in response to Mike Russell's statement, Adam Tomkins, the constitution spokesperson for the Scottish Conservative party, [said](#):

[For the citizens' assembly] to be effective, [it will] need cross-party buy-in at the beginning of the process. This one does not have that. This is not a genuine attempt at a citizens assembly in Scotland. It is a nationalist stunt to kick-start the conversation about independence. As such, I am afraid that we will have nothing to do with it, and I urge all unionists in Scotland to see it for what it is and give it a wide berth.

The Leader of Scottish Liberal Democrat, Willie Rennie, criticised the Assembly. He [said](#):

We are not participating in this latest SNP exercise, which has been set up simply to patch up its case for independence. Taxpayers' money should not be used for that party-political process. If the assembly begs the SNP Government to abandon independence, will it do so?

In a [blogpost](#) for the Electoral Reform Society, Willie Sullivan commented on the necessity of having buy-in from all political parties and the Scottish Executive, for the Assembly to be successful. He said:

it's up to the whole establishment – politicians, media and civil society – to understand that this a whole different approach, beyond party politics. How they react will have a big effect on whether the assembly can do the job it's required to do: being a trusted proxy for the citizens.

[...] And if parties really want to be on board with giving citizens a say on taking democracy to the next level they have to be open to learning. Parties need to pledge to accept the results of the assembly even if it doesn't fit their agenda: the government must commit to listening and taking this forward.

5.2 The National Assembly for Wales' Citizens' Assembly

On 21 March 2019, the National Assembly for Wales [announced](#) it was launching a citizens' assembly where participants would address "how can people in Wales shape their future?" and make recommendations on "new and improved ways" Welsh citizens can engage with its National Assembly.¹¹⁰ This was a part of a series of projects carried out by the Welsh Assembly to mark 20 years of devolution.¹¹¹

The Assembly met in Newtown on 19-21 July 2019 and was comprised of 60 randomly selected individuals who were collectively representative of Wales' adult (aged 16 and over) population. This included ensuring representation in terms of age; educational level; ethnicity, gender, regional spread, Welsh language skills and voters and non-voters in the

¹¹⁰ National Assembly for Wales, [The first citizens' assembly in Wales meets Newtown](#), [webpage] (accessed on 9 December 2019)

¹¹¹ Devolution 20, [Citizens' Assembly](#), [webpage] (accessed on 9 December 2019). This Assembly was organised with Involve and the Sortition Foundation.

2016 National Assembly for Wales election.¹¹² These participants were invited from a pool of 10,000 randomly selected addresses across Wales.¹¹³

Participants heard evidence from and questioned experts, and discussed international examples of how the general public can have a greater say in the democratic process. The expert speakers included Professor Graham Smith, Professor of Politics and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster and Dr Huw Pritchard, lecturer in law at Cardiff University and member of the Wales Governance Centre. Participants worked through a series of deliberative exercises which involved small group discussions, and also included voting to rank options in order to come to a set of recommendations and conclusions.¹¹⁴

The National Assembly invited external expert partners to organise and deliver the project. This included the selection of participants and expert speakers. Professional facilitators led the discussions and ensured that “all participants are heard and feel comfortable.”¹¹⁵

Elin Jones, Presiding Officer for the National Assembly of Wales, praised this initiative as a valuable democratic exercise. She said:

The first Citizens' Assembly for Wales is a landmark event and an important step on our devolution journey.

[...] For a democracy to thrive and improve, everyone must be involved. The Citizens' Assembly is a pioneering way in which we can make sure our work is in line with the priorities of people across the country.”¹¹⁶

However, on 7 July 2019, the *BBC* [reported](#) that UKIP AM, Neil Hamilton, believed that the Citizens' Assembly was “unnecessary” and “was an admission of failure by the [National] [A]ssembly for Wales.”

The National Assembly Commission published the Assembly's recommendations and conclusions in September 2019.¹¹⁷ The report is wide-ranging, covering a large number of topics around the governance and future of Wales.

5.3 House of Commons Select Committees: Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change

On 20 June 2019, six House of Commons Select Committees (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Environmental Audit; Housing, Communities and Local Government; Science and Technology; Transport; and Treasury) [announced](#) that they would be jointly commissioning a Citizens' Assembly into combatting climate change in

¹¹² National Assembly for Wales, [First citizens' assembly for Wales meets in Newtown](#), (accessed on 9 December 2019)

¹¹³ *Ibid*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹¹⁷ National Assembly for Wales, [Wales's first Citizens' Assembly reports back](#), 27 September 2019

the UK. This announcement followed the then Prime Minister's commitment for the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.¹¹⁸

Pressure had been mounting in this area following a prolonged period of individuals and groups lobbying for greater work to be conducted on climate change. For example, Extinction Rebellion provided [evidence](#) (along with other stakeholders) to the BEIS Committee; carried out several high-profile protests through 2019;¹¹⁹ and [called](#) for the Government to hold a citizens' assembly on "climate and ecological justice". There has also been the rising popularity of Greta Thunberg who made a speech to MPs in Parliament on climate change.¹²⁰ It has been suggested that the independent [report](#) from the Committee on Climate Change, which responded to the Prime Minister's net zero commitment and presented a range of policy options, "is likely to form the basis of the Citizens' Assembly discussions".¹²¹

The Citizens' Assembly will take place over at least two weekends, likely to be in the early part of 2020. The Assembly is intended to give an opportunity for public input into the climate change debate and inform the Committees' future work into this area. In particular, the Assembly will seek to identify the public's views on the "fair sharing of the potential costs" of different policy options for delivering the net zero target. The Assembly's report is also intended to help Parliament and Government to pursue policy changes that are acceptable to voters.¹²²

On 19 July 2019, at an event organised by the UCL Constitution Unit, Lilian Greenwood, then Chair of the Transport Committee, spoke about this Assembly. She [noted](#) the value of public engaged on the matter of climate change but conceded that the government would need to respond to the Assembly's recommendations for the substantial changes to be made.

Nonetheless, the creation of the Assembly was initially well received by the Government. Greg Clark, then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, said:

I welcome the Citizens Assembly launched by six Select Committees today; initiatives to engage the public will be vitally important to appreciating the challenges of getting to net zero

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Parliament.uk, [Government gives details on setting a UK net zero emissions target](#), 12 June 2019 and *BBC*, [Climate change: UK government to commit to 2050 target](#), 12 June 2019

¹¹⁹ See, for example, *The Guardian*, [Extinction Rebellion protests block traffic in five UK cities](#), 15 July 2019; *BBC*, [Extinction Rebellion: Climate protesters march on Parliament](#), 23 April 2019; and *BBC*, [Extinction Rebellion Protests: What happened?](#), 25 April 2019

¹²⁰ *BBC*, [Greta Thunberg: Teen activist says UK is 'irresponsible' on climate](#), 23 April 2019

¹²¹ For example, *The Guardian*, [Theresa May commits to net zero UK carbon emissions by 2050](#), 11 June 2019

¹²² Parliament.uk, [Select Committees announce plans for citizens' assembly](#), 20 June 2019

and giving people a say in shaping the future policies to achieve the target.¹²³

The Assembly will be delivered by the charity Involve, working with Committee staff and [POST](#) (the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology) to prepare learning materials, identify expert speakers, and clarify the topics and questions that the Assembly will address.¹²⁴ Details of how the Assembly will be constituted and the number of participants have not yet been announced, though MPs are not expected to take part in presentations. The six Committees also expect to work with the devolved administrations.¹²⁵

¹²³ Parliament.uk, [Select Committees announce plans for citizens' assembly](#), 20 June 2019

¹²⁴ BEIS Select Committee, [Climate change citizens' assembly – contract awarded to Involve](#), 2 September 2019

¹²⁵ Parliament.uk, [Select Committees announce plans for citizens' assembly](#), 20 June 2019

6. Constitutional conventions and citizens' assemblies: overseas examples

There are many international examples of constitutional conventions, citizens' assemblies and other forms of representative engagement.

In 1998, a 'mixed model' constitutional convention was held in Australia. It consisted of directly elected citizens in the case of Australia, and randomly selected citizens who worked alongside selected politicians.

The constitutional conventions held in British Columbia (2004), Ontario (2006) and the Netherlands (2006) were all "citizens' assemblies", consisting of randomly selected citizens, and followed very similar processes. For instance, each had a learning phase, a public hearing phase and a deliberation phase.

The constitutional convention which took place in Iceland in 2011 was a "directly elected constituent assembly", which saw an elected constituent assembly operate alongside Iceland's regular legislature.

Dr Alan Renwick has considered a variety of international examples of constitution making around the world in his report for the Constitution Society: [*After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention*](#) (2014).

6.1 Australia (1998)

Australia held a constitutional convention in 1998 to consider whether Australia should become a republic. The Australian constitutional convention was a 'mixed' model. Half of its 152 members were elected directly, state-by-state, using the single transferable vote. The other half were appointed, either from the federal and state legislatures or from wider society. Members of the federal or state parliament were not allowed to run in the elections for the directly elected members. Nonetheless, many of the successful candidates were prominent politicians who had been MPs. The 76 members who were appointed to the convention came from the Commonwealth Parliament, state legislatures or were non-parliamentary appointees.¹²⁶

The Australian constitutional convention sat for 10 days in February 1998 to debate whether Australia should become a republic and what form this republic should take. After preliminary debates during the first few days, convention members were then invited to put forward proposals on the eighth sitting day. Those attracting the support of at least ten members went forward to a vote on the ninth sitting day.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Alan Renwick, [*After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention*](#), 2014, pp76-77

¹²⁷ Alan Renwick, [*After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention*](#), 2014, p81

Dr Alan Renwick has commented on its work:

the Convention did not have the extended time for consultation and reflection that has been enjoyed by most [...] constitution-making bodies.

...the Australian Constitutional Convention was not a deliberative body: it was not based on the idea that members should keep their minds open, listen to the debate, and seek shared understanding. Rather [...] most members were tied from the start to a particular conclusion, and the debates that ensued were "fractious". Much of the time was spent not in debate, but in speechifying'.

According to Dr Renwick, the Australian constitutional convention "had a pro-republican majority. The main debate therefore focused on the form of republicanism that should be put to the electorate".¹²⁸

The then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, had promised a referendum on the model decided upon by the constitutional convention. This took place on 6 November 1999. 45.1% of voters voted for the republican model on offer, while 54.9% opted to retain the status quo.¹²⁹

6.2 Canada

British Columbia (2004)

The Government of British Columbia (B.C.), with the unanimous support of the B.C. Legislature, set up a constitutional convention in 2004 to review the electoral system there and suggest replacements. A referendum was held on the Assembly's recommendation in 2005.

This was an independent, non-partisan citizens' assembly comprising 160 members, one man and one woman from each of B.C.'s 79 provincial electoral districts (constituencies) plus two Aboriginal members. They were representative of the province as a whole, and worked for all British Columbians. Members were picked by random draw from a pool that reflected the gender, age and geographical make-up of British Columbia in order to ensure that members were demographically representative. Assembly chair Jack Blaney was also an additional member, the 161st.¹³⁰

The Assembly's budget was \$5.5 million (approximately £2.6 million). For 11 months, assembly members were engaged in learning and debating about electoral systems in use around the world. Over a series of weekends between January and April members learnt about electoral reform. For the following two months members were involved in fifty hearings across British Columbia, taking oral evidence from around 3,000 citizens and receiving approximately 1,600 written submissions. Finally, between September and December, the 160 members debated

¹²⁸ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, pp78-80

¹²⁹ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, pp80-81

¹³⁰ Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, [Citizen's Assembly in Action](#), [webpage] (accessed August 2019)

electoral systems and voted on options.¹³¹ The assembly recommended that a new single transferable vote, electoral system: BC-STV ought to be put to be adopted. This was then decided on by the electorate in a referendum on 17 May 2005.

Two thresholds were established for the result of the referendum to be binding. To pass, the referendum would have to be approved by 60% of all voters, and by a simple majority of voters in 60% of the 79 electoral districts. If the voters endorsed a new system, the government had previously indicated it will be in place for the following provincial election in 2009. The referendum was narrowly lost.¹³²

The Assembly's [final report](#) was submitted to the people of B.C. and the government on 10 December 2004. Then the Assembly and its staff disbanded.

Analysis

In advance of the deliberations by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, Members of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly unanimously approved the *Electoral Reform Referendum Act*. The legislation established that if the Citizens' Assembly recommended a new electoral model, a referendum on the proposed new model would occur in May 2005 in conjunction with the next provincial general election. Under the *Electoral Reform Referendum Act*, the results of a referendum would be binding upon government and that pre-requisite amendments to the Elections Act must be made by government in advance of the May 2009 general election.¹³³ The outcome of the referendum was a narrow defeat of the Assembly's proposals. 57.69% of voters across British Columbia voted in favour of the change (just short of the 60% required) with a majority of over 50% in 77 of 79 electoral districts.

The Citizens' Assembly was therefore more than just a deliberative forum. As Graham Smith has pointed out in work conducted for the Power Inquiry:

No doubt one of the reasons why citizens were so willing to engage in the process was because the government had committed itself to a referendum based on the Assembly's recommendations – they know that their deliberations and decisions would have an effect on the decision-making process.

Perhaps the one obvious weakness of the Assembly is that it did not set its own agenda – the government decided what questions the Assembly would tackle and the limits of its competence – for example, it was not allowed to recommend changes to the size of the legislature. However, once it began its work, the Assembly was independent of government.¹³⁴

¹³¹ G. Smith, *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*, 2009, pp73-74

¹³² Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, [Citizen's Assembly in Action](#), [accessed 26 August 2019]

¹³³ The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, [Special Committee on the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform Final Report](#), February 2005

¹³⁴ Graham Smith, *Beyond the Ballot Box: 57 Democratic Innovations from Around the World – A report prepared for the Power Inquiry*, p76 May 2005

In a [lecture](#) to the Australian Parliament, Campbell Sharman of the University of British Columbia, stated that there was initial scepticism from the media about the ability of “ordinary people” to become familiar with the complexities of electoral rules, but this changed over time:

... as the Assembly’s meetings progressed, the tone of media reporting moved from mild condescension to admiration both for the substance and the tone of the Assembly’s discussions. The faith in ‘ordinary people’ being able to make decisions on complex political decisions had been overwhelmingly endorsed. The public goodwill towards the Citizens’ Assembly process was perhaps its most important achievement.

He also noted that the Assembly also appeared to overcome the apprehensions within the governing Liberal Parliamentary Party:

...The electoral system controls access to parliament and sets the parameters for a parliamentary career. Why would members of parliament be willing to cede control over this critical issue to a bunch of ordinary people and a public referendum? The answer can be found in the conditions that were put on the timing of a possible change and the rules for the success of the referendum.

Sharman argued that with no change to the electoral system possible for five years after the report of the Assembly the possibility was a distant one. Moreover, the requirement for a referendum to gain the support of 60% of the voters, and majorities in 60% of the 79 electoral districts meant that the bar for electoral change was set high, perhaps so high that change was unlikely. It is also worth noting that the British Columbia Legislature established a special committee to provide a link between the Citizens’ Assembly and elected representatives.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee commented on the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly in their 2013 report [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#) They argued that the British Columbia model of a constitutional convention was one which the UK might be able to use:

29. While the reforms proposed by the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly ultimately failed, the Assembly clearly managed to engage citizens of British Columbia. The ‘town hall’ meeting style, where citizens come together to discuss and raise new proposals for change, is one that a constitutional convention for the UK could use. It would be impossible for a UK-wide convention to give each constituency even one representative on the convention, as then it would become too unwieldy, but ‘town-hall’ style meetings could be a way of increasing engagement among the wider public.¹³⁵

However, Dr Andrew Blick, of King’s College London, highlighted that although ordinary citizens were heavily involved in what was an independent process, the government still had considerable control over the convention. The terms of reference, for instance, were determined by government. The final decision on whether or not to adopt the assembly’s recommendation was also decided in a referendum by an

¹³⁵ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), 25 March 2013, HC 371, para 29

electorate who had “not been through the same process of education as the assembly members”. The “super majority requirement set for the referendum once again revealed the ability of the government to determine the overall framework within which the Assembly functioned”.¹³⁶

Ontario (2006)

Ontario also adopted a citizens' assembly to consider electoral reform in 2006. The assembly was created in March of that year and began work in September. This Assembly followed a similar procedure to Assembly which took place in British Columbia.

Apart from the Chair, the Ontario citizens' assembly was made up of 103 randomly selected citizens. They were selected by Elections Ontario from the Permanent Register of Electors for Ontario. Every registered voter was eligible to participate, with a few exceptions, such as elected officials.¹³⁷

The Assembly began its work in September 2006, with members of the Assembly meeting about twice a month for eight months. During this time they examined the Ontario electoral system and learnt about other systems. They also consulted with the public through meetings and written submissions, before deliberating themselves and deciding on a recommendation.¹³⁸

The Assembly has published a report on its work which outlined how it operated in greater detail:

Unlike public hearings or other ways that governments have tried to seek advice from the public in the past, this process devoted significant time to giving the Assembly members a thorough background in the issue through a comprehensive learning program including six weekend sessions. But three equally important elements were unique to this process. First, the Assembly consulted broadly with the public. Through forty-one public meetings, over 1,000 written submissions, and a concerted effort to reach a wide cross-section of the people of Ontario, the process allowed the members to hear what other Ontarians were thinking. Second, once they had learned about the issues and heard from their fellow citizens, the members had time to deliberate and decide together during a further six weekends. The final feature of the process, unprecedented in Ontario, was that the members were guaranteed direct access to their fellow citizens, in the form of a referendum, if they recommended change. These characteristics all contributed to making the Citizens' Assembly a remarkable experiment in citizen engagement. In large measure, they explain why the members were willing and eager to take on a responsibility that consumed

¹³⁶ Andrew Blick, *Codifying – or not codifying – the UK constitution: A literature review*, Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies, King's College London, February 2011, p37

¹³⁷ Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, [About the Citizen's Assembly](#) [accessed 9 December 2019]

¹³⁸ Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, [About the Citizen's Assembly](#) [accessed 9 December 2019]

a minimum of thirty to forty hours per month of their time over the course of eight months.¹³⁹

The Ontario Assembly's recommendation - that Ontario adopt a mixed member proportional system (MMP) - was published in a report and then put to voters in a province-wide referendum on 10 October 2007.¹⁴⁰ Voters rejected adopting the assembly's recommendation.

As in British Columbia, the bar was set high for the referendum result: the proposal required at least a 60% majority across the province, and at least a 50 per cent majority in each of at least 64 electoral districts. Unlike in British Columbia, however, the result of the vote was not close. The proposals received only 36.9% of votes across Ontario and a majority of over 50% in just 5 of the 107 districts.¹⁴¹ Some press coverage of the results suggest that the short amount of time devoted to a public education campaign, the lack of information available to voters, the complexity of the proposed MMP system, and the unpopularity of the MMP system (in particular the fact the new system would have led to a larger legislature) were all factors in the outcome.¹⁴²

6.3 The Netherlands (2006)

The Dutch Burgerforum Kiesstelsel – the Electoral System Civic Forum – sat between March and November 2006. Its remit was to review and make recommendations on the electoral system of the Second Chamber (or Lower House). Specifically, it was established to:

- carry out a study of various electoral systems for the election of members of the Second Chamber of the States General; and
- to issue a report containing the Civic Forum's substantiated recommendations for the most suitable electoral system for the election of members of the Second Chamber.

A report issued by the Electoral System Civic Forum on the process explained that:

In his democratic reform agenda of 8 July 2005 the then Minister for Government Reform and Kingdom Relations, Mr Alexander Pechtold, announced the incorporation of the Electoral System Civic Forum. At the time all the customary roads towards an amendment of the electoral system had come to a dead end... The Cabinet decided to break through the impasse by adopting an entirely new approach to the discussions on the electoral

¹³⁹ Ontario Citizens' Assembly Secretariat, [Democracy at Work: The Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform](#), 2007, p2

¹⁴⁰ Ontario Citizens' Assembly Secretariat, [One Ballot. Two Votes: A New Way to Vote in Ontario: Recommendation of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform](#), May 2007

¹⁴¹ Legislative Assembly of Ontario, [Elections Ontario](#), [webpage] (accessed on 9 December 2019)

¹⁴² See for example, *Toronto Star*, 'Bad timing undermined exercise in democracy', *Toronto Star*, 24 October 2007; *National Post*, 'Turnout dismal despite chance to reform voting', 12 October 2007 and *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, 'Voter reform didn't stand a chance', 12 October 2007

system – i.e. by consulting those with the greatest interest in the electoral system, the voters.

The Cabinet was also of the opinion that the appointment of a civic forum was an interesting experiment in a new method for the involvement of citizens in democracy, since our representative democracy is based on interaction between the votes and those who represent them. A civic forum appeared to be a promising means of strengthening these ties.¹⁴³

The Dutch Civic Forum followed a similar model to the citizens' assemblies in Canada (discussed above). Its work was divided into a learning phase, a consultation phase and a deliberation phase. It comprised 140 citizens who were chosen after first being selected as a random sample of 50,000, then asking those interested within the sample to self-nominate, then drawing lots from that group. The group was chosen to include equal numbers of men and women, to ensure geographical distribution of the country's population, and to ensure that the age distribution matched the Dutch population as closely as possible. As in British Columbia, no persons who, at the time of selection or operations of the Civic Forum, had been elected to or were included on the list of candidates for the national or European Parliament, were eligible. In December 2006 the Civic Forum recommended the implementation of a proportional voting system.¹⁴⁴

The process was shorter than that of British Columbia (perhaps having learnt from their experience as the Process Report notes that a visit was conducted to BC at the outset of the process design). The announcement was made in July 2005 that there should be a Civic Forum, letters of invitation to citizens were sent out in February 2006, the Forum was formally installed in March 2006, and it delivered its report in December 2006. Its budget was €5.1 million (approximately £3.5 million). Unlike in British Columbia, no commitment was made to a referendum on the outcome of the process before it began.¹⁴⁵ It was not initially clear what action would be taken as a result of the report of the Forum. The Forum ultimately had limited impact, this was in part due to the collapse of the Government while the Forum's work was still underway, with the new Government rejecting the Forum's proposals.¹⁴⁶

Graham Smith, Professor of Politics at the University of Westminster, has also argued that the Dutch Civic Forum differed in two important respects from the citizens' assemblies in Canada: "First, it operated at the national rather than sub-national level. Second, it was not linked to a referendum; rather it provided recommendations to politicians".¹⁴⁷ In both Ontario and British Columbia, the provisional governments had agreed in advance to hold binding referendums on their assembly's

¹⁴³ Netherlands Electoral System Civic Forum, Process Report

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁶ Alan Renwick and Jean-Benoit Pilet, *Faces on the Ballot: The Personalization of Electoral Systems in Europe*, 2016, p138

¹⁴⁷ Graham Smith, *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*, 2009, p75

recommendation. In the Netherlands, there was never any intention to do this. The Dutch Government had decided instead that any recommendations would simply be submitted to the Government for consideration.¹⁴⁸ On 18 April 2008, the State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations sent a letter to parliament stating that the government would not implement the proposal of the citizen assembly.¹⁴⁹

6.4 Icelandic National Forum and Constitutional Assembly (2010)

An [Act of Parliament](#) passed in June 2010 which set out a process for constitutional reform in Iceland. The Icelandic constitutional convention followed in 2011. It included a National Forum comprised of 950 randomly selected citizens and a Constitutional Assembly/Council made up of 25 members elected from 522 candidates. The National Forum was made up of a diverse group. The youngest participant was 18 years old, the oldest was 91, and the division by gender was even.¹⁵⁰ The Forum met for one day and were asked to compile a list of the values and principles they would like to see embodied in the Icelandic constitution.¹⁵¹

The Constitutional Assembly was also elected and the successful candidates were similarly diverse. It consisted of doctors, lawyers, professors, priests, mathematicians, and a farmer, among others. However, shortly following the elections there were several legal challenges contesting the election's conduct on various grounds. The Supreme Court ruled that elections to the Assembly had indeed been invalid. Rather than hold elections again, the same Assembly (with one exception) was then appointed by Parliament as a Constitutional Council to review the constitution in the same way the Assembly had been intended to do.¹⁵²

The Council had the task of drawing up a draft constitution which took the conclusions of the National Forum into account. Assisted by a team of legal advisers, the Council was divided into three working groups. These groups "worked with the text of the existing constitution to propose amendments, but reserved the right to draft a wholly new document. The findings of these group discussions were considered on a weekly basis at a full Council meeting and published".¹⁵³ The draft

¹⁴⁸ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, pp70-71

¹⁴⁹ Patrick Fournier et al, *When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizens Assemblies on Electoral Reform*, 2011, p7

¹⁵⁰ Robert Blackburn, [Mapping the path towards codifying – or not codifying - the UK constitution](#), July 2014, p118

¹⁵¹ See: Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, pp57–65 and Alan Renwick and Robert Hazell, [Blueprint for a UK Constitutional Convention](#), June 2018, pp12-13

¹⁵² Robert Blackburn, [Mapping the path towards codifying – or not codifying - the UK constitution](#), July 2014, pp118-119

¹⁵³ Robert Blackburn, [Mapping the path towards codifying – or not codifying - the UK constitution](#), July 2014, pp119-120

constitution (completed in July 2011) which they produced then had to be considered by the Icelandic Parliament (Althingi). In May 2012 Parliament voted in favour of putting the draft constitution to a national referendum.¹⁵⁴ A non-binding constitutional referendum was held in Iceland in October 2012 with six questions based on the draft constitution – all the proposals were accepted in the referendum. However, the Icelandic Parliament has not proceeded with implementing the proposals.

Analysis

Public participation with the work of the Constitutional Council was particularly encouraged. The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee commented on the Icelandic constitutional convention's use of social media in its 2013 report *Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?* In particular, the Committee highlighted the Constitutional Council's decision to publish draft clauses of the proposed constitution on the internet for the public to comment on, and the Council's use of new media – Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and YouTube – to engage the public with interviews and pictures of its members at work. The Committee said:

27. The Icelandic Constitutional Convention is a good example of the use of multiple facets to a convention to gain widespread support amongst the public. However, due to the fact that the Icelandic population is significantly smaller than the UK population—some 319,000 compared to the UK's 50 million—work would need to be done to ensure that a UK convention was representative, but also a manageable size. The use of social media, to ensure that the proposals of the constitutional convention were analysed by a wide range of people rather than a self-selected few, is certainly something that a UK-wide convention could adopt at little cost.¹⁵⁵

However, in a paper for the Constitution Society, Dr Alan Renwick has questioned whether the Icelandic constitutional convention was able to give adequate consideration to the contributions made via social media. He noted that although thousands of posts were made through social media, the Council had no systematic way of working through them.¹⁵⁶

Democratic Audit UK has also argued that the Icelandic constitutional convention shows that politicians should be involved in the process as little as possible:

There may be a lesson or two also for the UK in the Icelandic constitutional saga as it has played out thus far. A national assembly comprising a statistically significant sample of the electorate is a crucial initial step toward a democratic constitution because political parties tend to serve as interest organizations for politicians or other groups. For that reason, politicians should not be allowed near the constitution making process because of the

¹⁵⁴ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?*, 25 March 2013, HC 371, paras 24-25

¹⁵⁵ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?*, 25 March 2013, HC 371, paras 26-27

¹⁵⁶ Alan Renwick, *After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention*, 2014, p62

danger that they will try to hijack the process for their own benefit. Large countries like the UK should have no trouble with extending an open invitation to the public to participate in the process through crowd sourcing as long as appropriate sampling techniques are used to compile a representative collection of comments and suggestions offered by the citizenry.¹⁵⁷

6.5 Lessons learnt from overseas examples

In their 2013 report, [*Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?*](#), the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee concluded that examples of constitutional conventions in other countries show that “they are most effective when they have a clearly defined remit, contain representatives from a range of sections of society, and engage the public with their deliberations”. The Committee also found that international examples suggest that conventions can be completed within one to two years:

The Icelandic constitutional convention sat over seven months, drafting an entirely new constitution during that time, while the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly deliberated on a change in the voting system over 11 months. The Royal Commission on the Constitution, also known as the Kilbrandon Commission, looked at UK-wide constitutional issues, and took four years, reporting in 1973. Some believe that a UK-wide constitutional convention could report in under a year.¹⁵⁸

Unlock Democracy, an organisation which has campaigned for a UK constitutional convention, has previously highlighted that international comparisons show that if a constitutional convention were to be held in the UK, it would be important to involve politicians:

Where politicians are excluded from the process there is a risk that the proposals will not be implemented: British Columbia, Ontario, the Netherlands, and Iceland are all territories where constitutional change was attempted but ultimately failed because politicians were excluded from the process.¹⁵⁹

The Electoral Reform Society, who have also supported the use of constitutional conventions in the UK, similarly argued that international comparisons show that the involvement of politicians in the process is important:

Iceland clearly demonstrates the problems of excluding politicians. The process ‘emerged’, rather than being formally designed, and there was a lack of attention to the political reality of what would unfold. A new constitution was not achieved and the failure is largely attributed to the lack of attention to likely political outcomes. Excluding politicians gave them carte blanche to block the process at a later date, and strong citizens’ support came to nothing.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Democratic Audit UK, [*Events in Iceland show that a UK constitutional convention should involve politicians as minimally as possible*](#), 28 October 2014

¹⁵⁸ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [*Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?*](#), 25 March 2013, HC 371, para 110

¹⁵⁹ Unlockdemocracy.org, [*Guide to a Constitutional Convention*](#) [accessed 7 October 2015]

¹⁶⁰ Electoral Reform Society, [*How to do a Constitutional Convention in the UK*](#), March 2015, p3

In his study of constitutional conventions, Dr Alan Renwick concluded by pointing out that any citizen-dominated constitutional convention (such as those held in Canada) may increase popular legitimacy, but may struggle to secure political legitimacy. Similarly, a politician-dominated assembly can secure political legitimacy, but will lack popular legitimacy. "The obvious path to a solution lies in seeking to balance the two". For Dr Renwick, "Ireland's Constitutional Convention – two thirds citizens' assembly, one third indirectly elected convention of politicians – offers a plausible model".¹⁶¹

In an article for the UK Constitution Law Association, Professor Robert Hazell has discussed the budgets of several constitutional conventions in other countries and the implications this might have for any UK one.

The two Canadian conventions each cost \$5m. The Irish convention cost only 1m euros, but was squeezed very tight: those involved say it needed twice the time and twice the money to do justice to its remit. In an age of austerity, with further cuts to come, a Rolls Royce convention may not be feasible. Proponents will need to think how far the size and cost can be scaled back without compromising the integrity of the exercise.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Alan Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), 2014, p118-119

¹⁶² UK Constitutional Law Association, [Robert Hazell: You want a constitutional convention? This is what you need to think through first](#), 15 October 2014

7. Suggested Further Reading

Parliamentary publications

House of Commons Library briefing paper, [The Governance of Britain Green Paper and citizens' assemblies](#), CBP04482

House of Lords Library briefing paper, [Citizens' Assemblies: An Introductory Guide](#), 8 February 2019.

House of Lords Library Note, [Constitutional Conventions: Possible Options in the New Parliament](#), 20 March 2015.

Health and Social Care and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committees, [Long-term funding of adult social care](#), 27 June 2018, HC 768.

Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?](#), 25 March 2013, HC 371.

R. Blackburn, [Mapping the path towards codifying – or not codifying – the UK constitution](#), Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, July 2014.

Online articles and blogposts

R. Dean, J Boswell and G Smith, [NHS Citizen and what it tells us about designing democratic innovations as deliberative systems](#), Democratic Audit UK, 6 November 2019

S. Allan and R. McKee, [Why do citizens' assemblies work? Evidence from the citizens' assemblies on Brexit and Social Care](#), The Constitution Unit, 28 February 2019.

H. Kaufman, [Citizens' Assemblies: How can the UK learn from Ireland?](#), The Constitution Unit, 25 October 2018.

E. Cox, [Our call for action on deliberative democracy](#), RSA, 4 July 2018.

C. Chwalisz, [An Athenian solution to democratic discontent](#), Democratic Audit UK Blog, 26 February 2015.

J. Grant, [Citizens' assemblies provide an institutional foothold for republican political practices](#), Democratic Audit UK Blog, 2 March 2015.

A. Renwick, [After the Referendum: Options for a Constitutional Convention](#), The Constitution Society, 2014.

A. Thomas, [What might a constitutional convention look like?](#), In Brief (Blog of the Research Service of the National Assembly for Wales), 29 September 2014.

T. Gylfason [Events in Iceland show that a UK constitutional convention should involve politicians as minimally as possible](#), Democratic Audit Blog 28 October 2014.

S. Champion, [Imagining a constitutional convention for the UK](#), Constitution Unit Blog, 8 December 2014.

R. Hazell, [*You want a constitutional convention this is what you need to think through first*](#), UK Constitutional Law Association Blog, 15 October 2014.

M. Gordon, [*Time for a Citizens' Assembly on Lords Reform?*](#) UK Constitutional Law Blog, 17 October 2012.

Academic publications and reports

S. Allan et al, [*What kind of Brexit do voters want? Lessons from the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit*](#), *The Political Quarterly* vol 89:4, pp649-658, 7 June 2018.

Involve, [*Citizens' Assembly on Social Care: Recommendations for funding adult social care*](#), June 2018.

B. Prosser et al, [*Pedagogy and Deliberative Democracy: insights from Recent Experiments in the United Kingdom*](#), *Contemporary Politics* vol 24: no. 2, pp210-32, 4 January 2018.

A. Renwick and R. Hazell, [*Blueprint for a UK Constitutional Convention*](#), The Constitution Unit and Department for Political Science at UCL, June 2017.

University of Sheffield, [*Democracy Matters: lessons from the 2015 citizens' assemblies on English devolution*](#), March 2016.

A Renwick, [*A British Constitutional Convention?*](#) *Political Insight*, vol 6: 2, pp8-12, 21 August 2015.

H. Landemore, [*Inclusive Constitution-Making: The Icelandic Experiment*](#), *Journal of Political Philosophy* vol 23: 2, pp166-191, 25 February 2014.

P. Fournier et al, *When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizen Assemblies on Electoral Reform*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

G. Smith, *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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