



Beyond

THE BALLOT BOX

**The Democracy Box©
Report and Proof of Concept
2020 to 2023 (Full-Length)**

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Omidaze Productions
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Recommendations

Recommendation 1

For UK and devolved governments to commit to long-term investment for year-round democratic education and information for all citizens aged 7 plus. To provide this democratic information and education via schools, public information campaigns and democratic hubs (high profile one-stop shops in-person and online). This report strongly recommends that The Democracy Box prototypes should be used to achieve this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

That the Electoral Commission and the BBC join forces to deliver Recommendation 1 in collaboration with additional stakeholders and partners, including all local authorities, and embed and scale up The Democracy Box prototypes.

Recommendation 3

As part of Recommendation 1, the UK and devolved governments should prioritise raising the profile of credible, independent and trusted sources of factual and non-partisan information. This report strongly recommends that the Electoral Commission are promoted and funded to be the number one source for democratic information in the UK.

Recommendation 4

For UK and devolved governments to work with local authorities to create ongoing year round democratic education in schools, for children aged 7 to 16, and for The Democracy Box Creative Cascade in schools programme to be used to create the foundation for this work. The Creative Cascade programme should be government funded in each of the four nations and delivered in partnership with local authorities and education consortia.

Recommendation 5

That The Talking Shop model (including The Talking Shop on Tour) should be funded and delivered in each location by multiple local and national stakeholders whose remits include democratic and/or cultural engagement, participation, consultation, opportunities and services. A core government grant should be made available to match fund any town wishing to host a Talking Shop. The Talking Shop model should be used to complement and support existing models such as citizens' assemblies and citizens' panels.

Recommendation 6

That we begin to bridge the divide between existing high levels of engagement/activism and our representative democratic system by ensuring outcomes and feedback from The Talking Shop, and other new models for democratic deliberation are responded to and influence our existing democratic systems at local, devolved and Westminster levels.

Recommendation 7

That organisations, in and beyond the democracy and cultural sectors, routinely invite, embed and pay professional creatives and young people to 'be at the table' and use The Democracy Box Toolkit as a best practice framework for working with young people as co-creators.

Recommendation 8

That broadcasters, journalists and news providers (including but not limited to the BBC) break with the current practice of democratic education being packaged into news and election coverage and instead ensure democratic education becomes year-round. Reframing news stories from episodic (the individual) to thematic (the collective) is also strongly recommended.

Recommendation 9

That the Electoral Commission and the BBC work in partnership to centralise and promote My Society and Democracy Club tools, including:

www.writetothem.com

www.theyworkforyou.com

www.whocanivotefor.co.uk

Recommendation 10

That non-election specific, neutral and factual historical and ideological information about all UK political parties should be made readily available to the public year-round. This lies beyond the bounds of The Democracy Box and Omidaze's current capacity. However, it is a vital piece of work that needs to be done carefully – with the buy-in and collaboration of all political parties – and led by a neutral, trusted and impartial organisation such as the Electoral Commission.

“Most think they have little (36%) or no say (34%) in how the UK is run.”

– The YouGov Democracy Study 2020





Introduction

Omidaze (Oh My Days!) Productions is a non-core funded partnership organisation founded by two freelance creatives in 2008. A small creative company with big ideas, Omidaze's mission is to use theatre, the arts and creativity to inform, empower and inspire positive social change. Omidaze creates live and digital performances, events, projects and creative content.

Clwstwr funded The Democracy Box's research and development from 2020 to 2021. Part of the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CIPC), Clwstwr was an ambitious research, development and innovation programme (2018 – 2023). Clwstwr funded 118 R&D projects in the news and screen sectors which created new products, services and experiences.

Further prototype development was made possible through partnerships with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, the Electoral Commission, the Riverfront Theatre & Arts Centre, Wales Millennium Centre and Youth Cymru with additional support from and the Cares Family/UnLtd and over 30 collaborating organisations.

This is an independent report and set of recommendations written by Yvonne Murphy for Omidaze Productions.

Yvonne Murphy, the author of this report, has been a freelance Creative, Theatre Director, Producer and Consultant for over three decades and founded Omidaze Productions, a partnership organisation, in 2008. Yvonne is the creator of The Democracy Box and The Talking Shop models as creative solutions to our current democratic deficit. Early research which influenced this work dates back to 2013. Main research and development commenced in 2019.

This body of work exists because the author is fascinated by the intersection between cultural and democratic participation and passionately believes that creativity, creative approaches and co-creation are key to increasing both cultural and democratic participation.

Together, The Talking Shop and The Democracy Box models provide creative approaches to democratic deliberation, information and conversation. If up-scaled and rolled out, they could be used in collaboration with existing models such as citizen's assemblies, citizen's panels and existing digital look-up tools to provide the revolutionary change that is so urgently needed to address our current democratic deficit and stem and reverse the decline of democratic participation.

The purpose of this report/proof of concept is to influence:

- Welsh and UK Governments

- Democratic education/information organisations
- Existing large-scale, publicly funded organisations (for whom democratic education/information is within their remit, core mission/charter)

To ensure that our UK democracy is taught creatively and comprehensively going forward within formal state education and conveyed via state-funded public information campaigns and democracy hubs for all future generations. And that this is achieved in part by developing, up-scaling and embedding The Democracy Box prototypes for all future generations across Wales and the UK.

This report provides the proof of the problem with both quantitative and qualitative evidence and is a proof of concept for one possible part of the solution.

Since 2020, Omidaze has recruited and trained over 60 16 to 26 year olds from across Wales as young co-creators, including from the lowest voter turn-out constituencies. In addition, hundreds more young people have contributed via creative think-ins, focus groups, interviews, surveys and prototype testing. Feedback from nearly 9,000 visits from people of all ages to Talking Shop trials across Wales has also shaped this research.

This is the proof of concept for the four Democracy Box prototypes, which have all been tested comprehensively, and will be complete and ready to be up-scaled by the end of 2023.

This is the full-length version of the full Democracy Box report and proof of concept. The short version report can be found [here](#).

A Note From the Author

Before you read this document, please watch some of the young co-creators talking about democracy and their thoughts on this project from phase 1 in 2020 [here](#) and phase 2 in videos [one](#), [two](#) and [three](#).

I would like to offer my deepest thanks and gratitude to Clwstwr, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and the Electoral Commission and all collaborating organisations, funders and individuals who have contributed and supported and made (and continue to make) the the Democracy Box research and development possible. Above all, I would like to thank all the young people who have contributed to this work. This is for you.

Omidaze (Oh My Days! - A colloquial expression of amazement and disbelief originating in schools at the turn of the last century) Productions

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Executive Summary

The problem – A lack of joined-up and easy-to-access information about our democracy has created an information/knowledge gap for a majority of the population. This is leading to disillusionment, distrust and disengagement. The Covid-19 global pandemic forced governments and the media across the UK to begin to inform citizens about the structure of our UK democracy in way that they have been systematically failing to do for 20 years since devolution was first introduced. We should not require a global pandemic to happen before we inform all citizens of how the democracy they live in actually works.

A lack of information and subsequent inability to influence and contribute, 'problematic' language which disempowers, a lack of active listening by politicians and decision/policy makers, and the flow of communication being perceived as in one direction (top down) were all given as reasons for people not feeling genuinely heard and barriers to civic and democratic participation.

This research has identified two key barriers to democratic participation:

- A lack of knowledge of, and access to, our democratic systems and structures
- A frenzied focus on elections and voting

A solution – The main provocation of this report is that we must immediately cease to focus all of our energy, resources and media attention on elections. We must instead **prioritise addressing the information gap** that exists for the majority of the population with **year-round democratic education and information** and begin creating meaningful **access to our existing democratic systems and structures**. This will then lay the foundation for any subsequent work on elections, and voting and electoral, democratic and constitutional reform.

If we concentrate on explaining the basics of how our democracy works and fits together and how people can be heard and contribute to and influence our democracy all year round (e.g. share information and conversation, participate in democratic deliberation and debate, volunteer; get involved in civic and civil society through groups and societies which represent their needs and the need of their local community, petition, protest and campaign, involve the media, submit evidence to committees both in-person and in writing, know who their elected representatives are and be able to easily contact them and hold them to account in person and in writing, attend and speak at council meetings and stand for public office), rather than simply focusing on getting them to turn out to vote, the evidence from this research suggests that a significant increase

across all forms of democratic engagement and participation, including voter turnout will follow.

Yvonne Murphy, on behalf of Omidaze Productions, has researched, trialled and tested four prototypes as potential solutions to addressing the information gap and creating meaningful access to our existing democratic systems and structures.

Omidaze would like these four prototypes to be up-scaled and rolled out by publicly funded organisations whose core remit is democratic education and information. Two such organisations are the BBC and the Electoral Commission.

The need for non-partisan factual information about the main political parties and their histories and basic ideologies, which is not linked to election campaigning was also identified as an urgent need. This lies beyond the bounds of The Democracy Box and Omidaze's current capacity – however, it is a vital piece of work that needs to be carried out carefully and with the buy-in and collaboration of all political parties and a trusted and impartial organisation such as the Electoral Commission.

The conclusion of this body of work is that we cannot hope to increase democratic participation, engagement, voter registration and voter turnout levels and/or have a national conversation at a devolved or UK level about our constitutional future and electoral reform unless the majority of all voting age citizens have a shared minimum level of basic knowledge about our existing structures and systems (constitution).

A strategy for creative and inspiring year-round democratic education for the population, from age seven and up, is urgently required – both within and beyond formal education.

An appetite to address and change thinking, behaviour and beliefs which underpin and create four 'problems' is also urgently required by decision makers, funders and policy makers in this area.

In order to begin to create a minimum level of information/knowledge for everyone, we must first address these four existing problems.

The Four Problems

“Our evidence suggested that historically there has been no clear co-ordination across Government, no real evaluation to find what works, and no long-term commitment to initiatives – many of which appear not to outlive the minister who initiated them.”

– House of Lords’ 2018 report, **The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century**

How have we arrived at a situation where millions of citizens do not understand the basics of our democracy and where people can go through their entire school education only to enter society as adults not understanding how the democracy they live in actually works and fits together?

If you are looking for someone to blame, this research does not provide a simple answer. Rather, it highlights that the current state of affairs is the responsibility of all past governments, all political parties, broadcasters, journalists, policymakers, education ministers and all education and curriculum designers past and present.

However, ‘no shame, no blame’, as the Democracy Box young co-creators coined their approach, is a good mantra if we are to move forward. As is identifying the modes of thought and/or behaviour that have gotten us here, which we can collectively seek to address.

The Democracy Box research indicates four key ‘problems’ that are barriers to addressing our democratic deficit and the main reasons for the current status quo:

- The Ivory Tower Problem
- The Managed Democracy Problem
- The News/Media Problem
- The Status of Creatives Problem

Addressing all four of these problems is necessary if we genuinely want to address our democratic deficit and increase democratic engagement and participation both at and beyond the ballot box.

Problem 1 – The Ivory Tower Problem

The Ivory Tower problem is created and perpetuated by every person who has ever said or thought that 'knowing the facts is not enough' or 'knowledge doesn't necessarily lead to engagement'. Or described democratic education/information as 'low hanging fruit' or 'boring' or simply 'too big' or 'too time-consuming' to tackle.

This includes politicians, policy makers, civil servants, decision-makers, journalists, broadcasters, funders and key stakeholders and influencers – basically anyone who currently understands our democracy and feels like they have a voice but are unconscious of – or do not prioritise or downplay – the knowledge gap which exists for the majority and do not understand or recognise it as the starting point for all other democratic engagement work.

The Ivory Tower problem leads to basic democratic information and education being under-resourced and not prioritised.

Many well-meaning and influential figures diminish the information gap and downplay its role, arguing that lack of knowledge or information is not a primary barrier to democratic participation.

And yet it is and has been cited as **the** primary barrier by thousands of people during this research.

The information that needs to fill this gap is contained in **[The Democracy Box Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters](#)**.

This is information everyone in the UK needs to know 365 days a year in order to participate in our UK democracy both at and beyond the ballot box. A lack of basic knowledge about our democracy makes it impossible to participate meaningfully – or at all. Or as one Talking Shop visitor put it:

“To make an informed decision, you have to first of all be informed.”

Obviously if 100% of people are all informed, it does not follow that 100% of people will be engaged. However, what is certain is that it gives them the choice. Not giving people the information they need to fully participate, and therefore not giving them the choice, is fundamentally undemocratic.

Powerful and influential individuals, from across the political spectrum, have suggested that we need to 'give up' on anyone who isn't voting or participating over a certain age or simply accept that they do not want to participate. They have cited many reasons why education and information for all is not the answer.

These can be summarised into three arguments.

Argument 1 - There are countries where democratic education is routinely taught and yet democracy is currently 'under threat' in those countries due to the rise of populism and the far right.

Argument 2 - Lack of motivation rather than lack of information is the problem.

Argument 3 - Fixed immovable beliefs and/or apathy are to blame not lack of information.

None of the above are reasons not to inform the populace.

Answer to Argument 1 - This research has evidenced that how and where we convey this basic democratic information/education and who the messengers are is the key to success. Democratic education being routinely taught in schools is vital. How it is taught and what accompanies it beyond the classroom is equally vital. We urgently need to provide and facilitate public spaces (democratic hubs) that, as well being an information resources, also facilitate conversation and deliberation. Public spaces where people from all walks of life can come together to hear each other, and thereby hear opinions and views different from their own, as well as debate and deliberate. Such public spaces, like The Talking Shop, will enable us to tackle polarisation in our communities and the rise of populism and the far right.

Answer to Arguments 2 and 3 – Motivation, fixed beliefs and apathy are all rooted in experience. If we have tried something previously and it has failed, or we have been unable to even access it, we will often give up and create a fixed, ongoing negative belief from that experience. Therefore, we need to change people's first and ongoing experience of democracy.

Anyone in a position of power at any level who is conscious of the information gap and consciously chooses not to address it leads us to problem 2.

Problem 2 – The Managed Democracy Problem

Poor information flow and the subsequent lack of opportunity for the populace to impact decision making between elections could be defined as a managed democracy. A democracy that is reduced to elections and the demos (the people) as occasional voters.

A managed information gap is fundamentally undemocratic, as is the decision to ‘forget about’ people who have historically not voted or who traditionally vote against the government in power, whether that government is local, devolved or UK.

Many people who have contributed to this research expressed a concern with **why** this lack of democratic education exists and whether it was deliberate. Several people have argued that we have a ‘managed democracy’ and a broken ‘social contract’ in the UK, arguing that a social contract began as a reaction to the Great Depression and gathered momentum post-World War II and began to break in the sixties, or perhaps even earlier.

A managed democracy in the UK could describe a situation where the interests of party politics and the interests of individuals, organisations, movements and or groups are put above the interests of a whole population and a working democracy, because it is not in those persons’ vested interests who sit in positions of power and authority to challenge the status quo.

“I want us all to know what democracy means. Everything that we need to learn about our democracy is everywhere, making it difficult and overwhelming to find. I want to help build a place where all our vital information to understanding our UK democracy is. We are making it accessible and easy to learn about the structure of our politics. This way, everyone understands how important their voice is, leading to a bigger, brighter future for us all.”

– Young co-creator on Instagram

Problem 3 – The News/Media Problem

“Democracy is a process, not an event.”

– Democracy Box survey response

The main responsibility for delivering democratic education, with our UK media, currently appears to reside within rolling news with some budget being given to education. This is problematic and needs to change because:

- 1. Democratic education becomes wrapped around ‘flagpole’ and ‘newsworthy’ events, mainly elections.
- 2. News/news providers have become distrusted and difficult to distinguish for many from fake news and misinformation.

‘Who can I trust?’ and ‘Where do I go for the truth?’ were two of the top comments throughout this three-and-a-half-year research project. News providers, including the BBC, were referenced by young people as sources of information they did not feel they could trust. The advances of AI also make it urgent that credible, non-partisan, trustworthy sources of information that are fully independent of government are protected and promoted and sit outside of rolling news in the media.

Finally this report also recommends reframing our news stories that relate to our democracy. Most news stories are told/framed as episodic stories – focusing on the experiences of an individual to convey a larger situation (e.g. one soldier’s/civilian’s experience in a war). We need more thematic stories to reframe the narrative from the individual to the collective. A thematic framing gives a

“wide-angle lens to the coverage of an issue and allows us to focus on trends over time, context and environment and broader social or institutional solutions”. –

FrameWorks Institute, [Episodic vs. Thematic Stories](#)

Episodic framing of our news stories also possibly contributes to, rather than helps tackle, polarisation in our communities and wider society.

“...the most prevalent news stories on social issues are what’s known in framing research as ‘episodic’. They take a highly personal, individualized view of a situation. You could think of this as focusing a telephoto lens on an issue. While these stories may be highly

compelling, telling them through this tightly focused lens leaves a lot of important aspects out of the picture: what factors and conditions are responsible for the problem; what are the opportunities for public engagement; what is the impact on the larger society; and is there a need to change systems, laws, policies and programs. In contrast, what we call ‘thematic stories’ take in the big picture, including environment, context, trends, and solutions. Thematic stories open the door to a better understanding of both the causes of social problems as well as potential solutions to them.”

– FrameWorks Institute, [Episodic vs. Thematic Stories](#)

Problem 4 – The Status of Creatives Problem

In ancient Greece, citizens were obliged to go to the theatre as part of their civic duty. This report is not advocating that we should make theatre attendance compulsory in Wales and the rest of the UK – however, the author does believe, like the ancient Greeks, that access to and participation in arts, culture and creativity is vital to a healthy and democratic society.

We appear to have held onto and valued only part of the ancient Greeks thinking around democracy. The importance of ritual storytelling and creativity is somewhat undervalued in our UK modern society.

Creativity and the creative arts help us to express ourselves, make sense of the world and fine-tune our critical thinking, debating, collaboration and consensus-reaching skills, along with encouraging us to challenge and critique. Ritual storytelling can help us to reflect and understand and reform our social and political structures.

All of the above are fundamental for a good working democracy.

“Students from low-income families who engage in the arts at school are 20% more likely to vote as young adults.”

Cultural Learning Alliance, [Imagine Nation The Case For Cultural Learning](#)

And yet creatives have been in a position of defence in the UK for decades and required to constantly re-articulate and re-evidence the value and impact of arts, culture and creativity to society. Creatives spend a vast majority of their time working to survive, rather than being placed in positions of influence and power to help unlock some of society’s most pressing problems including, but not limited to, our democratic deficit.

‘So for us to re-examine what we value, what we are collectively willing to pay for – whether it’s teachers ... artists, all the things that are incredibly valuable to us but right now don’t rank high on the pay totem pole – that’s a conversation that we need to begin to have.’

– President Obama, 2016

Omidaze’s creative approaches to tackling our democratic deficit, (including creative approaches to engagement, communication, information sharing and democratic deliberation), have all proven successful

Using creative approaches to civic engagement is nothing new as we know from ancient Greece. In more recent years there have been decades of work, research and learning dedicated to ensuring best practice in creative approaches and the field of participatory arts. There is endless qualitative and quantitative evidence of the impact that access to, and participation in, creative arts and cultural activities has on everything from mental health and well-being to tackling anti-social behaviour and increasing civic engagement and cohesive communities. The evidence also points to the benefits of using the arts and creativity as a diplomatic tool and **‘soft power’** and as the most effective and low-cost strategy for urban regeneration.

In addition the author’s fascination with the intersection between cultural and democratic participation, and strong conviction that creativity can help increase both, has been significantly supported by the recent publication of a report by the European Union Culture and democracy, the evidence which details:

“How citizens’ participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion.”

However, the impact, value and benefits of using the arts and creative approaches in a vast range of areas, including deliberation, problem solving, engagement, consultation, conflict resolution, rehabilitation and depolarisation, to name but a few, have not perhaps been as well-documented, communicated or platformed as they should have been.

This has led to an existing disconnect between the cultural/creative sectors and the democracy, academic, policymaking and political sectors in Wales and the UK, which is hugely problematic. There is limited shared dialogue, learning and understanding across these sectors. This means that this high-impact, creative approach/participatory arts work of the last few decades is often not cited, understood or even known about beyond the cultural/creative sector.

The language constructs, modes of communication and stereotyping of each 'world' or sector act as barriers to addressing this, and academia, civil servants, governments and policymakers making use of this rich back catalogue of participatory arts practice.

It is essential that we draw on these decades of experience and research from within the arts and cultural sector and, in particular, the participatory arts field. The years of experience, skills and wealth of knowledge that creatives (and the sector generally) can bring to the democracy sector and the problem of declining democratic participation should not be underestimated.

It is essential that we routinely invite professional creatives (as well as young people) to sit at every table, be embedded in decision and policy-making and be paid for their time, skills, insights and creative thinking. It is also vital that professional creatives are involved and paid to help lead and inform work where creative approaches are being adopted.

At the core of The Democracy Box prototypes are professional creatives and young people recruited and trained as paid co-creators, including those from the lowest turnout constituencies. Everyone is valued. Everyone is paid properly.

“Being paid as a young co-creator is beneficial to young people generally, because it encourages the idea that we are valuable and worth listening to.”

– Democracy Box young co-creator

Further information on the lack of status of creatives and the historical and current lack of investment for the cultural/creative sector that creates an obstacle to creatives and the sector having a guaranteed 'seat at the table' can be found in appendix 1.

All four problems outlined above can be addressed. The question is whether they actually will be in any meaningful way since it may run contrary to the interests of political parties, the media and those who currently hold power in all its forms to ensure that every citizen is actually empowered.

Three Steps

What is certain is that three steps are required if we are to tackle these four problems.

Step 1

Democratic education/information, using creative approaches, must be provided year-round to all citizens from age 7 onwards via three routes:

- 1. Public information campaigns for all ages**, co-created with young people, including those from the historically lowest voter turn-out constituencies, and they must be paid for their time, skills, insights and experience.
- 2. One-stop shop democracy hubs, both online and face to face**, which are easy to access, welcoming, safe, creative and inspiring. Spaces where unexpected, informed and open conversations and creative approaches to deliberative democracy can begin. Spaces that can help us to build trust in our democracy and begin to tackle our democratic deficit and polarisation. Spaces that can enable us all to be informed and participating citizens; empowered to make the change we want to see in society.
- 3. Democratic education baked into the primary and secondary school curriculums from age 7 to age 16** using inspiring and creative methods.

The following four Democracy Box prototypes have been created, trialled and tested for all three routes:

- 1. Public information campaigns for all ages The Democracy Box© public information campaign**
- 2. One-stop shop democracy hubs The Talking Shop© - a cultural and democratic hub which contains The Democracy Box**
- 3. Democratic education being baked into the primary and secondary school curriculums The Democracy Box Creative Cascade© in schools programme**

The fourth Democracy Box prototype - The Democracy Box Toolkit© for working with young people as co-creators – underpins steps 1-3.

Step 2

An appetite to address and change the thinking, behaviour and beliefs that underpin and create the four problems is required by those who hold power and influence and who fund and make decisions and policy in this arena.

A shift in democratic culture and language is required. We need to move away from the current focus on elections and instead make our focus year-round democratic education and participation, including transforming how our media/news tells the story of our UK democracy.

An attitude shift is required – not within the general public and young people, but for those in government, the media and positions of power whose focus is solely the ballot box and turn out at elections.

There is a popular misconception that young people are not interested in politics. However, every single young person Omidaze has worked with, interviewed and spoken with who doesn't know the story of our UK democracy, wants to know it and they are angry and frustrated that they don't.

Polling data commissioned in November 2020 shows that young people are engaged with politics in Wales. The YouGov survey conducted in November 2020 showed 69% of 16 to 24 year olds surveyed said the upcoming Welsh Parliamentary election was important to them. However, nearly half of 16 to 24 year olds (44%) say they'd be unlikely to contact their Member of Senedd (MS) regarding an issue.

The polling data also showed that 16 to 24 year olds are more likely than any other age group to have engaged in some form of political activity in the last 12 months (77% versus around 49 to 52% for all other age groups). The reason this doesn't translate into voting is not apathy. It is a sheer lack of information and access.

Three years of bringing young people into 'Ivory Tower' rooms to let people in positions of power and influence hear for themselves directly from young people why basic democratic education and information is key to tackling our democratic deficit has been frustrating and exhausting. After three years, the author and young people are still being routinely asked by those in positions of power and influence, 'What can be done to engage young people? How can we reach them? How can we change people's attitudes?' without seemingly any notion that it is they themselves, or their organisations, that are hard to reach. It is their attitudes, not those of young people and the majority of citizens that must change.

It is not just young people, who are experiencing significant barriers to participation. The main barrier for people of all ages is a lack of information and conversation.

The Welsh Election Study 2021, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, confirmed that 72% of young people surveyed were not involved in any conversation whatsoever, either in an education or home setting, about the fact that 16 and 17 year olds were receiving the franchise and would be entitled to vote for the first time in some elections in Wales or about the upcoming Welsh Parliament election in May 2021.

We need to articulate and celebrate the fact that participating in democracy is much more than putting a cross on a ballot paper. Omidaze has created **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters**. It is open source and available online as a free downloadable PDF. We need every single citizen, young and old alike, to have access to and know this story.

Step 3

We need to bridge the gap between activism and our democratic systems and structures so that people know how to access those systems and structures. They must be fit for purpose to facilitate people's voices being heard and allow them to influence change beyond the ballot box at all times of the year. We need the flow of information and communication to be two-way. The Democracy Box and The Talking Shop can help with this.

Record low levels of democratic participation and engagement sit side by side with record high levels of activism and engagement regarding issues/themes at local, devolved, UK and international levels. People **are** engaged, however, there is a yawning gulf between the speed and energy of activism and the slow pace and inaccessible nature of our democratic systems.

How can people advocate for issues they care about and lobby for them to be invested in, developed and prioritised if they have no knowledge regarding budget setting, policy making and legislation? This leaves people of all ages, not just young people, frustrated and unsure of how to impact decisions about the issues that matter to them most.

If we are to meaningfully and sustainably increase democratic trust, engagement and participation then our democracy needs much stronger two-way communication so that all citizens can hear and be heard. This requires year-round, effective public democratic information and existing methods for the public to be heard between elections to be reviewed and radically reformed. Existing outdated, ineffective and poorly advertised mechanisms,

including public consultations and surgeries with elected representatives that only a minority of citizens know about and engage with, are, on the whole, not currently fit for purpose.

The majority of people who contributed to this research were not aware that committees are a key function of our UK representative democratic system. Many people do not know that much of the work of the UK and devolved parliaments and local government takes place in committees or how they, as citizens, can contribute to or be heard by a committee.

Committees, if reviewed and reformed, along with citizens' panels and assemblies and participatory budgeting and new creative models for deliberation like The Talking Shop could all support the public in 'feeling heard' and in having the opportunity to contribute meaningfully between elections.

"To connect young people to The Democracy Box (TDB) through music/issues/themes that matter to them, we need to make them aware that our democracy actually allows them to tackle the issues they care about. Once young people are aware that democracy will help them and their cause, they will need to understand the basics of our democracy, thus pointing them towards TDB."

– Democracy Box young co-creator

Information Before Reform and Creating the Kitchen/Dining Room Table Experience for Everyone

The Institute for Community Studies and the Young Foundation's 'Civic Journey' two year project in England seeks to address an important and critical challenge:

"The extent to which young people should uncritically replicate and reproduce civic norms, behaviours, and identities; or challenge such orthodoxies...whether we should seek to reinforce or challenge the civic status quo."

Or as one of Democracy Box young co-creator put it in a recent roundtable event:

“We are using new technologies for old ideas.”

However, the Democracy Box research has clearly evidenced that we can only challenge the current ‘civic status quo’ if we understand it. Only when we understand our past and present and our existing systems and structures can we imagine our future and make informed choices about what we want to reinforce and replicate or review and reform. Debates around proportional representation versus first past the post, electronic voting systems, increasing the size of a parliament and constitutional and electoral reform are all vital – however, we need to take everyone with us. As one young person said:

“I don’t even know what these words mean.”

The Democracy Box research evidences that:

The common denominator in terms of democratic disengagement is not age. It is not having had the luxury and privilege of a home and/or classroom where the basics were discussed or taught.

This body of work seeks to raise the engagement and participation levels of citizens of all ages all year round by designing outwards and engaging first the demographic currently most under-represented at the ballot box. However, this does not mean that we believe that our democratic deficit is restricted to young people or that they are more disempowered compared to older adults.

This work has taken into account the ‘civic learning’ that takes place in family, communities, digitally, in person and within peer-to-peer environments, as well as within formal and non-formal education environments. The findings are that the majority of adults have poor levels of civic learning and therefore poor civic agency, This in turn leads to what we refer to as the ‘broken cycle of storytelling’ when those adults become parents and educators.

The term ‘democratic deficit’ is used within this report to denote citizens of all ages who are disempowered in terms of civic agency and the ability to participate in democratic and civic life.

Learning in the Home – The Kitchen/Dining Room Table Experience

The Democracy Box young co-creators were fascinated with how other people knew about our democracy when they did not and interviewed elected representatives about how and when they had learnt about our UK democracy. Every single one said at home around the kitchen or dining room table.

The pressing issue then becomes how we break this cycle of poor storytelling for all citizens of all ages and enable everyone to have a shared knowledge base with which to begin their 'civic journey' at any age.

Creating this 'kitchen/dining room table' experience for everyone must be the priority.

Our challenge is how to create this online, in person and within formal and non-formal education settings with fact-checked information and content from trustworthy and non-partisan sources. Omidaze took on this challenge and has created four prototypes in response:

1. The Democracy Box© public information campaign
2. The Democracy Box Creative Cascade© in schools programme
3. The Talking Shop© – A cultural and democratic hub containing The Democracy Box
4. The Democracy Box Toolkit© for working with young people as co-creators prototype

Omidaze's vision for 10 years from now is that:

- The Democracy Box is embedded across multiple organisations and be entirely youth-led and managed.
- A Talking Shop, containing The Democracy Box, exists in most towns and cities and is managed and hosted by a collective of the local authority and local and national cultural, democratic and community organisations.
- Teachers in all schools, first across Wales and then the UK, are trained and equipped to teach the Creative Cascade programme.
- All students in school years 2 to 11 are consistently developing their **Creative Habits of Mind** and working with professional creatives to imaginatively retell the story of our UK democracy for younger students every year.

- All citizens know and understand the basics of our UK democracy and that democracy begins with them and is them and is not fixed or set in stone and is shaped by us, the people, for the people.
- The focus of democratic education/information has moved beyond the ballot box and happens 365 days a year.
- All citizens are informed and therefore have the choice to participate in our UK democracy.
- The majority of citizens have confidence and trust in our democracy and feel involved and able to be heard. They contribute and have the confidence, skills, information and permission to question, challenge, shape and influence our UK democracy every single day and not just at the ballot box.

“It’s been so enlightening to work with Omidaze Productions and The Democracy Box to find out more about how some of our talented young people want to see the Well-being of Future Generations Act being used to create a Wales fit for future generations. It’s vital that young people have an opportunity to shape their future and that politicians listen to them, and The Talking Shop is a brilliant initiative that I hope will encourage even more young people to feel comfortable using their democratic right to demand more from those running the country – for a greener and more equal Wales for now and in the future.”

– Sophie Howe, Former Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

SECTION 1 - THE PROBLEM

1. Key Findings

The key finding of this research is that the best way to ensure everyone can engage and participate in our democracy is to ensure everyone understands our democracy and knows how to influence decisions, policy and legislation and get their voices heard 365 days a year – every year.

Young people as co-creators - Those currently most disengaged and disenfranchised need to be made co-creators and placed front and centre of any information and engagement campaigns regarding our Welsh and UK democracy and paid for their time, talents and ideas.

Paying young co-creators - It has been fed back many times by the young people that being paid is a game-changer and essential to being able to be involved and feeling that their contribution is valued and taken seriously on a professional level. Additional benefits cited to being involved include being given a platform, access to wider networks, raised profiles and educational, employment and personal development opportunities.

The Information Gap – We currently have record levels of people not engaging with or not participating in our democracy. (To find out more, read the BBC article, [Dissatisfaction with democracy ‘at record high’](#).)

When this research began in February 2020, there was not a single easy-to-find resource where people could access basic information on our UK democracy and learn how everything fits together.

Democratic understanding and education (often termed ‘political literacy/ political education’) and public information across Wales specifically and the UK generally was incredibly low in 2019/2020.

“Most think they have little (36%) or no say (34%) in how the UK is run.”

– [The YouGov Democracy Study, 2020](#)

Up until 1992, 60% of 18 to 24 year olds voted. In 2010, that figure dropped to 44%. Recent polling suggests it is now 24% or one in four, which is a record low.

“I have absolutely no idea what a democracy is.”

– Democracy Box survey respondent aged 16 to 25

A lack of knowledge and information is a recurring theme for all ages. The Democracy Box research suggests that we have historically low levels of knowledge and understanding of the basics of our UK democracy.

One of the reasons for a growing uninformed percentage of the population is that we are lacking a consistent, coherent and joined up provision of basic information sharing and awareness-raising about our UK-wide democracy. This, in turn, is leading to an information gap of fundamental life knowledge – knowledge that all citizens should share. A new, coherent, creative and engaging way of informing and educating all citizens of all ages is urgently required. We need non-partisan, non-election-specific information about our UK democracy 365 days a year and not just in the run-up to an election. It needs to be baked into our education system from age seven upwards, so that no young person ever leaves school again without a basic understanding of our UK democracy and how they can take part and have their voices heard year round and not simply at the ballot box.

In focus groups over the last three years a constant refrain has been heard:

“Slow down, go back – we don’t even understand the words you are using.”

The vast majority of the hundreds of young people who have contributed to this research did not understand the basics of how our UK democracy is structured. Some did not even know what the word ‘democracy’ itself meant or that the UK is a democratic country.

Most young people who contributed to this research (and people of all ages inside The Talking Shop) did not understand the difference between our various parliaments (devolved and Westminster) and all our forms of government (local, devolved and UK) or the different elections that are held and how their votes are counted in each. The majority do not know who their elected representatives are or how to contact them or what a committee is or does. They also don’t understand devolution or what is devolved and what words like ‘constituency’, ‘ward’ or ‘district’ refer to or the difference between parliament and government and the Prime Minister and a First Minister or terms commonly used by the media like ‘left’ and ‘right’ (when it comes to the political spectrum). This does not mean they do not want to know. They are passionate about knowing and are really angry and frustrated that they don’t.

“This is essential life knowledge. It’s as important as English and Maths.”

– Young co-creator, 2020

The Democracy Box survey results

This survey, held in 2020 and 2021, began online as a public survey in phase 1 and was amended and continued in phase 2 when young co-creators and focus group participants were asked to take the survey. Across both versions of the survey, there were 199 responses: 150 in phase 1 and 49 in phase 2.

In phase 1, those aged 16 to 25 accounted for 31%, which increased to 75% in phase 2.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-DD5ZCDLC/> (150 responses)

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-VN8JWDLC/> (49 responses)

Additional in-person responses from interviews, focus groups and thousands of Talking Shop corroborate the findings below and confirm that these figures are representative across all ages of the population:

62% either do not understand or want or need more information on the basics of our UK democracy.

75% do not understand or only partly understand what devolution is and what is devolved.

65% don't know who represents them in the Senedd or what a Member of Senedd does or is responsible for.

77% don't know who their councillors are or what a councillor does or is responsible for.

39% do not know who their MP is or how to contact them.

67% either do not know or only partly understand the difference between Parliament and Government.

73% have never heard of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Over 91% of those responding to The Democracy Box survey said that young people should be taught about our democracy in primary and secondary school and is of paramount importance. Subsequent focus groups have specified that democratic education in schools should focus on democracy in general, before specifically focusing on elections and voting.

The information gap creates a barrier to accessing our democratic systems and structures

If 77% of people don't know what a councillor is or what they are responsible for is it any wonder so few turn out for local elections? Because why would you want to take part in and vote in a system you do not understand? For the minority who actually do know how to contact their local elected representative and get no response at the first attempt, they will often then give up. Despite this, thousands of people who have contributed to this research from all over Wales care passionately about their local area and their local community.

“The creation of a country in which every one of its citizens feels secure, engaged and fulfilled must be a primary objective of a successful modern democratic nation. This would be a country in which everyone feels that they belong, and to which everyone feels they can contribute. Individuals do not learn about governmental and judicial institutions of the United Kingdom through osmosis.”

– House of Lords' 2018 report, [‘The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century’](#)

A frenzied focus on elections and voting – The Democracy Box research suggests that the current focus on elections and getting people to register to vote – and vote – is at best ineffective and, at worst, and rather ironically, may actually be contributing to our record low levels of voter turn-out.

Because why would you want to vote in a system that no one has bothered to explain to you?

The frenzied focus on elections is the responsibility of everyone for whom elections are newsworthy, exciting, interesting and core to their purpose and who prioritise elections above year-round democratic education. This includes political parties, politicians, journalists, broadcasters, news providers and organisations both within and beyond the democratic sector.

Engaging and mobilising only for elections creates a cycle of wall-to-wall election coverage, followed by tumbleweed. This cycle is leading people to feel powerless and excluded, with many people feeling disillusioned with the ballot box as the only advertised/perceived method of participation.

On a positive note, we have moved in recent years to a widening 'democracy sector' in the UK with excellent work being done, much of which is now more joined-up and better networked than pre-2020. However, much of this work remains focussed on addressing elections and voting which, without meaning to, is maintaining the status quo and contributing to continuing low level democratic participation.

“...people need to get involved beyond making a cross on a ballot once in a few years. Democratic participation should be taught from school and reinforced by of events and media campaigns.”

– Democracy Box survey response

Omidaze has been asked more than once how we can sustain interest year round in our democracy and create a buzz outside of elections. This is an interesting and, one could argue, a misplaced concern. We don't worry about creating a buzz around maths and English – or other life information that we all accept everyone needs to know, or have a basic standard of knowledge about, in order to take part in society.

Language as a barrier – The words we use are key and we need to ensure we have a shared vocabulary and avoid 'problematic language'. For example, the word 'politics' is strongly connected to concerns around truth and trust for many people and is often thought to imply 'party politics'. The word 'politics' is also associated with traditional, alienating and inaccessible power structures. The word 'politics' heats up the discussion and creates immediate silos.

In contrast, the word 'democracy' allows people of all political persuasions to come together to discuss options for the society they want to see now and for future generations. The word 'democracy' cools down the discussion and allows people to think about how to work together collectively for the greater good.

Throughout this three-and-a-half-year research project, the terms 'civics', 'citizen' and 'citizenship' were commonly disliked and not understood by many and said to be problematic and alienating. This was also found to be the case with much of the vocabulary and language traditionally surrounding this subject.

No individual who contributed to this research – who was not already involved in the democracy/citizenship teaching sector – used the terms 'civics', 'citizenship' or 'civic journey' or referred to themselves as a 'citizen' when asked to talk about democracy. This is problematic, because if people do not recognise or relate to the language being used to describe democratic education and democratic participation, this in turn will create further alienation and disengagement.

“What we call it is key. ‘Citizenship’ is not a good title.”

– Young person in a focus group

When Talking Shop visitors were asked specifically about these terms, they spoke passionately about the term ‘citizen’ not holding any meaning for them. They also found the term ‘citizen’ to be either archaic, distancing or simply not one they could identify with.

“No one would call themselves a citizen. Citizens have no power. People have power. We are people.”

– Talking Shop visitor

The word, or rather concept, of citizen versus consumer is also key:

“Throughout the twentieth century, widespread use of the word ‘consumer’ grew steadily in public life, policymaking and the media until it far outstripped the word ‘citizen’... Why does it matter? Because, explains the media and cultural analyst Justin Lewis, ‘Unlike the citizen, the consumers’ means of expression is limited: while citizens can address every aspect of cultural, social and economic life...consumers find expression only in the market place.”

– ‘Doughnut Economics’, Kate Raworth

This research also looked at co-production. In the ‘Our Voice Matters phase 1 findings from the Cwm Taf/RCT People First project’ report, authored by Jenny Mushiringani-Monjero, which looks at co-production being an essential ingredient when working on some of society’s most complex and pressing issues, language as a key barrier to participation is addressed .

Mushiringani-Monjero quotes Shaw to illuminate this point:

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

– George Bernard Shaw

Who owns and authors the language is important, as is the shared understanding of all vocabulary being used. The avoidance of language being used as a weapon or lever of power or status is crucial.

Glossaries, explainers, easy-to-understand guides and digestible information have all been routinely requested over the last three years. This highlights the need for the language around our democracy to be demystified and made commonly understood.

Words such as ‘constituency’, ‘ward’, ‘parliament’ and the word ‘democracy’ itself were not understood and deemed a barrier.

As one young person in an early focus group said:

“Whoa, you’ll have to go back, because I don’t even understand half of the words you are using. What does the word ‘democracy’ even mean?”

Or as another eventually said tentatively to a collaborating academic who wanted to talk to the young people about constitutional change:

“What does the word ‘constitution’ even mean?”

The FrameWorks Institute’s research into reframing government aligns completely with the Democracy Box research findings that content explaining our democracy needs to be values-driven and use:

- Simplified models
- Reasonable tone
- Visuals
- Effective and representative messengers
- Thematic instead of episodic stories
- Stories that explain cause and effect

Three key findings from the FrameWorks Institute’s research in the USA around re-positioning government and increasing democratic participation are useful guides:

- 1.** The word ‘government’ poses an obstacle to productive thinking.
- 2.** People’s immediate reactions to the topic of government are limited to two narrow default frames: The first frame considers government to be elected leadership and its decision-making functions; the second regards government as a large, bureaucratic mass.
- 3.** People want to see a role for themselves as engaged citizens.

Key communication challenges, based on insights from that research, are the need to:

- Emphasise the **mission of government** as distinct from, but not antithetical to, business.
- Reinforce the notion of **shared fate**, in the form of the **common good or quality of life**, which gives rise to government in the first place.
- Offering a **persona for government more in keeping with democratic ideals**: responsible manager, protector, long-term planner, the people's voice, etc.
- **Connect the role of government to values that the country as a whole embraces** such as planning for a prosperous and healthy future for all, stewardship and the building and preservation of community.

Key takeaways regarding language

- Use of story to convey complex information is key.
- Ensuring a shared vocabulary is vital.
- Reframing of words such as 'government' is crucial.
- News stories need to shift from episodic to thematic.
- Replacing the word 'politics' with 'democracy' will aid engagement and participation - this includes renaming 'political literacy' as 'democratic education' – and avoiding problematic language which alienates and reinforces existing power structures

Peer-to-peer learning and information sharing has been consistently evidenced as the route to success and to transforming democratic engagement and participation. Omidaze has trialled Democracy Box young co-creators working as ambassadors in school and college settings, including accompanying the Electoral Commission to outreach sessions. Participant feedback confirmed a direct correlation between this activity and subsequent democratic engagement, including registering to vote and voting. Omidaze believes the only barrier to up-scaling this ambassador work both in person and online is investment.

Working with young people and creative approaches have historically been on the periphery of democratic engagement and participation work. This research has evidenced the need for these two strands to become central to how all organisations plan, work and evaluate.

Non-election specific and non-partisan public information for all ages provided year round by neutral and independent organisations was the second priority in all feedback received. Information campaigns run directly by government (of any political party) were deemed **not** suitable, neutral or trustworthy. State-funded information campaigns – if run by neutral organisations – are acceptable to the majority. National figures, celebrities or ordinary members of the public were recommended to be the face of these campaigns – not politicians.

Diversity and representation in any campaign is also a high priority, as is the use of simple language.

The need for joined-up, truly collaborative thinking and working and a long-term approach to democratic education and information, rather than multiple short-term fixes and approaches, was also cited routinely as key to change. Multiple stakeholders are now coming together across the UK to create networks to share resources and information, which has enabled a foundation for sustained collaborative long-term work.

Trust and truth – Trust, or rather the lack of it, and a general concern about how to find the truth in an oversaturated digital world are key issues for everyone we spoke to, including young people. There is a wider and significant breakdown of trust in democracy generally across all generations, including a growing lack of trust in elected representatives, political parties, the media and the structures and systems surrounding all three levels of government.

Disillusionment, distrust, disengagement, dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement with our UK democracy – The lack of trust cited above is a significant factor, being ‘fed up’ with politics, feeling like their vote doesn’t count or make a difference, a lack of response and the ‘feedback loop’ not being closed, not knowing how to get involved and not knowing how to have their voices heard outside of elections are all main reasons consistently given for not participating in civic society, registering to vote or turning out to vote.

What People Want

- Easy-to-use digital look-up tools (e.g, My Society and Democracy Club, which all receive 100% positive feedback with the repeated refrain, ‘Why aren’t these more publicly available?’)

<https://www.writetothem.com/>

<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>

<https://whocanivotefor.co.uk/>

<https://mapit.mysociety.org/>

<https://wheredoivote.co.uk/>

- Simple facts and non-biased information that cuts through the saturation and overload.
- Information co-created with the people, for the people.
- Information across multiple media platforms under one non-partisan brand so that it is easily recognisable wherever it’s found.
- Information that is relevant, inspiring, innovative, non-formulaic and allows and encourages free thought.
- Bite-sized/quick-fire information across all social media platforms that is easily digestible, hooks you in and links to longer in-depth pieces.
- Truthful, factual and politically neutral information that isn’t presented in dry, boring and formal formats.
- Accuracy **and** creativity.
- Compelling **and** balanced information.
- Diverse and representative messengers.
- Content that genuinely encourages meaningful participation and real life examples of how democracy affects us day to day.
- Information on how to participate both at and beyond the ballot box.
- Good aesthetics.
- Digital and face-to-face information points.

- The feedback loop closed. If someone writes to their elected representative, they want a response, even if it's a negative one.
- Activity and inclusion throughout the year that will retain their interest and involvement between elections.
- An online dummy's guide to democracy – democracy made easy and broken down; a toolkit for angry people and/or activists; A 'Know your...'
Series: 'Know your rights/councillor/MS, MP/your democracy'; A 'How do I...'
guide.
- Short sentences, easy to read with glossaries of key words and no jargon.
- Simple, easy-to-follow and digestible information.
- Infographics that make the information easier to consume.
- High production values for long form content and authentic user-generated short-form content.
- Historical context.
- Content/information that is catchy, weird, consistent, repetitive and uses animals, makes us look, features celebrity icons and 'interesting' people, uses quizzes, has cliff hangers, aligns with trends, uses buzz words and music, and is never too serious and has a sense of humour.

People want a one-stop shop for democratic information – both digital and in person. When asked where and how they wanted to be able to access this information, everyone who contributed to this research said the same three things. Make the information:

1. Make it relevant to people's lives.
2. Make it easy to find and all in one place.
3. Make it simple and easy to understand.

People want to see a role for themselves as engaged citizens. They want to contribute and be valued.

Finding a balance between entertainment/keeping it light while still being responsible/factual and informative came up again and again. Animation and humour can help to make complex information easier to understand – however, both were divisive, with almost 50/50 liking and disliking the use of each. Music, short-form content leading to long-form content and content that was representative and authentic were requirements shared by everyone who contributed.

Finding the hook, phrase, jingle, tagline or motto that everyone would know, repeat and remember was discussed and continues to be discussed a lot. The young co-creators have asked for merchandise and a Democracy Box jingle since our research began in 2020. The latter has just been created. The concept of environmentally friendly Democracy Box collectables has been a recurring theme in think-ins and focus groups (e.g. pins, badges, pens, hoodies and mugs) for the full age range of young people contributing to the research from 16 to 26.

Going back to basics was another recurring theme of the research. In focus groups and creative think-ins, young people routinely suggested posters and leaflets be given out and displayed in shops, cafes, colleges, universities and schools and eye-catching adverts displayed in public places (e.g. on billboards, in restaurants and shopping centres).

They also told us that an interactive element (e.g. QR codes and/or tear off takeaway strips for links and websites) is essential, as is proactive in-person human signposting, interaction and facilitation of these materials.

Top answers from all surveys, focus groups and work with young co-creators of where and how young people want democratic information were:

1. School
2. Social media
3. Podcasts
4. Music
5. Story/drama/film/video

“I just think, for me, it was a really nice way to learn about it – a fun way, less boring.”

– Feedback from a young person in Democracy Box content test focus group

Top Four Social Media Platforms Identified

1. Instagram
2. TikTok
3. YouTube
4. Snapchat

“We are connected to our screens ALL the time.”

“Show us the door and we’ll google the rest.”

– Democracy Box young co-creators

The idea of state-funded public information films being revived to explain our democracy was welcomed by over 50% of those surveyed. A further 30% answered ‘maybe’, with certain caveats – namely, the films need to be made by a non-partisan organisation and not the government. They also need to be fact-checked, impartial, truthful and trustworthy.

There were also specific suggestions for engaging with young people after they have left secondary school, or in addition to the formal school setting:

- **Activities in youth centres and for community groups were suggested as a less formal alternative to school-based activities.**
- **Pop-up events and stores were identified as an alternative means of engagement, especially in places where young people spend time.** There was also support for events and space where young people can turn up without any pressure to contribute, and can choose to access information and conversation.
- **Information stands at college and university freshers’ fairs.** There was a consensus among participants that this kind of continued engagement across age groups is something that young people really want. In particular, this would enable targeted advice to students around voting and registering to vote whilst they’re away from home.

What Matters Most to Young People

- Friends and family
- Home and immediate environment
- Transport/travel
- Internet access
- Climate emergency
- Poverty, lack of equality and homelessness
- Food and food poverty
- Cost of living
- Free public spaces to use, socialise and congregate
- Music, art and creativity

- The natural world, including animals
- Socialising
- Tradition, culture and heritage
- Sport

What Young People Tell Us Should Be the Key Messages in Democratic Information Campaigns

- The basics of our UK democracy that everyone needs to understand
- What is democracy?
- What has it got to do with me?
- How do I get involved and heard all year round?
- Democracy has a massive effect on your day to day life
- Every vote counts
- If you have an opinion, it needs to be heard
- No change will come without action
- Democracy affects our daily lives and our future
- Democracy affects our living conditions
- Governments (which we elect) determine our travel, our rights and what our taxes (our money) are used for
- Get involved/heard by voting, registering to vote, having discussions, staying informed and using your voice



2. Democratic Participation

“Engagement comes from understanding. People are only going to be interested in something if they understand it. If you don’t understand, why would you take part?”

– Young co-creator, aged 17

How do we measure democratic participation? Is the act of voting enough to define one as being an active participant in our democracy?

Let us begin with the blunt evaluation and measuring tool of voter turn-out before we shift our focus away from the ballot box.

In the 2019 General Election, whilst the overall turn-out was just over 67%, in many areas, the turnout was just below or just above 50%. Let that sink in. Fifty percent of the population in many areas are not voting.

For devolved parliament elections, we either hover around the 50% mark in Scotland (49.2 to 55.7%, with an all-time high of 63.5% in 2021) or dip way below it in Wales, where the turn-out has tended to be around 40 to 45%. The lowest turn-out was 38.2% in 2003 and the highest was 46.5% in 2021. The percentage has been even lower than 38% within individual constituencies.

In 2021, over 53% of people eligible to vote in the Welsh Parliament election chose not to. That is still **an average of over 50% people in Wales still not turning out to vote** for elected representatives who will make decisions about health, education, transport, agriculture, culture, sport and housing in the country they live in and which will directly affect them.

“To me, democracy means the entitlement to political freedom where we have a voice and as individuals can advocate for what is important to us. I am trying to educate myself on UK democracy and politics. I believe there should definitely be something in place to help people understand more.”

– Young person aged between 16 to 25, via The Democracy Box survey

The statistics get much worse for local elections in the UK, coming in at under or just over 40% across England, Wales and Scotland. That is **60 to 70% of people not voting in local elections**. Up to seventy percent of people are not voting for the elected representatives who will make decisions that affect them on a day-to-day basis in their local areas, communities, towns and cities. Let that sink in. Sixty to seventy percent of people are **not** voting in local elections. And yet Omidaze know, from talking to thousands of people all over Wales, that the vast majority of people really care about their local areas and

communities and all the things which local authorities and councillors are responsible for. People care deeply about their schools, their streets and public spaces and their social services. And yet most people do not know who their councillors are, how to contact them or that these elected representatives are deciding budgets and policies that affect them and their schools, local streets, public spaces, social services and the quality of their lives every single day.

This is our democratic deficit.

“I didn’t vote when I first could, because I wasn’t educated in the system and didn’t know how my vote would count.”

– Young person giving feedback on Democracy Box content

When 50% or more, therefore the majority, of people are not voting, shouldn't we ask ourselves why? Isn't it time we listened to that silent majority?

No one would expect anyone to sit down and engage with and participate in a game of Monopoly or Cluedo (insert your board game of choice) without first telling them the rules. Why then should we expect anyone to be able to, or want to, fully participate in our democracy without first understanding the rules and how our democracy is currently structured?

The **Electoral Commission’s report** on the May 2022 elections in Wales stated that:

“Feedback from young people and partners involved in our education work has consistently shown:

- **a lack of understanding as to how to participate in our democratic process**
- **a lack of motivation to engage in elections due to insufficient knowledge**

The New Curriculum for Wales aims to support learners to become ‘ethical, informed citizens who understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights.’ There is therefore an opportunity for democratic awareness to be woven consistently through education, rather than being a standalone topic during an election.”

The Open University in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs conducted a Citizens’ Panel in 2022 to research democracy and the media in Wales and concluded:

“The panel agreed that most people have quite a low level of understanding about politics. They thought the news doesn’t help... and schools don’t teach enough about democracy and how citizens can get involved. They also said there was little chance for adults to catch up on what they’d missed in school.”

– Institute of Welsh Affairs, **Citizens’ Voices, People’s News: Making the Media Work for Wales**, November 2022

They recommended:

- Welsh Government should strengthen democracy education in schools and the wider community.
- New qualifications should include teaching about democracy and politics.
- Training for teachers.
- Education resources about democracy in Wales should be created with ordinary people for ordinary people and promoted through schools and universities.

One of the main topics of feedback from young people contributing to The Democracy Box research during the Covid19 pandemic was the negative impact caused by their lack of awareness and knowledge of devolution.

Young people aged 18 to 26 tend to move around the UK more compared to other age groups due to study and early stage careers. When starting university in another part of the country, they talked about how the lack of information and knowledge and not understanding the different rules around voting and elections in all four nations was a major barrier to their engagement and participation. Many asked why, when we get a National Insurance number sent to us at 16, we aren’t also automatically registered to vote and sent an information pack on how our democracy works and fits together.

They have told us, along with thousands of visitors to The Talking Shop trials, that one solution is not enough.

All of this research evidences that people want to contribute. They want to participate and feel included and add value and be valued.

Democracy is much more than a cross or tick on a ballot box every few years. A real-life example of every day democracy in action is given to all new Democracy Box recruits. It is a true story of residents who wanted to do something about a forgotten patch of public land at the end of their street. Young co-creators

are told how the residents began with a conversation. Then a few of them volunteered to clear the patch of ground. A gardening club was started and the local town council was contacted, which donated planters and gave support. The main county council was then contacted, funding was successfully applied for and an artist and a piece of artwork commissioned, flagpoles purchased and so on. This triangular spot of previously overgrown, unused public land is now a tranquil haven for any weary traveller to rest a while (especially after a long climb up the adjacent hill) and an open green space for community cohesion and activity throughout the year.

This definition of democracy which starts with the people and not with politicians being elected allows the young people to become active participants in their own democracy story. The vital part of the story is that it happened because those initial residents were informed. They knew how our democracy was structured and how to access it – including contacting their council and elected representatives – and could therefore have their voices heard, contribute, and feel empowered and equipped to make a difference to their local community.

New recruits are also told about a young guest on the Democracy Box podcast series who, after listening and talking to two young co-creators, suddenly said, “I think I get it. My local post office is closing, and we don’t want it to. Can I do something about it?” Together, the three young people went through the ‘10 Ways’ in The Democracy Box story and the young person left determined to start a petition, demonstrate, contact her local paper and elected representatives and get her voice heard.

Many people who don’t vote are participating in democracy every single day, from volunteering and signing petitions to writing to a local paper and having conversations on the street about their local areas.

We need to celebrate and value people participating in everyday democracy as much as participating in elections. A good place to start is with The Democracy Box’s **Ten Ways to Have Your Say**. Instead of starting with voting and registering to vote – which are placed at the bottom of the list - number one is having a conversation and sharing **The Democracy Box’s Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should know in Seven Short Chapters** with family, friends and neighbours.

We need to begin by helping everyone to understand and access our existing democratic systems and structures. We need to give everyone the basic information and knowledge they need to participate in our democracy every day, which is all contained in the Democracy Box story.

Finally the need for a ‘conversation with the nation’ to discuss our UK democracy and our future constitution in order to tackle our democratic

deficit was a key emerging theme of this research. There are many different approaches to this already taking place from the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales to citizens' assemblies. In 2022, the Welsh Government created the **Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales** with the ambition of a conversation with the nation about constitutional reform and the Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy have been calling for a citizens' convention for some time:

“This demands that we find imaginative, new ways for people to discuss subjects that they might not be familiar with or feel confident in addressing.

No process will have credibility unless it can demonstrate that everyone is equally able to participate, and that it is designed to make the experience of participating easy and enjoyable.”

- **Citizens' Convention on UK Democracy – A User's Manual**

How we can have such a conversation, however, without the majority of the

DEMOCRACY IS NOT SET IN STONE. IT'S SHAPED BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE. THE LAW APPLIES EQUALLY TO ALL RULERS AND RULED ALIKE.

DEMOCRACY IS ABOUT HAVING YOUR SAY AND GETTING INVOLVED ALL YEAR ROUND...

HERE ARE 10 WAYS FOR EVERY HERO TO MAKE THEIR VOICE HEARD

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Share the Story of our Democracy with other heroes. | 2. Volunteer and get involved in your local community. | 3. Get in touch with your councillors, Members of devolved Parliament and MP. | 4. Protest, Campaign and Organise. | 5. Contact the media. |
| 6. Start a Petition, get it debated by your devolved Parliament or the UK Parliament. | 7. Contribute towards a committee's research. | 8. Join a school council/a Youth Parliament/ if you're over 18 stand for Public Office. | 9. Register to vote. | 10. VOTE! Check the Electoral Commission for unbiased voting info! |

ILLUSTRATIONS BY OLIVIA WINTER

population having a shared basic understanding of our current constitution is unclear. Many of the young people we have spoken to and worked with do not even know what the word 'constitution' means.

“There’s an element of embarrassment about not knowing what’s going on. That was true for me. I don’t think anyone really wants to admit ‘I don’t get it’. I think that’s definitely putting a lot of people off.”

– Liv Young, co-creator aged 17

This research has evidenced that such a conversation can only take place meaningfully and inclusively if everyone has a shared baseline of existing knowledge. Unfortunately this body of research has also evidenced that today in the UK many citizens, young and old (including teachers and educators), simply do not have a strong basic understanding of how our democracy (our constitution) works and fits together. Therefore, by definition, they cannot fully participate. The basics include what the words ‘democracy’ and ‘constitution’ themselves actually mean; the difference between local government; devolved governments and UK government and how they are all structured and fit together; the difference between parliament and government; how, when and why elections are called; voting ages and how votes are counted; what devolution means; lines of responsibility; who elected representatives are and how to contact them, the rule of law, the role of the media in our democracy and how to get ones voice heard beyond the ballot box.

We need to do this work from the grassroots up and not top down. Young people need to be front and centre of this and any work that seeks to engage and inform them. We also need to use the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** as a metric and framework.

This report and proof of concept proposes that together **The Talking Shop**© and **The Democracy Box**© can help to address this information gap and:

- increase democratic/voter engagement
- increase participation both at and beyond the ballot box
- create a platform for a game-changing conversation about our UK democracy, constitutional change and electoral/democratic reform

“I don’t think many of my friends really know the meaning (of the word ‘democracy’) or about our UK democracy. I think something should be done to help the younger generation understand it, as we are the future generations, and our decisions will affect us in the future.”

– The Democracy Box survey respondent aged 16 to 25

3. The Current Landscape of Democratic Education in Schools in England and Wales

This report recommends that:

- We must provide non-partisan, non-election-specific public information about our UK democracy and bake democratic education into our education system from teaching training onwards and ensure it runs year round, every year, and not just in the run-up to an election.
- The basics of our existing democracy, as contained in the Democracy Box story, are routinely shared with all adults, including our educators and school pupils from primary school year 2 to secondary school year 11, and that this then forms the foundation for all citizenship teaching.

“You don’t really learn about the system. The only time it gets talked about is when there’s a general election. It’s something you’re supposed to know but you never get taught it.”

– Young guest on The Democracy Box podcast

Our education workforce - If our teachers come from a background where democracy/politics wasn’t discussed around the kitchen table growing up, chances are they will be ashamed about not understanding our democracy as adults.

If you are a teacher, it is hard enough to stand in front of a class and teach your own subject. To teach something you do not fully understand and to do it creatively and confidently, and thereby engage and inspire young people, is a tall order. Teachers may therefore continue to sidestep it all together or resort to the passive practice of putting on a video or handing out a workbook, which has historically resulted in low, or zero level, understanding and engagement.

The cycle of poor story sharing will thereby continue and low democratic engagement and participation along with it. The new curriculum alone will not change that.

There are many ‘players’ or ‘actors’ in the democracy sector, and within parliaments and the civil service, all doing brilliant and important work regarding democratic education across the UK (many of them are named collaborators on The Democracy Box). There have been some huge steps forward in networking and partnership building, particularly in the last three years, and positive progress has been made around democratic education. However much more work is needed.

Teacher training that makes sure teachers know **this story** and which equips them with creative approaches to share the story with their students, and empower their students to become young co-creators and storytellers, is urgently required.

“To me, the word democracy means ‘fairness’. I would like to be taught in school about politics, because I have no idea what I’m voting for or how to vote or how to access information about these things.”

– Democracy Box survey respondent, aged 16 to 25

Democratic education currently differs across the whole of the UK.

Citizenship is a statutory subject in England and Northern Ireland. It is not statutory in Wales or Scotland and is instead a cross-curricular theme.

The following parts of this chapter outline the current situation in Wales and England – however, it is important to note that, whilst this chapter is titled ‘Democratic Education’, the school subject that this falls under in England is ‘Citizenship’. Citizenship as a subject is much wider and more encompassing than simply teaching the basics as contained in **The Democracy Box’s The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters** and, the author would argue, wider than democratic education.

“If The Democracy Box’s information were to reach a school environment, I believe it would have a colossal impact on the youth, allowing young people to understand how their country’s actually run. If children were to be brought up with knowledge of our democracy, then the knowledge of ‘how to make change and get your message heard’ would become common knowledge, which is what it should be.”

– Liv Winter, young co-creator, September 2021

3.1 Democratic Education in England

Citizenship is a statutory requirement in secondary schools in England up to year 9 (age 14), after which it is a Citizenship Studies GCSE option. The subject is not statutory in primary schools in England.

“Democratic education programmes in schools have been debated by teachers and policy-makers alike in the UK since the early 1970s. However, democratic education only acquired formal recognition

following the publication of the 'Crick Report' (QCA, 1998)...'citizenship education' was introduced as a statutory subject on the English National Curriculum from 2002."

- **'The missing link – an updated evaluation of the provision, practice and politics of democratic education in English secondary schools', Dr James Weinberg, Sheffield University**

However, despite being a statutory subject in England, research has shown that it is not being taught well or, in some cases, at all in years 7 to 9, and the GCSE is an option not being offered or taken up in huge numbers. In 2021, fewer than 22,000 young people took the Citizenship GCSE in England, which is on offer in only 600 schools and colleges. To put this in context, there are 3,458 secondary schools in England and over 700,000 16 year olds, of which at least 600,000 take GCSEs in England each year. That leaves 578,000 who are not receiving democratic education in England beyond the age of 14, if at all.

The summary of **'The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century' report**, published in 2018, states:

"We have found that citizenship education...has been neglected... The decline in citizenship education has a number of causes: the revision of the national curriculum in 2013, the fact that academies are in any case not required to follow it, the low esteem in which the subject appears to be held, the decrease in the numbers of trained teachers and the corresponding fall in the numbers taking Citizenship GCSE. The Government must re-prioritise the subject, creating a statutory entitlement to citizenship education from primary to the end of secondary education, and set a target which will allow every secondary school to have at least one trained teacher."

In Westminster, an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was formed in 2021 looking at current political literacy in secondary schools in England. **The Missing Link** report ('The Missing Link: an updated evaluation of the provision, practice and politics of democratic education in English secondary schools' by Dr James Weinberg of Sheffield University), published in November 2022, underpins the work of the APPG.

Weinberg states that:

“Three ‘barriers’ or ‘blockages’ stand out: competing demands on teachers’ time; teacher expertise; and curriculum content. It is worth noting that there was no significant variation in the hierarchy of these obstacles according to teacher experience, seniority or school type.”

– **‘The Missing Link: an updated evaluation of the provision, practice and politics of democratic education in English secondary schools’, Dr James Weinberg, Sheffield University**

3.2 Democratic Education in Wales

There is good news in Wales. Lowering the voting age to 16 was established in 2021 and ground-breaking legislation was enacted in the form of the **Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) in 2015**. In the run-up to the first election where 16 year olds could vote for the first time, there was fast and furious work being done by many organisations, including the Electoral Commission, the Welsh Government, the Welsh Parliament, the Electoral Reform Society, and broadcasters and educators across Wales. This work continues – more content, more resources and more teacher/educator guides and packs are being created.

The Election Reform Society conducted research in schools in Wales pre-pandemic, and their recommendations included quick explainers on social media and one lesson a week dedicated to democratic education. They also cited trust and reliability as key.

A new **Curriculum for Wales**, which places UK and global citizenship at its very core, began to be rolled out in 2022, with the roll out aiming to be complete by 2026. This progressive new national curriculum should, in theory, remove two of the three obstacles to democratic education within secondary schools in Wales that Weinberg quite rightly identifies in his report – teacher time and curriculum constraints.

The bad news is that there remains an implementation gap for aspects of the new curriculum, including those around UK and global citizenship, which is caused by a lack of teacher expertise, knowledge and confidence.

“Across the world young people are realising that democracies have failed them, and future generations, on issues like climate change, jobs and skills and wellbeing. Part of this problem may be that our education system does not provide enough support to young people to help them understand and engage with democratic systems or processes. The holistic nature of the new curriculum provides an opportunity to address this, but teachers and learners must be supported to find creative ways to implement it. This programme is a way of doing exactly that.”

– Sophie Howe, Former Future Generation Commissioner for Wales, writing about The Democracy Box project

The former Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, Sophie Howe, outlined the ‘double test’ of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 for public bodies of ‘what we do’ and ‘how we do it’. Her quote above is in relation to how this applies to the new curriculum and that ‘what we learn’ and ‘how we learn it’ needs to be in line with the main principles of the Act.

The power of the new curriculum in Wales will be in its implementation. How it is actually going to be delivered is key. If we are to truly break the cycle of poor shared storytelling about our UK democracy referenced above, then we need to do things radically different.

If we are to meet the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales, we must equip our educators with the basic information about our democratic systems and structures first and then ensure that the ways in which they share that information with their students is both creative and inspiring. The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme for schools can do just that and enable us to begin to break the current cycle of poor shared storytelling about our democracy.

We must accept that we have failed previous generations, remove the blame and the shame and begin with the adults and educators themselves. Unless we teach the teachers and equip them with creative means of sharing our UK democracy story, nothing is ever going to change.

4. The Story of Our UK democracy and the Cycle of Poor Shared Storytelling

In the UK in 2023, we have lost our collective story.

Stories are how we understand and make sense of the world. Creative and interesting stories engage and inspire us. Stories will help us tackle our current democratic deficit.

How we tell, retell and shape and structure our stories is vital to the development of human civilisation and therefore our democracy. We all need to know and understand our collective story as Welsh and UK citizens, so that we can all take part and help write the next chapter together.

Knowledge is power, and only if we all know the story of our UK democracy will we have the power to collectively shape the society we want for ourselves, our friends our families and future generations.

One could argue that we have never had a shared story of our UK democracy. What is certain is that we don't have one now. We need to ask ourselves if we can truly claim to have a democracy in the UK if the majority of citizens do not understand the basics of how that democracy actually works and fits together.

The Democracy Box research included:

- Story and story structure
- Storytelling
- Neuroscience behind storytelling
- How the human brain functions in connection to story
- Sharing and retelling of stories in different forms and contexts
- Thematic versus episodic stories
- Stories as the base for all communication
- Nudge theory and priming
- Why and how anecdotal narrative evidence will always have more impact than dry, factual statistical evidence
- How we understand the world and make judgements and decisions
- Why stories with active agents who have habits, personalities and abilities engage us

“We no longer live in a broadcast era where we must passively receive our stories en-masse. Instead, growing numbers of people have the means to be storytellers as well as story-listeners. As systems changers, we should seek to enable others to use story to illuminate the lay of their land, to cohere communities, and to reauthor the nest of narratives they live in. How can we enable more people to use this most ancient technology to change systems for the better?”

– **‘Telling the Difference: Using Story to Change Systems’, Ella Saltmarshe**

A story structure, namely the classical hero story structure, was therefore adopted by the author to create **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters.**

All Democracy Box young co-creators and participants in the Democracy Box schools programme prototype are storytellers, retelling this story of our democracy in myriad ways both in person as ambassadors and across multiple digital platforms.

“Communications is storytelling; but the stories we tell must have all the elements in place: Values, that orient the audience to the big idea, or to ‘what this is about’; Simplifying Models, that concretize and simplify complex scientific explanations of how things work; Reasonable tone; Reinforcing visuals; Effective messengers; and Thematic stories that include causal sequences, or stories that explain the link between cause and effect.”

– The FrameWorks Institute

All Democracy Box content is created using **The Democracy Box’s The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters©.**

Written by Yvonne Murphy, with input from young people and stakeholders and approved by the Electoral Commission, this 'story' contains all the basic information that every UK citizen is entitled to know and needs to know in order to participate in our UK democracy. You can view and download the story for free [here](#) in Welsh or English from The Democracy Box prototype website.

The story was illustrated by young co-creator Olivia Winter and the PDF was designed by young co-creator Katie Price, who also designed all The Democracy Box logos and branding. It is not finished – it still needs a glossary and historical timeline. A BSL and audio version also needs to be created.

The information is in a story format, because the research demonstrated that using stories is the best way to engage and share complex and dry information.

“A sentence is understood more easily if it describes what an agent does than if it describes what something is, what properties it has... The mind...appears to have a special aptitude for the construction and interpretation of stories about active agents.”

– ‘Thinking, Fast and Slow’, Daniel Kahneman

SECTION 2 - TOWARDS A SOLUTION

5. Working with young people as co-creators and storytellers

Young people aged 16 to 26 are the demographic least likely to turn out to vote across the whole of the UK.

Involving young people from the start of a project earns trust which in turn increases engagement and leads to better research and the development of more meaningful prototypes.

Omidaze passionately believes that creativity should be at the very core of how we all learn and work every single day. All the young people Omidaze has encountered agree.

Young people generate all The Democracy Box ideas and co-create all aspects of The Democracy Box, from the content and branding to the internal communications and structure. They say where and how they want the information, what content works and what doesn't, and then work with professional creatives to create the solution. In phase 1, they watched hours of existing content and gave their very honest feedback and were then helped to create what they wanted to see instead.

“I joined The Democracy Box because I want to make information about our UK democracy digestible, accessible and appealing to young people. This is because I’ve always had an interest in politics but previously avoided political spaces and conversations. As I hadn’t learnt the basics in school, I didn’t feel intelligent enough to form, trust or voice my opinions. So I now want to show how liberating it can feel to be part of that democratic process and help shape your future.”

– Democracy Box young co-creator, via Instagram, December 2021

Young co-creators are given responsibility as ‘team leads’ and trained up as trainee and then assistant producers. The direction and development of The Democracy Box, the prototypes and all associated content have been developed in response to their input and in their order of priority.

The young co-creators are digital natives who bring a wealth of digital knowledge and experience to the table. The professional creatives bring their skills, expertise, knowledge and networks. Everyone learns. Everyone contributes. Everyone is paid.

All the young people who have engaged with The Democracy Box have fed back that the facilitation and completely non-partisan nature of the project is both refreshing and essential to its success. All are welcome, whatever political party they align with and whether or not they view themselves as ‘political’ or not.

Omidaze is committed to training and paying people as co-creators and Talking Shop hosts, and for their time in focus groups, ensuring they feel valued for their time, insight, input and skills.

Working with young co-creators takes investment – time and money – and is probably the best investment any organisation will ever make. It doesn't require new money – rather, it needs to use existing budgets differently, with a shift of priority and emphasis. Organisations will often pay a large marketing/ PR/comms company and put no line in the budget to pay the very people they are trying to reach, include, engage and inform.

Here are just a few of the things young people have shared with Omidaze that they need and that Omidaze strives to provide:

Respect; skills; experience; networks; connections; contacts; platforms; access; exposure; finance/funding; work opportunities; training; facilitation; permission to question; equipment; professional guidance; access/signposting to knowledge/information; space and time to try out their ideas/thinking (and fail and learn and try again); to gather; meet other young people; connect; collude; and create.

“Just wanted to let you know that I received an offer from Oxford (Hertford College) this morning. The project last year provided me with the confidence needed to succeed in online interviews and prepared me for speaking in unfamiliar situations with new people online. For that, I'm very thankful. These types of projects help teach skills that the school environment struggles with.” –

Young co-creator

Many young people do not know who their elected representatives are, what they do, or how to contact them. This does not mean they do not want to know. They are passionate about knowing and really angry that they don't.

Like the 16-year-old young co-creator who tried to find out who her elected representatives were online. She was observed as she researched. She went down dead ends and blind alleys, navigating non-user friendly websites and still had no clarity about who her MP or MS were, let alone the councillors who represent her.

After 10 minutes, she was asked, 'At what point would you have given up if you'd been on your own?' She replied, downcast and defeated, 'After about thirty seconds'.

It is not just about not knowing who represents them. It is also not understanding how the whole system works which frustrates them. One 19 year old, who participated in an early focus group, stated she would never vote again and was furious. When asked to say more, she began to describe a frustration with our electoral system and how our votes are counted.

This young person didn't have knowledge or the vocabulary of our voting systems including 'first past the post' or 'proportional representation' to articulate her frustration. (Neither did the author until a few years ago.) It was quickly explained to her – a headline explainer, a fast and simple introduction in about 30 seconds. Then, that young person became even angrier – this time because no one had ever told her this before. She was furious that she had been through 13 years of the state education system and come out the other side without a basic understanding of our democratic systems and structures. And she is not alone. **[Check out this petition started four years ago.](#)**

“I am interested in finding ways to make crucial information like this more accessible for people in the UK. I believe that, in taking charge of teaching one another about the systems that we live in, we are taking radical steps towards creating better futures for everyone.”

– Young co-creator on Instagram

During a two day Clwstwr ideas lab in February 2020, the author began desk research to understand the lowest voter turn-out demographics and constituencies in Wales. Young people aged 18 to 26 are the age group least likely to turn out to vote, not just in Wales, but across the whole of the UK.

Having worked with young people in participatory arts, drama and theatre settings as a freelance creative for over three decades, the author's instinct was that this was the age group who needed to be part of this project as co-creators and paid for that role. This formed the premise of the seed research and development application and all subsequent Democracy Box research and development work.

All previous Omidaze work with young people (including our 'Open Rehearsals' strategy, which involves scheduling a percentage of professional production rehearsals inside schools so that young people can input their ideas and understand the creative process of professional theatre productions), led Omidaze to understand that if we involve young people as co-creators, we can create more relevant work and identify unmet needs.

“This opportunity offers a safe space for creative thinking and connection with others in a time of chaos. Offering payment for participation is vital for having engaging, vulnerable and meaningful meetings.”

– Democracy Box young co-creator

Omidaze also has a proven track record of working with, recruiting and engaging young people from a wide range of backgrounds and communities. Ten young people aged 16 to 30 were involved in phase 1. This increased to twenty in phase 2. **The Democracy Box**® to date has now recruited and trained over 50 young co-creators aged 16 to 26 from across Wales, and Omidaze continues to recruit. Capacity and funding have been the only barriers to recruiting and working with many more.

5.1 Recruitment

Omidaze has been developing the wording and placement of their call outs for applicants and participants across all of their work for several years.

Recruitment methods - included paying people and hiring young people as recruiters to bring other young people on board. This ensured that some young people recruited as co-creators had little or no previous interest in democracy before joining the project. This was vital. When given just a tiny bit of knowledge and agency, every single young person who has been involved with The Democracy Box has been passionate about creatively sharing what they have learnt with other young people and other generations.

The same recruitment methods could be up-scaled to recruit young people from the lowest voter turn-out constituencies in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

Cultural and democratic organisations are often trying to engage and consult with people who are economically disadvantaged and simply do not have the financial resources to give their time for free.

Omidaze is committed to training and paying people properly, including co-creators, Talking Shop hosts, and focus group participants.

If we are asking people to co-create, then we must value their creative input and financially reward them for that input and their time, insight and skills.

All young co-creators are contracted on a freelance basis and paid £15 an hour for allocated hours, which they complete flexibly on their own timescale.

For all Omidaze recruitment:

- An access budget is made available wherever possible for disabled and D/deaf freelancers and participants.

- Omidaze specifies that it is particularly interested in receiving applications from young people who identify as global majority/black or non-black people of colour, disabled, D/deaf or those who have experienced barriers to taking on opportunities or participating in activities because of their financial situation or background.
- If applicants identify as disabled/ or D/deaf and have encountered barriers in working relationships or to opportunities because of their disability, they will be invited to complete and submit a confidential access rider to inform us of any access needs.
- All live and online meetings, performances and workshops take place in accessible and safe spaces.
- Call outs and paid/voluntary opportunities are written in accessible language and distributed widely via community networks to ensure Omidaze reaches those who are currently under-represented.
- The application and selection process challenges traditional formats to ensure genuine openness and access. These processes are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure best practice is maintained. Omidaze makes the application process as easy and as attractive as possible, with multiple ways to respond and apply (e.g. audio, video, written and illustration).
- Omidaze creates a baseline of opportunity for all successful young co-creator applicants e.g. everyone who gets recruited is guaranteed a minimum of two days' work.
- Omidaze uses clear timelines and deadlines, and ensure the work is flexible and part-time, whenever possible, when recruiting 16 to 26 year olds.
- Omidaze works hard to not use jargon or create barriers with language, and to be open, transparent and manage expectations.
- Application information is simple, accessible and uses plain English and we aspire to all information also being available in BSL/audio/bilingual formats.
- Omidaze seeks unlikely alliances and goes outside of usual networks to place, share and advertise call outs.
- Omidaze never uses the easiest option, i.e. Youth Parliament/School Council participants, because those young people are already on board and engaged.
- Omidaze goes to where young people already are – youth groups, drama, music, gaming clubs and societies.

- Interviews are combined with training, so that all participants benefit from the time they contribute, even if they are not successfully contracted.

The Democracy Box's ongoing call out for young co-creators can be found [here](#).

As part of The Democracy Box project Omidaze contracts young people as freelance community consultants to help recruit other young people and encourage them to apply to be co-creators and be paid to participate in creative think-ins and focus groups.

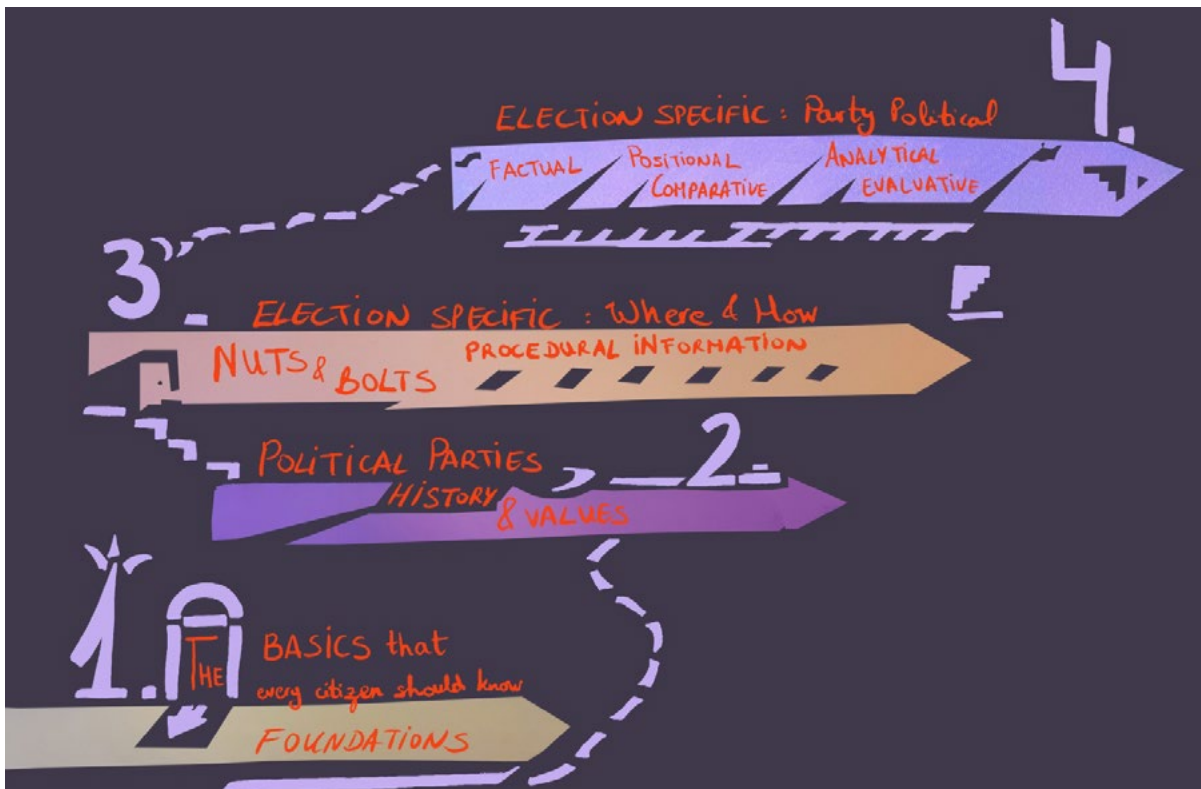
In addition, Omidaze held recruitment/information/consultation sessions with partner/collaborator youth organisations and youth groups/collectives.

“Being paid as a young co-creator previously in 2020 helped towards purchasing an iPad. This impacted my career in an amazing way and led to further employment. I am so grateful for my experience with The Democracy Box and can categorically say that it has the potential to influence a generation for the better.”

– Democracy Box young co-creator, 2020



6. Four Levels of Citizen/ Voter Information



The starting point of The Democracy Box research and development was to separate into categories the multitude of voter/citizen information that was swirling around in every meeting, conversation and interview. This process allowed the author, Yvonne Murphy, to separate the 'basics' that everyone needs to know all year round from election specific information. This became The Democracy Box **4 Levels of Voter Information**.

Levels 1 and 2 are non-election-specific voter/citizen information.

Levels 3 and 4 are election-specific voter/citizen information.

The Four Levels of Voter/Citizen Information© Created by Yvonne Murphy and illustrated by Maria Elorza Saralegui, 2020.

Level 1 is non-election-specific voter/citizen information. Level 1 is the focus of the Democracy Box and is the foundation of all other democratic education and information. Level 1 is the missing level, where historically the least time, energy and resources have been focused. Level 1 is the basics of how our democracy works and fits together that every citizen needs to know – information that we need all year round and not just when there is an election coming up. It outlines the difference between local government, devolved government and UK government, how they all fit together, who our elected representatives are and who is responsible for what and why; what devolution is and what areas are devolved and what the difference is

between a parliament and a government. It explains that democracy is us the people, all of us, and that democracy is not a fixed thing done to us. All citizens must be given this basic knowledge and the tools, information, confidence and permission to have their voices heard and take part, challenge, shape and influence our democracy 365 days a year, every year – and not simply at the ballot box. Level 1 is the focus for The Democracy Box young co-creators and all four prototypes.

Level 2 is also non-election-specific voter/citizen information. Level 2 is information about all the political parties outside of an election – their history, values and ideologies; a basic summary of what they stand for and why. This information needs to be publicly available all year round and was requested by the majority of young people involved in The Democracy Box. This lies beyond the scope of this research and development project and Omidaze's current capacity.

Level 3 is election-specific voter/citizen information. Level 3 is the 'how to vote' election procedural material that the Electoral Commission does so well; where to go to vote; how to register; where your polling station is; election timelines; how to complete a postal vote or vote by proxy, etc. The nuts and bolts.

Level 4 is also election voter/citizen information and covers 'who you can vote for'. This information includes all the comparative and analytical tools and information that citizens need to decide who to vote for in an election. Level 4 includes the manifestos from all political parties published prior to an election and all information relating to the candidates standing for election and all aspects of their election campaigns and where you can hear or read what they stand for and what they are promising to do if elected.

Levels 3 and 4 are where, traditionally, most of the time, energy, focus and resources are spent.

The evidence tells us that we need to shift the focus, time, energy and money to levels 1 and 2 and provide year round, democratic education/information that is not wrapped around an election. Only then can we possibly begin to tackle with any real impact levels 3 and 4. This means we need to prioritise democratic education ahead of focussing on voter registration, voter turnout, national conversations and constitutional and electoral reviews and reforms.

Without investment in level 1 (and ideally level 2), we will never truly change the status quo, and voter registration, voter turn-out and democratic participation will remain low or, worse, keep decreasing.

**7. The Democracy
Box Story of Our
UK Democracy
That Every Citizen
Needs to Know
in Seven Short
Chapters**

All the voter information for level 1 is contained within **[The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters.](#)**

You can view and download the story in Welsh or English from the above link. The story was written by Yvonne Murphy and illustrated by young co-creator Olivia Winter and the PDF was designed by young co-creator Katie Price who also designed all The Democracy Box logos and branding.

This 'story' contains the basics which every citizen needs to know. The information is in a story format because the research demonstrated that using story is the best way to share complex and dry information.

The foundation of the story is the original interactive 'Introduction to Democracy' workshop script from Omidaze's 'Democracy Explained' workshops to schools in 2017. Additions and the hero story format are based on research and several think-ins with young people and key stakeholders from across the democracy sector, including civil servants, teacher trainers, media professionals and young people. The story was then fact checked by the Electoral Commission.

This 'story' is now the basis of all The Democracy Box's ongoing work. The story has also been made into bilingual booklets by Conwy Local Authority and distributed to secondary school students and all young people as they turn 14 and become eligible to vote. The ambition is for this to be replicated across Wales and the rest of the UK so that all young people have access to the story. These bilingual booklets contain QR codes to digital content, made by the young co-creators that explain parts of the story, including podcast episodes, music and videos. Large-scale posters of the story displayed inside every Talking Shop also contain these QR codes. The aim is to create audio and BSL versions of the story going forward.

All new Democracy Box young co-creators are first shown and told the story before being encouraged to explore how they can creatively retell the story themselves across multiple live and digital platforms. They will be invited to join an existing Democracy Box social media team and offered other paid opportunities including representing the Democracy Box as an ambassador at live and online events.



8. The Four Democracy Box Prototypes

1. [The Democracy Box public information campaign](#)©
2. [The Talking Shop](#)© – A cultural and democratic hub that contains [The Democracy Box](#)
3. [The Democracy Box Creative Cascade](#)© in schools programme
4. The Democracy Box Toolkit© for working with young people as co-creators prototype

All four prototypes are summarised in this chapter. Further information on each prototype and the testing of the prototypes can be found in appendices 3 – 7.

Underpinning the four prototypes are The Four Levels of Voter Information and [The Democracy Box's Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters](#).

8.1 Prototype 1 – The Democracy Box© Public Information Campaign

Omidaze used the old style [public information films](#) as inspiration and as the starting point to explore sharing democratic information.

All Democracy Box young co-creators are storytellers retelling the Democracy Box story of our democracy in [myriad ways across multiple digital and broadcast media platforms](#) and via in-person large events which create access and awareness to the digital content.

The Democracy Box is now on BBC Bitesize, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and has a podcast series, which is available on Spotify and Apple. In-person events have included whole year assemblies, higher and further education events and a Blaenau Gwent Council event ([covered by the BBC](#)), where young co-creators welcomed every year 11 student in the county to the start of their democratic journey.

All of The Democracy Box Public Information campaign (both behind the scenes and public-facing elements) are co-designed, co-led, co-managed and co-created by young people. They are paid as freelance Democracy Box young co-creators, assistant producers and ambassadors or 'storytellers'. Additional young people are recruited and paid to attend creative think-ins and focus/feedback groups.

Prototype development is ongoing, and robust user testing has been conducted. Between the publishing of this report and the end of 2023, more young co-creators will be recruited and trained and new creative ways of retelling and sharing the story will be explored. The young co-creators' vision of making The Democracy Box a Wales-wide, and then UK-wide, movement is possible with investment and resourcing.

8.2 Prototype 2 – The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Schools Programme©

This programme enables primary and secondary school teachers to replicate the Democracy Box young co-creator process with their own students, aged seven to sixteen, and creatively retell and cascade the story down through the school years multiple times and in multiple ways.

Each year, students will learn the story in more detail, retell it and cascade it to the year below them using progressively more complex creative skills, mediums and techniques year upon year.

The programme was piloted in collaboration with Central South Education Consortium and 15 primary and secondary schools. The piloted was successfully completed in February 2022 with outstanding feedback. The ultimate goal is for every school in Wales, and potentially the UK, to have access to this model of professional development to create the foundation for all subsequent democratic education. This foundation knowledge for educators and their students is vital if the Global Citizenship aspect of the new Curriculum for Wales is to succeed.

The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme will provide the foundation for learners to begin to develop an understanding of their responsibilities as citizens of the UK and to recognise their own and others' civil rights. The programme will also help signpost to all subsequent citizenship teaching, elections resources and democratic and citizenship education providers.

Teachers will be introduced to The Democracy Box project, and its research methodology and findings. They will be taught the basics of our democracy using The Democracy Box's **Story of our UK Democracy that Every Citizen Should Know** in Seven Short Chapters and content produced by the young co-creators that retells the story. They will meet some of the young co-creators and begin to explore how they can replicate The Democracy Box process with their primary and secondary school students.

Teachers will then be signposted to key democratic education providers including the Electoral Commission, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales team and the Welsh Parliament engagement team who can answer any questions they may have, inform them about their organisation's work and how they can support the school going forward.

Imagine 10 years from now: a student who is currently in year 2; they will be told and will have creatively retold the story of our UK democracy every year for 10 years. They will leave school with a sound, basic understanding of our democracy and empowered with ways in which to have their voice heard year round and not simply at the ballot box.

That student will also have developed their **Creative Habits of Mind** and their creative and critical thinking skills, and be ready to enter society as an informed, creative and engaged citizen.

In Wales, The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme for schools will create a strong foundation for the **what matters statements of this Humanities Area of Learning** and Experience, **principles of progression** and **descriptions of learning** of the new curriculum.

In England, the Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme for schools will offer a framework for introducing democratic education in primary schools. It will provide a foundation and support for statutory citizenship teaching in secondary schools for years 7 to 9 and Citizenship Studies GCSE and PHSE for years 10 and 11.

Below are links to the 2022 Democracy Box Creative Cascade pilot run in partnership with Central South Consortium:

- **[Thornhill Primary – The Democracy Box Creative Cascade project](#)**
- **[The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022 image and audio slideshow](#)**
- **[The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, snapshot of pupils' creative output](#)**
- **[The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, pupils' reflections](#)**

8.3 Prototype 3 – The Talking Shop©

The Talking Shop was piloted in Cardiff in 2019 in an empty shop opposite Cardiff Castle. Visitors repeatedly asked if Talking Shop hosts could show them, on their phone, digital content that would simply and succinctly explain our UK democracy in the way the hosts had. These recurring requests led to this research and development project and the creation of **The Democracy Box©**.

During the course of the Democracy Box research, young people, old people and everyone in between said, as well as digital public information and democratic information in schools, they wanted face-to-face information, signposting, interaction and dialogue. Our research came full circle back to The Talking Shop where it began.

The Talking Shop is a shop that sells nothing and where ideas, information, conversation are free. And so is the tea. It's an open and safe space for the public and creatives to come together to inform themselves as citizens and collide, converse, connect, collude and create.

Inside The Talking Shop®, you will now find the Democracy Box story in takeaway booklets and via digital content on screens, headphones and QR codes. Trained hosts (including young co-creators) introduce the public to The Democracy Box story and content, signpost democratic and cultural information, and facilitate democratic conversation and deliberation using creative approaches.

The Talking Shop provides a platform for civic engagement, democratic debate and creative approaches to democratic deliberation.

The Talking Shop is being trialled in towns across Wales, as Omidaze work out how to replicate that kitchen or dining room table experience for everyone in any town or city. The model has now been trialled successfully in Cardiff, Newport and Merthyr Tydfil in 2022 and 2023 and has recorded nearly 9,000 visits with no dedicated marketing budget. The visitors range in age from six months to 96 years old and include all socio/economic demographics, with a high percentage of young people aged 16 to 30. Visitors represent the full spectrum of democratic engagement, from self-declared non-engagement to highly engaged citizens. Visitors have told us a story about what we have lost: our public spaces to gather and connect, debate, converse and deliberate – public spaces that can provide us with civic information and democratic education.

Everyone contributes to and helps curate the shop. A programme of creative participatory activities hosted by Omidaze, collaborating organisations and freelance creatives act as engagement tools and creative approaches to democratic deliberation.

The Talking Shop's creative sessions and approaches to deliberative democracy

include a wide variety of creative sessions and workshops, designed and facilitated by professional freelance creatives. To date Omidaze have programmed arts and crafts, bunting making, collaging (individual and collective), stone painting, journaling, origami, knitting, crocheting, podcasting, creative writing, paper lantern making, graffiti, Christmas crafts, wreath making, clay modelling, pompom making, poetry writing, illustration, zine making, music, dance, drama and spoken word.

Various creative activities are also available in the shop every day, including arts and crafts, games, jigsaws and books. All have proved successful in helping to bring people into the shop and engage people in conversation, including visitors who may not otherwise have entered the shop, and in giving structure to the conversations and democratic deliberation.

Creating structured and programmed creative activities to increase democratic and cultural engagement and participation and facilitate deliberative democracy is a key priority for Omidaze and the future potential of The Talking Shop model.

The Talking Shop prototyping will be complete by the end of 2023. The final stage is to trial one more site and create and test the accompanying 'Talking Shop on Tour' concept. These final trials will allow Omidaze to explore:

- 1.** How to make the conversations fully bilingual
- 2.** How to structure the creative conversations and democratic deliberations further.
- 3.** How to feed outcomes of these deliberations into our democratic system and structures which, if successful, has the potential to help bridge the existing divide between activism and our current constitutional mechanisms.
- 4.** How multiple stakeholders can come together to invest in and benefit from a long-term or even permanent Talking Shop in any town or city.
- 5.** How The Talking Shop on Tour model can reach those unable to access a fixed town/city centre site, as well as being an engagement tool to that site.

You can read The Talking Shop emerging themes report [here](#) and the report from the 2019 pilot [here](#).

Omidaze remain interested in collaborating creatively to find and implement a sustainable digital democracy hub solution – a digital Talking Shop – a one-stop shop or signpost mechanism to all things democracy online. This could utilise existing Democracy Box prototype platforms such as The Democracy Box website and the methodology of The Talking Shop model.

In 2020, Omidaze held two creative think-ins with young people, colleagues and collaborators from across the democracy sector, and creative industry professionals to think collectively about this. Capacity has meant that this fifth prototype has stalled. Omidaze would welcome the opportunity to continue this early stage research and development and for The Democracy Box brand and young co-creators to partner or collaborate on exploring digital signposting technology and democratic and distributed digital networks.

[Information on The Talking Shop](#)

[Emerging Themes summary](#)

[The Talking Shop 2019 pilot report](#)

[Talking Shop pilot 2019 video](#)

[The Talking Shop Merthyr Tydfil trailer](#)

[The Talking Shop explainer film 2022](#)

[Video of The Newport Talking Shop made by Newport Youth Council](#)

[The Cares Family \(The Multiplier programme\) – The Talking Shop Cardiff 2022 film](#)

8.4 Prototype 4 – The Democracy Box Toolkit©

The toolkit is a best practice guide for anyone co-creating and collaborating with young people. This toolkit will enable organisations to place young people at the heart of all work that is created to reach their age range. It will support organisations and individuals, in both the democracy sector and beyond, to recruit, engage and co-create inclusively, meaningfully and creatively with young people.

The toolkit is underpinned by existing models of best practice, including The Ladder of Children's Participation (Roger Hart, UNICEF 1992); The Lundy model of child participation; the ArtWorks Cymru Quality Principles; A Children's Rights Approach; the European Youth Information Charter (ERYICA); The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the 7 Principles of Complete Co-Creation. The toolkit draws together the author's body of participatory work and artistic practice from over 30 years, including her knowledge and experience of working with young people across the UK and internationally, and combines it with 18 months of intensive research and development funded by Clwstwr.



9. Scaling-up The Democracy Box Prototypes

Researched, created and tested predominantly in Wales with young co-creators born or based in Wales, all four prototypes have the potential to be up-scaled and rolled out across Wales and potentially the UK.

Omidaze passionately believes that it is vital that The Democracy Box is a 'public good' and therefore needs to be co-owned/co-produced by companies who have public service and democratic education and information as their core purpose. The vision is for publicly funded, arms-length organisations, including the BBC and the Electoral Commission, to come together and be the guardians of The Democracy Box and develop, embed, up-scale and roll out the prototypes in partnership.

In 2021, Omidaze proposed a suggested structure that would enable The Democracy Box work to continue to be developed and up-scaled. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was drafted by Omidaze and presented to the Electoral Commission, the BBC and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales asking them to be the inaugural and permanent guardians of The Democracy Box and ensure its longevity and aims are met.

The MOU outlined how Omidaze would grant The Democracy Box trademark and all associated copyright content under the auspices of a newly formed partnership agreement for the benefit of the public and persons of the United Kingdom.

A legal partnership between Omidaze/The Democracy Box and the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales was announced on 29 November 2021, which has enabled further prototype development beyond the original Clwstwr funding period.

In January 2022, Omidaze successfully won a tender to become the Electoral Commission's Youth Voice Partner for Wales 2022/23. From September 2023 Omidaze is continuing to work with the Electoral Commission to explore the scaling-up potential of The Democracy Box prototypes within the Commission's scope and remit.

The third and final organisation, the BBC, reopened the conversation in December 2022.

At the time of writing, Omidaze is in conversation with both organisations. These conversations are positive and ongoing.

Omidaze's vision and aims for the prototypes:

The Democracy Box public information campaign prototype - for Omidaze to incrementally step away and for young co-creators to be upskilled and trained to lead The Democracy Box Public Information Campaign into the future under the guardianship of the BBC and the Electoral Commission and possibly more key stakeholder organisations. If it is to succeed, the public information prototype needs to constantly change and evolve. The platforms that are being currently used will soon be obsolete and replaced by new trends and tech within the next decade. The only way to create a sustainable model is to ensure that 16 to 26 year olds are at the helm and constantly being recruited, trained and paid as co-creators.

The Creative Cascade programme for schools prototype - for the programme to be government funded in each of the four nations and delivered in partnership with local authorities and education consortia and rolled out either by the Welsh Government pan-Wales or piecemeal by all local authorities, potentially in collaboration or partnership with the BBC and the Electoral Commission.

The Talking Shop prototype - for this to be blueprinted and a non-commercial 'franchise' model created that allows Omidaze to own and be responsible for the design and overall concept and handover the management and running of the model to collectives of stakeholders in each town in which it operates, under the joint guardianship of the BBC and the Electoral Commission. The aim is for the model to be funded in each location by the collective of stakeholders (multiple local and national stakeholders whose remits include democratic and/or cultural engagement, participation, consultation, opportunities and services) with an additional core government grant made available as match funding. The Talking Shop model should be used to complement and support existing models such as citizen's assemblies and citizen's panels.

The Democracy Box toolkit - for this one prototype to provide commercial income for Omidaze/Yvonne Murphy in the form of both consultancy and licensing.

Conclusion

“This work mustn’t end here...”

– Democracy Box online sharing attendee

So what happens now? Will this body of research from the past three and a half years (10 years if you include the root and foundation of this research and development) and all the work done with and by young people simply fall off the edge of the cliff?

One thing this research has made clear to Omidaze is that when it comes to democracy, we, as a society, are very good at re-inventing the wheel and implementing short-term projects, fixes and solutions and are really quite poor at sustained, strategic and long-term, joined-up solutions. If we are to change the current levels of democratic participation (whether measured through the traditional and arguably unhelpful optics of voter registration and voter turnout or through alternative and more holistic and creative methods), then we need to have sustained and long-term solutions to this very real, growing and urgent problem of our democratic deficit.

This report recommends that the basics of our existing democracy are shared routinely to all adults via public information campaigns and democracy hubs (online and in person) and via formal and non-formal education settings from primary year 2 to secondary year 11 and that this then forms the foundation for all democratic education and citizenship teaching.

The solution(s) needs to be funded by the state and be independent and non-partisan. It also needs to have young people aged 16 to 26 at the very heart of the solution’s creation and curation.

The Democracy Box prototypes have been trialled and tested for this purpose.

The only current obstacle to scaling up these prototypes is capacity and investment. Investing in The Democracy Box prototypes outlined in this report, along with additional digital tools, such as [writetothem.com](https://www.writetothem.com), [theyworkforyou.com](https://www.theyworkforyou.com) and [whocanivotefor.co.uk](https://www.whocanivotefor.co.uk), and existing models, such as citizen’s assemblies and citizen’s panels, could be a game changer for our Welsh and UK democracy and radically increase democratic participation both at and beyond the ballot box.

The author and Omidaze remain optimistic. However, there is a long way to go and the strain on the author and on a tiny non-core funded arts organisation to facilitate and sustain this work is beginning to take its toll.

And, finally, a word about the wider impacts and benefits of this work –

Increasing democratic and cultural participation was the primary aim of this work. However, Omidaze began to understand with The Talking Shop pilot back in 2019 that the impact and benefits far outreach that basic aim.

The Talking Shop can help us tackle some of society's most pressing issues including isolation and loneliness; mental health and well-being; inter-generational connection; polarisation in our communities and society; community cohesion and urban regeneration.

Loneliness, our modern day epidemic, has been heightened to new levels by a global pandemic, social media and polarising media and political standpoints. Everyone is more connected than ever before – at the click of a button – and yet we are more isolated than we have perhaps ever been in history.

The Co-op Foundation **researched** loneliness and its impacts on young people's mental well-being, skills and community and found that:

- Chronic youth loneliness (young people who are lonely often or always) has risen by 400,000 over the past year to 1.9 million.
- 85% of chronically lonely young people say loneliness has negatively impacted on their mental well-being, while 70% said it made them less able to perform well in school or work.
- Half of all lonely young people (50%) say loneliness makes them less likely to want to help out in their local community.

The Cares Family have also recently published a **report** on the UK's crisis of social disconnection in which it highlights:

- In 2022, 49.63% of adults (25.99 million people) in the UK reported feeling lonely. Numerous medical studies have highlighted how improved social connection can decrease the risk of developing and worsening heart disease, anxiety, dementia and diabetes.
- Only 45% of younger people feel as though they belong within their neighbourhood.
- The cost of loneliness to UK employers has been estimated to be £2.5 billion every year.

Both The Talking Shop and The Democracy Box confront and tackle loneliness and isolation.

Both bring complete strangers together, introduce them and enable connections to form and give them permission and the confidence to take part, contribute and be involved in activities and conversation within the shop, their community and wider society.

Both give people the basic information that we all need to take part in our democratic society.

Both provide safe and creative live and digital spaces where unexpected, informed and open conversations can begin. Conversations that might just change the world or at least how we see and experience it.

The Co-op Foundation identified four key challenges for young people – Anxiety, Transport, Technology and Poverty. All four concur with concerns voiced by all the young co-creators Omidaze has worked with. And all four have been areas that young people have said that The Democracy Box has directly or indirectly positively impacted.

You can read an emerging themes summary from over 1,500 feedback data entries from over 8,500 Talking Shop visitors to date [here](#) that highlights this impact.

Two questions remain.

What value do we place on the health and well-being of our citizens and our democracy combined – now and for future generations?

Can we afford not to up-scale this work?

“Me and my friends miss The Talking Shop. Was amazing having you guys in Merthyr. Hope your journey will change many other lives in future like you’ve done for us.”

– Young person commenting on an Omidaze Instagram post

Please do like, follow and share all of The Democracy Box content across all platforms. Please use the story and young co-creators content to help others understand the basics of our democracy.

For more information, click on the links below or email [Yvonne Murphy](#).

The Democracy Box© and The Talking Shop© and all associated content is copyright Yvonne Murphy/Omidaze Productions 2020.

Further Information and Links

General links to further information

[The Democracy Box's Story of our UK Democracy that Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters](#)

[The Democracy Box website](#)

[Omidaze Productions website](#)

[Information on The Talking Shop](#)

[Information on The Democracy Box](#)

[The Democracy Box first stage research and development report and proof of concept 2020](#)

[The Talking Shop 2019 pilot report](#)

<https://linktr.ee/Omidaze>

<https://linktr.ee/TheDemocracyBox>

Links to Talking Shop trailers and explainer videos

[Merthyr trailer](#)

[Merthyr full length](#)

[Talking Shop pilot 2019](#)

[The Talking Shop explainer film 2022](#)

[Video of The Newport Talking Shop made by Newport Youth Council](#)

[The Cares Family \(The Multiplier programme\) – The Talking Shop 2022 Cardiff film](#)

[Talking Shop generic trailer](#)

[Cardiff and Newport Talking Shops 2022 – full length](#)

[Cardiff and Newport Talking Shops 2022 – short](#)

Links to Media Coverage

[BBC Radio Wales – The Idea Debate](#)

[ITV Wales clip – Merthyr Talking Shop 2022](#)

[BBC coverage of The Democracy Box sharing the story of our UK democracy with all year 11s in Blaenau Gwent, 2022](#)

[Nation Cymru article – Merthyr Talking Shop, January 2022](#)

[The Talking Shop Welsh Agenda, January 2023](#)

[IWA article – The Talking Shop and The Democracy Box, November 2022](#)

[IWA article – Clwstwr research and The Democracy Box, December 2020](#)

[IWA article – Talking Shop and Constitutional Commission launch, December 2022](#)

[The Leanne Wood podcast, episode 22 – ‘We can’t have a democracy without informed citizens’](#)

Links to The Democracy Box Public Information Campaign Prototype

[The Democracy Box Podcast Series](#)

[Democracy Box music video series commissioned by BBC Bitesize](#)

[The Democracy Box on Instagram](#)

[The Democracy Box on TikTok](#)

[The Democracy Box YouTube channel](#)

Links to Output From Schools Participating in the 2022 Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme for Schools Pilot in Partnership With Central South Consortium

[Thornhill Primary – The Democracy Box Creative Cascade project](#)

[The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022 image and audio slideshow](#)

[The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, snapshot of pupils’ creative output](#)

[The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, pupils’ reflections](#)

Appendix 1

Problem 4 – The Status of Creatives Deep Dive

This work evidences that one of the best ways to ensure all generations understand and engage in our democracy is to place young people and professional creatives front and centre of any information campaigns about our Welsh and UK democracy.

Creatives and creative approaches can help us work out ways to make democracy relevant, so that everyone understands that it affects their lives and the things that matter to them most.

To do this successfully, we must address the problem regarding the status of the arts, culture and creative sector in the UK.

Firstly, let us accept that what we are discussing is one ecology with regards to the arts, cultural and creative industries. One sector. Whether that is recorded, live, digital, commercial or subsidised work, it is one ecology with freelance creatives as its beating heart. Next, let us agree that everyone should have access to this ecology in order to facilitate the basic human need to understand and express what it is to be human through creative means, whatever their financial and economic situation.

Unfortunately this is not accepted and agreed by everyone in positions of power and influence and UK investment/subsidy continues to be below other comparative European levels. The arts, culture and creative sector are still described by some as a 'private good'. A private good describes something that the individual has to pay for and that has a market value. A car is a private good. Private goods are often a luxury sometimes only affordable by a minority. A public good, such as education and health in the UK, requires investment at scale so that they are accessible to all. The arts, cultural and creative sector is complex and made of many parts. Live performance events will nearly always have to implement a box office (private good) – however, without state subsidy/investment (public good), ticket prices will only be affordable to the minority. Also essential to the ecology of the sector, and the author would argue to society as a whole, is community and youth/educational arts/cultural/creative activities (public good) for which a ticket price would render most activities unobtainable. These activities therefore require substantial and sustained state investment in order to thrive and be available and accessible to all and the return on this investment is huge.

“There is evidence to show that cultural participation can contribute to social relationships, community cohesion, and/or make communities feel safer and stronger. Research has found positive links between cultural participation and improved social skills and engagement with the wider community, and evidence that culture can play a role in tackling crime.”

– **The Culture White Paper**, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016

State-funded arts, culture and creativity is the third pillar of a civilised and prosperous society that places the well-being of its citizens as paramount. State-funded education and health are the additional two pillars. However, rather than investing at scale in the cultural/creative industries and bringing them up to the status and scale of education and health, we currently find ourselves in the precarious position of long-term under-funding negatively impacting our existing two pillars.

Stagnant and reduced funding/investment in the arts/cultural/creative sector is an illogical reality that exists despite the fact that state investment in the creative/cultural industries produces a higher return on that investment than state investment in most other industries and the arts/cultural/creative sector being described as:

“The coal and steel of the future.”

– Sara Pepper, Media Cymru presentation at Cardiff Capital Region’s Unleash 2023 Conference, April 2023

A lack of sustained and strategic investment in the cultural/creative sector, combined with a lack of status, create an obstacle to creatives and the sector having a guaranteed ‘seat at the table’.

Instead, the arts and cultural/creative sector has had to consistently fight for a seat at the table, particularly since the 1970s.

Strategic and long-term thinking and investment in the cultural/creative industries, the sector (and therefore organisations and individual artists and creatives) have been placed on the back foot. Creatives are consistently being asked to prove the case for arts, culture and creativity and provide data that evidences the role, value, impact and benefit to society, to the economy, to health, well-being, education – the list is endless. This data and evidence now exists in spades and yet this position of defence continues. The author has been discussing this situation since 2013 in various [blogs](#) and [articles](#), including the Clore Provocation Paper, ‘[Why Fundraising & Crowdfunding are not the Answer Mr Skates](#)’ and most recently in an [article for Wales Arts Review](#) following the Arts Council of Wales 2023 Investment Review.

“Recent data from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) shows that: The creative industries sector contributed £109bn to the UK economy in 2021. This is equivalent to 5.6% of the UK economy that year... Overall the creative industries sector grew by 6.9% in September 2022 compared with the same month in 2021. Growth across the UK economy as a whole was 1.2% over the same period ... growth in the creative industries has been higher than across the whole of the economy since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

– Arts and creative industries: The case for a strategy, House of Lords Library, published December 2022

The situation is not helped by a multiple-funding approach. We now find ourselves in a situation where the Arts Council of Wales is not responsible for the creative industries in Wales, which instead sits directly under Welsh Government and the banner of Creative Wales, and where the UK government leapfrogs the Arts Council of England and devolved nations arts councils with direct grant funding to the sector via various means, including the Levelling Up agenda. This despite the fact that all of these things are interconnected within one creative/cultural ecology and would benefit hugely from a unified, joined-up and continuing arms-length strategic approach. We also find ourselves in a situation where local authorities, who have historically funded a huge majority of local community art, cultural and creative activities, are struggling to balance budgets and resource statutory services such as social and education services and are unwillingly being forced to cut arts and culture budget lines and fund-raise externally. This in turn puts further pressure on arts councils' limited budgets.

Appendix 2 –

The Democracy Box Methodology

Since 2017, thousands of people of all ages (via co-creation, workshops, focus groups, surveys, creative think-ins, ideation sessions, interviews and The Talking Shop), together with leading academics, partners, collaborators, stakeholders and professional creatives, have been part of the research, development and testing of four Democracy Box prototypes as models for democratic education, democratic engagement and creative approaches to deliberative democracy via:

- Desk-based research
- 1-2-1 interviews
- Digital surveys
- Focus groups
- Creative think-ins
- Stakeholder meetings
- Prototype test groups
- Sector and stakeholder sharings
- Ongoing comms and updates to all partners, stakeholders, collaborators and participants

Since the research and development started in 2020

- 61 young co-creators have been recruited and trained
- 600-plus young people have participated in test and focus groups, pilot programmes and events.
- 8,434 visits to Talking Shop trials in 2022/23 have been recorded (550 in and the 2019 pilot)
- 201 surveyed
- 10 professional creatives have worked directly with the young co-creators
- 38 partners and collaborators have been involved

This body of research had four phases:

- 2017 to 2019 Pre-project research and development, including 'Democracy Explained' workshops to primary and secondary schools and The Talking Shop pilot.
- 2020 Phase 1: Clwstwr ideas lab and Clwstwr seed funded research and development.
- 2020 to 2021 Phase 2: Clwstwr-funded, large-scale research and development.
- 2021 to 2023 Phase 3: Prototype development with partners Electoral Commission and Office of Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and collaborators.

A summary of each phase is below.

Pre-Project Research and Development – 2013 to 2019

- 2013 to 2014 Doorstep research and research on the streets of Cardiff.
- 2017 Creation and facilitation of the Omidaze 'Democracy Explained' interactive workshop for schools.
- 2017 Collaboration with the Senedd Cymru engagement team begins.
- 2019 **The Talking Shop pilot** in Cardiff, received over 550 visitors and identified the need for what would become The Democracy Box.
- 2017 to 2019 Conversations with a wide cross section of adults and educators while researching, developing and facilitating the above schools' workshop and The Talking Shop pilot.

Phase 1: Clwstwr Ideas Lab and Seed Research and Development – February to June 2020

The initial research question was 'how to successfully engage a mass public audience in democratic education with a campaign that could be up-scaled and replicated across Wales and the rest of the UK, transforming democratic participation both at and beyond the ballot box'.

Research areas included:

- Historic public information films and exploration of a current public information campaign across multi-media platforms
- Current levels of understanding of our democratic systems.
- Language as a barrier.
- Systems change.
- Digital communication content, media production and consumption and audience habits including around information campaigns
- Engagement tools for disseminating public information.
- Story structure and storytelling
- **Existing online content** explaining our UK democracy, its history and how it all works and all fits together.
- **An experience/engagement tool** that could drive people towards that content.
- **A best practice co-creation model** of working with young people.

Methods in phase 1 included:

- Recruiting 10 young co-creators aged 16-31 from across Wales, including from the five lowest voter turnout constituencies, to research existing content and explore how they would create or curate it differently. Each of them also conducted their own research amongst family and friends
- Experimenting with an online Talking Shop
- Online focus groups with diverse groups of young people aged 16 to 31
- A survey with over 150 respondents
- Feedback via social media call-outs and questions
- Desk research and reading
- 15 one-hour interviews with key stakeholders
- Exploring the BBC and its current content explaining democracy and mapping this against its charter and five public purposes
- Contracting a community consultant to recruit focus group participants

- Contracting professional creatives – an animator and a cut-through content creator - to work with the young co-creators and contribute to the research and content creation

Desk Research Main Areas/Themes

1. Researching existing democracy content, organisations, networks, individuals, institutions and events that tackle explaining our democracy.

1. Political structures, ideologies and philosophies that have created opportunities and obstacles past and present to educating the public, including the concept of a managed democracy.

1. Story structure and storytelling, story webs, psychology and engagement/ influencing tools for conveying public information and disseminating public information. How we tell stories and how to use stories to convey complex information and language.

1. How we consume and are communicated with via multi-digital media platforms. How, where and why people choose and consume content. How people use their phones and where they go for quick knowledge gathering versus deep dives. Generational divide and digital/social media platforms versus broadcast television and the public information film.

1. Frameworks, systems change and design for policy and democracy in general and the barriers and opportunities to people understanding and participating.

The seed research and development confirmed that the majority of UK citizens do not have a sound basic understanding of the UK democracy and how local, devolved and Westminster Governments all fit together and why. It confirmed that four things were needed:

- 1. A public information campaign
- 2. An educational information campaign
- 3. A public information hub
- 4. A content toolkit for teachers/teacher training programmes

Phase 2 Clwstwr Large-Scale Grant – September 2020 to July 2021

This phase proved the need for a new and coherent way of sharing information and raising awareness about our democratic processes. It demonstrated that the best way to ensure young people understand and engage in our democracy is to pay young people, as co-creators, to be front and centre of any information/engagement campaigns about our Welsh and UK democracy.

In this phase, Omidaze created, researched and developed the four Democracy Box prototypes, including the co-creation of mass public and formal education information campaigns:

Methods in phase 2 included:

- Creating The Four Levels of Voter/Citizen Information© tool.
- Creating **The Story of our UK Democracy that Every Citizen Should Know** in Seven Short Chapters©.
- Recruiting and training new young co-creators.
- Designing and facilitating focus groups and creative think-ins, and testing and reviewing sessions with over 600 more young people.
- Developing and continuing The Democracy Box survey.
- Mapping the UK democracy sector and meeting with and interviewing many of the main stakeholders and organisations, and inviting many of them to collaborate on The Democracy Box.
- Leading regular consultations with over 200 young people to review existing resources.
- Holding 1-2-1 interviews with young people, stakeholders, collaborators and colleagues.
- Working with a wide range of collaborators – creative industries degree students; youth groups; teachers; teacher trainers; education consortia; secondary and primary school teachers and students; the Five Nations Network of citizenship teaching; and professional creatives working in animation, illustration, audio, music and video production – to research and develop the prototype challenges.

Phase 3 Prototype Development – 2021 to 2023

- Prototype development in partnership with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.
- Pilot of The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme for Schools in collaboration with Central South Education Consortium in Wales and 15 primary and secondary schools.
- Awarded Electoral Commission Youth Voice Partner (Wales) commission Stage 1.
- Talking Shop trials (with The Democracy Box story and content and creative approaches to deliberative democracy inside the shop) begin in Newport (1 month) and Cardiff (3 months) in partnership with the Future Generations Commissioner and in partnership with the Riverfront Theatre & Arts Centre, Newport, and Youth Cymru with Welsh Government local government funding.
- The Democracy Box workshops and ambassadors inside Cardiff Council's Child Friendly Cardiff's Pop Up shop.
- Blaenau Gwent collaboration introducing every secondary school student to their vote using The Democracy Box story.
- Talking Shop Creative Conversation at the Eisteddfod in collaboration with Dr Anwen Elias (Aberystwyth University).
- The Talking Shop Merthyr Tydfil trial in partnership with Wales Millennium Centre and funded by Creu Cyffro with support from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and all collaborators and partners (five month installation)
- Presentations of The Democracy Box and The Talking Shop as case studies including to the Chief Librarians of Wales; Co-production Network for Wales; Cwm Taf Public Services Board and Regional Partnership Boards; The Democracy Classroom Network General Election Strategy away day in London; Future Media Hubs and 'The Idea' BBC Wales Radio show.
- Completion of co-created content with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales explaining and raising awareness of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including songwriting; bilingual Democracy Box podcast episodes; video explainers; music/dance/spoken word videos; poetry; creative think-in sessions; influencer

work and infographics. This culminated in young co-creators performing and facilitating a human library at the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales Changemaker 100 event in January 2023, with Omidaze and the Democracy Box young co-creators being named one of the 100 changemakers.

- Electoral Commission Youth Voice partner (Wales) Stage 2 and completion of co-created content, including Welcome to your vote week presentations at the Senedd and Talking Shop takeover; website and YouTube channel development; online and in-person creative think-ins, bilingual podcast episode – ‘Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know about Elections (But Were Too Afraid to Ask)’; ‘What is a anyway?’ content series; Elections Explained content series; and Explaining Democracy to Cats content series.
- Recruitment and training of new young co-creators through The Talking Shop in Merthyr in partnership with Wales Millennium Centre and Creu Cyffro. Additional Democracy Box young co-creators trained as Talking Shop hosts, Talking Shop volunteers and assistant producers.
- Democracy Box young co-creators host the launch of The Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales interim report at The Talking Shop Merthyr.
- Conwy County Council produces the booklet form of **The Democracy Box’s Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters** in collaboration with Omidaze and distributes via schools to every year 11 student and posts with a birthday card to every child as they turn 14 to welcome them to their vote.

Appendix 3 —

Testing and Evaluating the Prototypes

Omidaze has tested all four of The Democracy Box prototypes, including The Talking Shop model, with young people and all generations across Wales.

All four of the prototypes have been put in front of other young people throughout the project. As well as the young co-creators, Omidaze has been supported in the testing of the prototypes by students from the University of South Wales, the Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel Project youth forum and Blaenau Gwent youth group. Content has also been tested by teachers and pupils via the Creative Cascade pilot programme and with over 50 additional young people from across Wales via creative think-ins in partnership with the Electoral Commission and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and the **Constitutional Futures** project, led by Dr Anwen Elias.

Our testing has included:

The Democracy Box Creative Cascade pilot programme for schools in partnership with Central South Education Consortia and 15 secondary and primary schools and 450 pupils.

The Democracy Box introduction to democracy event in partnership with Blaenau Gwent Council and four secondary schools and over 400 students.

Talking Shops trials in 2022, with over 8,400 visitors to date

- Cardiff, 36-38 Castle Arcade, from April to July 2022
- Newport, Unit 9 Friars Walk, in April 2022
- Merthyr Tydfil from October 2022 to February 2023

Creative think-ins and focus groups with hundreds of young people

- Online and in-person focus groups, as the Electoral Commission's Youth Voice Partner (Wales), with participants aged 16 to 26 born or based in Wales through open recruitment.
- Online with Blaenau Gwent Youth Group.
- Online twice with University of South Wales students.
- Online with Hub Cymru Africa and Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel youth members.

- Online with Dr Anwen Elias, Aberystwyth University, and Dr Matthew Wall, Swansea University, as part of their Constitutional Futures project.
- In person via an installation of The Democracy Box inside Cardiff Council's Child Friendly Cardiff's Pop Up venue in Cardiff in early 2022.
- In-person Blaenau Gwent County Council collaboration introducing every year 11 secondary school student (aged 15 to 16) in the local authority to their vote using The Democracy Box story.
- Online with Youth Cymru, RecRock and professional and young creatives.
- In person with Dinas Powys Brownie pack members aged six to 11.

Appendix 4 –

**The Prototypes in Detail:
The Public Information
Campaign Prototype**

Overview

Between the publishing of this report and the end of 2023, more young co-creators will be recruited and trained and more new creative ways of re-telling and sharing the story will be explored. The young co-creators' vision of making The Democracy Box a Wales-wide, and then UK-wide movement, is a real possibility.

The Democracy Box public information campaign involves and facilitates young people in identifying and creating authentic, engaging and creative new ways to retell **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know In Seven Short Chapters** across multiple digital and broadcast media platforms. The campaign is co-led, co-managed, co-designed and co-created by young people who are all paid as freelance co-creators of digital content and Democracy Box ambassadors at in-person events that create access and awareness to the digital content. In-person events have included whole-year assemblies and the Blaenau Gwent Council event, **covered by the BBC**, where young co-creators welcomed every year 11 student in the county to their democratic journey and shared with them **the story of our UK democracy**.

The aim for this prototype has always been twofold:

1. To be up-scaled and embedded into existing organisations, including the Electoral Commission and the BBC.
2. For the young co-creators to gradually manage and develop The Democracy Box themselves under the guidance and auspices of existing organisations, such as the Electoral Commission and the BBC, and for Omidaze to incrementally step away.

This prototype is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2023.

Omidaze formed a partnership in 2021/2022 with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales to develop this work and became the Electoral Commission's Youth Voice partner in Wales 2022/23. Dialogue with the BBC is ongoing.

Several young co-creators have been trained up as assistant producers and the last series of content creation (in partnership with the Electoral Commission in spring 2023) was made entirely by the young co-creators from creative think-ins to the edits. They allocated and managed the full process themselves and submitted the beginning of a glossary video series (16 pieces of content under the 'What is a...anyway?' series title) that they conceived, scripted, filmed, edited and subtitled entirely themselves in both Welsh and English.

This prototype is made up entirely of young co-creators' ideas and content. The young co-creators have made everything from the branding, logos, illustrations, music, podcasts, and manage and create all social media content.

The reach of the content being created is UK-wide.

Starting Point

This public information prototype began with a fascination with the **old style public information films**.

The author of this report still remembers to dip her headlights because of the public information film she watched in the 1970s. Over four decades later, young people do not watch TV in the same way. This body of research investigated what young people watch now, how, where and when they watch it, what platforms they use, how they interact with them and how they receive and process complex information. The challenge question was what could and should a public information film look like now in this century, that would be fit for purpose. How could it sit across multiple media platforms, including social media and broadcast, and be made with, and target, 16-26 year olds?

The prototyping began by commissioning two ideas from phase 1:

- **The Democracy Box podcast series**
- **A series of music videos**, four of which went on to be commissioned by BBC Bitesize

Both podcasts and music have consistently been at the top of all recommendations by young people of how to convey information about our UK democracy. Both of these early examples use **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters** and clearly demonstrate the potential of making young people co-creators and placing them at the heart of a creative solution to our democratic deficit.

The Democracy Box Podcast Series

The Democracy Box podcast series is a combination of two young co-creator podcast ideas:

- Democracy Box young co-creators invite their peers to be guests who come on a journey of discovery with them through judgement-free conversation.

- Rapid fire interviews with elected representatives (including MPs, MS and councillors) and other experts to get to grips with everything from the different parliaments and levels of government in the UK to the Well-being of Futures Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and elections.

The young co-creators of the podcast tag lined it with #NoShameNoBlame and #BeBraveBeBoldBeEducated.

Season 1, episodes 1 to 8 introduces The Democracy Box, and the series creators take us through **The Democracy Box story** with young guests.

Season 2, episodes 1 to 6 is created in partnership with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and introduces us to and guides us through Wales' groundbreaking **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act** 2015, a key part of Welsh democracy since 2015.

Season 3, episode 1 is created in partnership with the Electoral Commission and is an introduction to the work of the Commission and elections.

Seasons 2 and 3 feature episodes produced in both English and Welsh. The Democracy Box Podcast series is available on **Spotify** and Apple Podcasts.

“Something which is amazing about the podcasts is that they’re really relaxed and casual; they bring a young person in and just ask them really simple questions and provide information about the basics. It’s also so nice to hear people from different backgrounds and their accents all supporting one another. Hearing real people’s voices talking about democracy is so different compared to what we hear from the news and media; it’s empowering.”

– Young co-creator feeding back after listening to The Democracy Box podcast

The Democracy Box Music Videos

One young co-creator who has been with the project since phase 1 in March 2020 is Saskia Pay. In stage 1, Saskia came up with the idea for a series of songs that follow one character’s journey as she explores and comes to understand and engage in our UK democracy. The character realises she has a voice about the things that matter most to her and her community. **Music videos 1 to 4** have been commissioned by BBC Bitesize and **rap 5** can be found on the **Democracy Box YouTube channel**.

Several music videos have been made since, which can all be viewed on **The Democracy Box You Tube Channel**.

“The project facilitates thought provoking conversations and allows us to work towards a common goal of educating each other in places where our education or social circumstances have failed us. The fact that we can use music to engage with each other is a groundbreaking way to get the attention of young people.”

– Democracy Box young co-creator

The Democracy Box – A Democratic Movement

In phase 2, the new cohort of young co-creators wanted to explore how to create a Democracy Box movement and tell the story of our democracy using their top three most used platforms (these were also the top three with all young people surveyed and focused grouped):

1. TikTok

2. Instagram

3. YouTube

Twitter was not a platform requested by young people. It was added so that everyone over 30 and our partners and funders could feel included.

Using **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters**, the young co-creators started to work out how to retell the story across these platforms in ways that they and their peers would be interested in and make them curious to find out more.

The YouTube channel began with eight young co-creators working on prototype videos. They chose different parts of the story and came up with their own mini public information films. They are all really different styles and approaches tied together under the banner of The Democracy Box and can be found in **The Democracy Box YouTube ‘What Even Is Democracy?’ playlist**.

The YouTube channel is still in development, as is the website. The ambition is for the website to include multiple interactive functions, including a message board.

Omidaze is beginning to explore how to involve more young people. The young co-creators want it to be a movement and that is the next stage. Omidaze sends the young co-creators out as ambassadors to live in-person events whenever possible. This has included open days at colleges, school assemblies, events at the Senedd, at The Talking Shop and a Cardiff Council pop-up shop for young people.

Omidaze is currently exploring how they bring volunteers on board, attract influencers and grow hits, likes, shares and followers, and create Democracy Box merchandise and collectables. Omidaze still needs to work out how to include Snapchat and BeReal and how to make The Democracy Box interactive, become a movement, catch light and go viral. There is a steady stream of new young co-creator applications with no call out being promoted. The only real barrier to growth and up-scaling this prototype is the capacity of Omidaze and investment.

Consistent feedback has been that peer-to-peer learning and information sharing is the route to success and transforming democratic engagement and participation. Omidaze has trialled Democracy Box young co-creators accompanying the Electoral Commission to outreach sessions and a **direct correlation between this work and subsequent formal democratic participation** was evidenced. Omidaze believes the only barrier to up-scaling this ambassador work both in person and online is investment.

Feedback from two of Democracy Box/Electoral Commission sessions conducted with 18 higher education students training to work in the youth work sector:

What have you learnt today?

“14 year olds can register to vote in Wales.” (Reported twice)

“Learnt more about politics and democracy.” (Reported twice)

“There is a lot more to politics than I thought.”

“No blame, no shame.”

“I learned about politics and democracy and how it affects us.”

“What a ward is.”

“How to find out who is my local MP and how easy it is to contact them.” (Reported twice)

“How to find my local councillors.”

“The difference in voting ages.”

“Love the resources on the Electoral Commission website.”

“Learnt how to utilise relevant websites and resources.”

What one action will you take away from today?

"I'm going to vote!" (Reported twice)

"Re-register to vote under my new address."

"Actually vote and understand."

"I'm going to do research and vote."

"Will vote. This is so interesting and I was engaged."

"The story of democracy PDF to use with young people."

"Inform young people how to contact and raise issues with local MPs."

"The Democracy Box as a resource to inform myself and others."

"Activities I can do with young people in relation to voting."

"Use resources with young people."

Appendix 5 –

**The Prototypes in Detail:
The Democracy Box Creative
Cascade in Schools Programme**

Overview

Ninety to 100% of young people Omidaze has surveyed want **this information** taught in primary and secondary schools.

The Creative Cascade programme for schools will ensure teachers and students across Wales (and potentially the UK) work collaboratively with a wide range of creative practitioners to understand the basics of our UK democracy and simultaneously develop creative thinking, practice and skills.

Years 2 to 11 in primary and secondary will be involved, so that understanding our UK democracy will become embedded from year 2 onwards. Each year, students will learn the story in more detail, retell it or cascade it to the year below them using progressively more complex creative skills, mediums and techniques year upon year.

The Democracy Box Creative Cascade education campaign can equip and prepare teachers to replicate the Democracy Box young co-creator process with students aged seven to 16 in all secondary and primary schools and non-formal education settings. This way, teachers and students across Wales (and potentially the UK) can creatively retell and cascade the story multiple times and in multiple ways, developing democratic awareness, understanding and participation amongst school children and educators in Wales.

This Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme for schools will enable teachers across Wales to meet the new Curriculum for Wales requirements and enable **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters** to be taught creatively and in inspiring and engaging ways, including:

1. Sharing of the research, knowledge and skills from The Democracy Box research and development project, including the toolkit prototype and the public information campaign prototype with teachers and students.
2. Equipping teachers with the tools to creatively share complex information about our UK democracy with students aged seven to 16 and giving their students the knowledge, space and skills to explore **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters** and creatively retell the story for their peers and students in the year(s) below them.

All students in schools in Wales finish Year 11 with:

- a strong basic understanding of our UK democracy
- well-developed and resilient **Creative Habits of Mind**
- increased curiosity, confidence, self-esteem and transferrable creative skills

The vision and ambition for this prototype is that in 10 years' time students leaving year 11 will have a sound, basic understanding of our UK democracy, and they will have obtained that by being told and retelling the story through creative mediums.

The information contained within the story will be creatively retold and cascaded down through the school years every year.

It is vital that this Creative Cascade programme is rolled out to teachers and students in all primary and secondary schools across Wales for students aged seven to 16. Following this the programme should be widened to include all formal and non-formal education settings in Wales in the run up to a general election in 2028/9 and to teacher training institutions, further, higher and non-formal education settings across Wales.

Following evaluation, it can then be rolled out across the whole of the UK. This programme must include all relevant stakeholders (e.g. the Electoral Commission, Future Generations and Children's Commissioners and Welsh Parliament and Local Authority democratic services and engagement teams) and will act as a foundation/gateway/signpost to all areas of further democratic education, citizenship teaching, resources and training to ensure a joined-up approach.

Year 11 students will be told **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters**® using **The Democracy Box** creative content made by young co-creators. They will choose how to retell a part of that story creatively themselves whether through music, spoken word, cartoon, illustration, podcast, dance, drama, video – however, they think their peers would best receive and understand the information. This new creative content will be shared with year 10, along with **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters**® and The Democracy Box creative content made by young co-creators. The year 10 students then choose how to retell a part of that story creatively themselves – however, they think their peers would best receive and understand the information. This is then shared with year 9 and so on and so on – all the way down to year 2. A creative cascade of the story of our UK democracy.

The Pilot

The programme was successfully piloted from October 2021 to February 2022 with 15 primary and secondary schools in South Wales, together with the Electoral Commission and Central South Education Consortium, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and the Senedd Engagement team. It has received outstanding feedback from both teachers and pupils. **The pilot culminated in an online sharing event in February 2022.**

This prototype is piloted, tested and ready to be up-scaled and rolled out via a pioneering local authority to all its primary and secondary schools. This is a first step. The ultimate goal needs to be for every school in Wales to have access to this model of continuing professional development (CPD), which will create the foundation for all subsequent democratic education. This foundation knowledge for educators and their students is vital if the Global Citizenship aspect of our new Curriculum for Wales is to succeed. Democratic education being baked into the curriculum is required, as is young people from the age of seven being actively informed and given the knowledge, information, tools, skills, confidence, permission to question and encouragement to get involved in our democracy. Young people from aged seven up must be taught that, together, they are the future of our democracy. That it is their democratic right to challenge, question, protest, shape, critique, debate and influence and challenge our democracy all year round, and not just at the ballot box.

“The children said it was their favourite work all year and are so proud of it... I have recognised through research, working with, and speaking to the children just how important it is for us as educators to take responsibility for teaching our children from a young age the power they have as individuals to make change in the world and to use their voice.”

– Claire Holcombe, Year 5 class teacher, Thornhill Primary School, Cardiff

Below are links to the 2022 Democracy Box Creative Cascade pilot run in partnership with Central South Consortia and in collaboration with the Electoral Commission, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Parliament engagement team:

- [Thornhill Primary – The Democracy Box Creative Cascade project](#)
- [The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, image and audio slideshow](#)
- [The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, snapshot of pupils’ creative output](#)
- [The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme pilot, February 2022, pupils’ reflections](#)

Appendix 5.1 – The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme Outline

The following four sessions will allow teachers to begin to theoretically and practically explore the model and put it into practice in the classroom.

Session 1 Summary – The Democracy Box Project and Working with Young People as Co-Creators

Teachers will be introduced to The Democracy Box project and its research methodology and findings and be taught the basics of our democracy. They will meet some of the young co-creators from the project and hear and watch content co-created by young people using the Omidaze [The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters](#).

Session 2 Summary – The Creative Cascade Model

At the core of The Democracy Box model is young people. Yvonne Murphy has now recruited over 50 young co-creators aged 16 to 26 from across Wales, including those from the five lowest turnout constituencies, and has held focus groups with teachers, teacher trainers and young people, including students of all ages from across Wales. This session will begin to explore how teachers can replicate The Democracy Box process in primary and secondary schools.

In this session, teachers will also be introduced to some of The Democracy Box collaborators, such as the Electoral Commission and the Welsh Parliament engagement team, who can answer any questions they may have, inform them about their organisation's work and how they can support the school going forward.

Session 3 Summary – The Democracy Box Toolkit

Underpinning the Toolkit and all The Democracy Box work are seven frameworks and principles. All teachers using the Creative Cascade model© must familiarise themselves with all six:

- The 7 Principles of Complete Co-Creation
- A Children's Rights Approach
- Artworks Cymru Quality Principles
- The Ladder of Children's Participation
- European Youth Information Charter

- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – seven well-being goals, five ways of working and Sustainability Development principle
- The Lundy model of child participation

The Creative Cascade model puts the emphasis on student ownership and creativity. Teachers will begin to theoretically and practically explore the Toolkit within the session and how they can put it into practice back in the classroom. They will brainstorm different creative ways their own students can retell the story. They will identify opportunities and obstacles to making this work happen in the classroom. They will begin to set down what success looks like, as well as an evaluation process that will capture impact and learning and how this can be cascaded down from year 11 to year 2.

The programme will also cover:

- Budget implications.
- Ownership/leadership of the work, the new curriculum and, in particular, the Humanities Area of Learning and associated progression steps.
- The academic calendar and potential timeframes for work within the academic year.

Young co-creators will join again for this session and feed in their own in-school experiences around creativity, the **Creative Habits of Mind** and democracy and citizenship teaching.

Session 4 Summary – The Steps to Success

The Steps to Success has been created by Yvonne Murphy and utilises all of the frameworks listed above and the **ArtWorks Cymru Quality Principles** in particular

Appendix 5.2 – How The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Model© Fits With the New Curriculum for Wales and the Humanities Area of Learning

We have a new curriculum being developed and rolled out in Wales that has this basic information about our UK democracy at its very heart. However, as discussed in 'The Current Landscape of Democratic Education in England and Wales' section, our broken cycle of democratic education has resulted in generations of educators not understanding the basics of democracy themselves and therefore feeling ill-equipped and lacking in confidence in this area. This in turn has traditionally resulted in passive and lack-lustre approaches to democratic education and low level or zero student engagement and understanding subsequently contributing to low levels of democratic understanding, engagement and participation in adult life. The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme for schools can break that cycle.

Imagine a programme which helps all teachers to understand the basics of our UK democracy using the content created by the young co-creators. Then they share the story of our UK democracy with their students using the very same creative content that has informed them as a teacher.

Now they set their year 11s the task to creatively retell the story, or part of it, in their own way. It might be through film, podcast, rap, song, drama, dance, spoken word, animation, comics – who knows? The best way to get young people to really engage in and understand something is to first inspire them and then empower them.

Those creative resources created by year 11s are then shared with the year 10 teachers and students who in turn get to creatively retell the story and pass their work onto year 9 and so on and so on, as we creatively cascade the story down to primary. And it never stops. Each year they get to do it again. Each time in more detail, depending on their age, and the task time and resources are varied. Just like our democracy itself, the story is always being developed. It is not fixed.

The Democracy Box and its Creative Cascade Model will create a strong foundation for the **what matters statements of this Humanities Area of Learning** and outlined associated **principles of progression** and **descriptions of learning**.

Creativity and innovation is an integral skill of the new curriculum, as is critical thinking and problem-solving and developing the ability to think analytically and understand the past and present, as well as to imagine possible futures.

Local, national and international contexts are integral to this area and form part of the key principles relating to the choice of content. It is therefore imperative that teachers and students understand the basics of how our UK democracy is structured. The Democracy Box and Creative Cascade model will create inspiring, engaging creative learning that will help learners develop an understanding of their responsibilities as citizens of Wales, the diversity of Wales and to recognise their own and others' civil rights.

The Democracy Box and Creative Cascade model will also enable a focus on genuine and authentic links between this area and other areas in particular – expressive arts, health and well-being, and languages, literacy and communication.

“This educational prototype would be so useful for long term impact – in Wales and the UK as a whole.”

– Audience member, The Democracy Box Public Sharing Event, July 2021

Appendix 5.3 – Teacher Testimony for The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme

“Our Spring Term topic in Year 5 was entitled, ‘I Have a Dream’ and was centred around rights and equality for all. I felt that the democracy project work would fit in perfectly with this topic and decided to work on it during that term. I found the project to be extremely valuable and rewarding.

I was greatly impressed with the enthusiasm and interest the children showed for the subject and found that they were extremely engaged and passionate throughout. They worked on the project in co-operative groups and were willing participants in making a film to share what they had learnt and what they felt about it. They worked well together and developed some lovely creative ideas on how to show what they had learnt in a variety of ways.

The project fits so well with the new Curriculum for Wales and is definitely something I would teach again with future year groups. I am the creative arts leader within the school, and the project has helped me to recognise how effectively humanities can be taught and learnt through creative ways and in doing so have a far bigger impact upon the children’s learning as a result.

I have recognised through research, working with, and speaking to the children just how important it is for us as educators to take responsibility for teaching our children from a young age the power they have as individuals to make change in the world and to use their voice.

The children said it was their favourite work all year and are so proud of it.

Thank you for the opportunity. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and it was certainly a highlight for both me and the children of last term.”

– Claire Holcombe, Year 5 class teacher, Thornhill Primary School, Cardiff. You can find out more about this [Year 5 Democracy Project on YouTube](#).

Appendix 6 –

**The Prototypes in Detail: The
Talking Shop, a One-Stop Shop
Cultural and Democracy Hub**

Overview

The Talking Shop actively creates the circumstances to ensure that the kitchen/dining room table information sharing experience is one for the many, rather than a privileged and diminishing situation for the few. The Talking Shop creates that kitchen and dining room table experience for everyone

The aim is for The Talking Shop, including an accompanying Talking Shop on Tour version, to be ready to be up-scaled and rolled out by the end of 2023.

The final stage is to trial one more site and to create and test the accompanying Talking Shop on Tour concept. This final trial will enable Omidaze to finish blueprinting the model and progress early thinking and ideas around creative methods of recording voter registration and evidencing and evaluating links between engagement with The Talking Shop and increased and sustained democratic and cultural engagement beyond the shop environment.

It will also enable us to explore how The Talking Shop conversations can be fully bilingual and how to structure the creative conversations and democratic deliberations further and then feed the outcomes of these deliberations into our representative democratic system, policy and law making structures. Thereby helping to bridge the divide between activism and our current constitutional mechanisms.

At the time of writing, Omidaze is partnering with Caerphilly Local Authority to finish the trialling of both the Talking Shop and The Talking Shop on Tour.

Omidaze is also co-hosting Stakeholder Conversations with Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil Local Authorities to work out, and hopefully pioneer and model together, how multiple stakeholders can come together to invest in and benefit from a long-term or even permanent Talking Shop in any town or city.

The Talking Shop on Tour concept has been suggested by young people across Wales in numerous Democracy Box creative think-ins and focus groups and requested by stakeholders, collaborators and partners across Wales since the first Talking Shop pilot in 2019.

What Is The Talking Shop?

Yvonne Murphy has been developing the concept of **The Talking Shop**© – a democracy and creativity hub – since 2019. The Talking Shop© is a public creative space inside a disused shop in a town or city centre and hosted by trained professional creatives and co-hosted by a range of collaborating organisations. The Talking Shop aim is to increase both cultural and democratic participation both at and beyond the ballot box and address our current democratic deficit through conversation, information and creative approaches to democratic deliberation.

The Talking Shop© is a physical ‘what’s on’ and ‘what’s what?’ public information hub that everyone helps curate. A physical listings and democracy signposting hub.

All Omidaze work, including The Talking Shop and The Democracy Box, is non-partisan and neutral. It is not affiliated with or supported by any political party and holds no political or religious view.

Inside The Talking Shop you can find out ‘What’s What’ about our Welsh and UK democracy and how it works and fits together. How to have your say. Who holds the power and how decisions affecting you and yours are made. Find out who your elected representatives are, learn about all our parliaments, volunteering, getting involved in your community, getting your voice heard, how to have your say and how to register to vote and vote and how to get involved in our democracy year round – and not just at the ballot box.

Inside The Talking Shop you can find out ‘What’s On’ in your town in your local theatres, galleries, museums and live performance spaces. It’s a physical listings hub. A place to drop in and find stuff out. To add to. To be part of.

The Talking Shop invites artists and creatives and the public to use the space to work, to think, to talk, to find stuff out, to share, and to simply just ‘be’ inside an open and safe space. Together. To help create and curate. It’s a new way of working, conversing, being. A space for debate and deliberation for creatives, artists, the public, activists, thinkers, shoppers, passers-by, strangers and old friends to come together, share ideas, collide, connect, converse, collude and create the next chapter of the society we want – together.

Because as the Japanese proverb says, ‘None of us are as smart as all of us’.

Step inside. Sit on the sofa. Have a cup of tea. Join in with a conversation about the question of the day or just sit, watch, read, think, listen, pick up or stick up a leaflet, scrawl on the wall, chat to the host, or no one at all.

It’s a place where you can meet others, not be alone or find a space to call your own.

It’s a space where you don’t need money to enter or be inside and someone will make you a free cup of tea.

It’s a space where you can just hang out, work, register to vote, sit, think, dream, read, get connected, be welcomed, informed, inspired, signposted and heard.

It’s a space for the young, the old and everyone in between. It’s a shop that sells nothing, because ideas, conversation and information are free.

A space with information, creation and conversation at its core.

Everything inside is carefully designed and created in response to years of research and visitor feedback.

The Talking Shop has a zero or minimal carbon footprint. All furniture and shop dressing is begged, borrowed, gifted and recycled. The trained hosts are freelance creatives and Democracy Box young co-creators supported by co-hosts from partnering and collaborating organisations. The Talking Shop is non-commercial and invites everyone inside for free tea, conversation, information and deliberation.

What Happens Inside?

Every visitor is welcomed, offered a cup of tea, introduced to the space and invited to join a conversation centred around the question of the day or any of the many questions on the walls. The Talking Shop© trained hosts begin open conversations around democratic and cultural engagement, introduce the public to The Democracy Box and Omidaze's **The Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters**© and signpost to democratic and cultural information. Everyone contributes to and helps curate the shop. A programme of creative participatory activities hosted by Omidaze and collaborating organisations and freelance creatives act as engagement tools and creative approaches to democratic deliberation.

Omidaze has a long and evolving list of open questions about democratic and cultural participation, which are used as conversation starters for inclusive and rolling conversations, with all visitors, facilitated by the trained hosts. These questions are painted onto the walls and windows of the shop. Omidaze has also integrated questions from the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales consultation survey into The Talking Shop© trials. These adapted questions are on The Talking Shop© walls and are used as questions for the day.

The Democracy Box story covers the shop walls and digital Democracy Box content is displayed on screens. A voting booth and ballot box are integrated into the shop alongside comfortable sofas, armchairs and kitchen and dining room tables and chairs. A 'What's On' wall is open to anyone to display posters and information about cultural and creative events and activity coming up nearby and a 'what's what' wall is used to display local democratic information and services. A rolling weekly calendar of events inside The Talking Shop and for the local area is also curated by the hosts, together with all visitors who can add their thoughts to The Talking Shop visitor books, The Talking Shop Tree of Thought and via ongoing interactive creative activities. Or a visitor can pick up a book from our shelf, read, think, dream, chat, relax, use our free WiFi or just 'be' in a totally safe and free creative public space.

The Talking Shop's creative sessions and approaches to deliberative democracy have so far included bunting making, collaging (individual and collective), stone painting, poetry, journaling, origami, knitting, crocheting, music, podcasting, creative writing, paper lantern making, graffiti, Christmas crafts, clay modelling, pompom making, illustration, zine making, dance and spoken word.

Creating structured and programmed creative activities to increase democratic and cultural participation and then using these activities to explore creative approaches to deliberative democracy within The Talking Shop is a key priority for Omidaze and the future potential of The Talking Shop model.

In Merthyr Tydfil, the programmed participatory activities totalled over 200. All proved extremely successful as creative approaches to deliberative democracy and/or in helping to bring in and engage visitors including those who may not otherwise have entered the shop.

Freelance creatives and organisations used The Talking Shop for meetings, rehearsals, book and poetry readings, art exhibitions and to work, network, collide, connect, converse, collude and create with each other and the public.

Freelance Hosts and Co-hosts

Each shop will be hosted six days a week by two hosts. The main host each day will be a paid freelance creative or Democracy Box young co-creator, and the co-host will ideally be a member of staff from a collaborating organisation. Both will have received online or audio training and will be fully supported by Omidaze and partners. The co-host's role is to support the primary freelance host who will take the lead in facilitating the space.

There may be some quiet down time when co-hosts can hot desk and carry on with their day-to-day work inside the shop – however, they should put themselves forward on the understanding that they need to be a present and active host and facilitator for the whole (or half) day. Co-hosts are there to support the safe facilitation of the space and activities, conversation and deliberation and actively support the freelance host and communicate with the public about the purpose and mission of the shop, their organisation, The Democracy Box Story and democratic and cultural information generally.

Talking Shop Opening Times

The shop is open from 9.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Saturday. The freelance host arrives by 9am to prepare and open the shop. Ideally, the co-host will join the freelance host for the whole day or start slightly later e.g. 10/10.30am. The

minimum requirement of a co-host is four hours (1.30 to 5.30pm), although, ideally, they will co-host for the whole day. All co-hosts will then be sent a host pack, which includes the Omidaze child and vulnerable adult protection policy and an audio host training file. A contingency budget line for freelance co-hosts is in place in case Omidaze cannot rota enough collaborating organisation co-hosts.

Talking Shop Methods of Data Capture and Evaluation Used to Date

- Creative outputs from our creative approaches to deliberative democracy
- Anecdotal evidence, feedback and testimonies from visitors, hosts, young co-creators, visitors, partners and collaborators
- Conversations captured/audio/video recorded, including soundscapes, podcast and video
- Talking Shop surveys, questionnaires and visitor books
- Host notebooks
- Dictaphone recording verbatim conversations
- Talking Shop Tree of Thought
- Button polls
- Paper mind maps
- Number of Democracy Box story booklets distributed
- Visitor numbers
- Voluntary visitor demographic via surveys and visitor profiling
- Documenting of 'ripple effect' in person/online
- Omidaze social media views and engagement
- Media engagement
- Numbers of new hosts recruited and trained
- Numbers of new young co-creators recruited and trained

Appendix 6.1 – The Talking Shop Pilot 2019

The Talking Shop© was first conceived in 2017 and created and piloted in Cardiff in 2019, thanks to funding and support from National Theatre Wales under Artistic Director Kully Thiarai, with additional support from Catherine Paskell and Dirty Protest, Creative Cardiff, Senedd Cymru and a team of volunteers including Clare Isaac, Lewis Gwyther, Jennifer Lunn, Ella Maxwell, Shane Nickels and George Soave. It took place between 25 March and 20 April 2019 in 33 High Street Arcade, Cardiff.

Everyone was offered a free cup of tea courtesy of Cardiff City Council.

The Talking Shop pilot was designed by Yvonne Murphy, along with second year University of South Wales design students Bethan Thomas and Ashley Phillips. Illustrations were made by second year Cardiff School of Art & Design (Cardiff Metropolitan University) students Maria Elorza Saralegui and Vicky Yang. It was further curated during the month it was open by over 550 visitors, including creatives and artists of all disciplines and members of the public from all over the world. The Talking Shop design continues to develop during The Talking Shop trials happening all over Wales.

This pilot Talking Shop received over 550 visitors aged from two to 96 reaching across all social, ethnic and economic backgrounds. The response was overwhelmingly positive. A strong and urgent need to have a ‘shop window’ for arts and culture, combined with public information on our democratic systems and structures in the very heart of our capital city, was identified.

“Love this space. Very welcoming and open.”

– Talking Shop visitor

Three things were said over and over again inside the pilot Talking Shop about our democracy, which led to the creation of The Democracy Box:

“Why don’t we know this stuff about our democracy?”

“Why weren’t we taught this in school?”

“Is there something you can show me now on a screen or on my phone which explains the basics to me?”

The Democracy Box was created in response to The Talking Shop pilot’s visitors’ questions and feedback.

The Talking Shop pilot in Cardiff in 2019 identified the following needs:

- A physical information point/shop window for our democratic services, systems and processes allowing local, Welsh and UK Government-wide public engagement and thereby facilitating a wider and more inclusive approach to democracy.
- A public forum for democratic discourse and debate.
- A voter registration and information centre.
- A space for artists and creatives to share their intellectual and physical resources and work in a smarter and more collective and collaborative fashion.
- A joining up of the creative/arts sector ecology and industry entry points.
- A physical knowledge bank for the arts and creative industries where information, skills, knowledge and experience can be shared and promoted.
- A physical place for arts, cultural and creative industries advocacy in the centre of the city.
- A dedicated public space for artists and creatives to meet the public and each other. To share and test ideas and concepts.
- A dedicated physical cultural and democratic information centre. A physical what's on/listings democracy hub.

“Good idea. Needs to be here full time.”

– Talking Shop visitor, 2019

Appendix 6.2 – The Talking Shop Trials 2022/2023

- Cardiff, 36-38 Castle Arcade, April to July 2022
- Newport, Unit 9 Friars Walk, April 2022
- Merthyr Tydfil, October 2022 to February 2023
- Location to be confirmed, Autumn 2023

One more trial is being planned to finish blueprinting the model.

Omidaze are trialling Talking Shops in towns across Wales from Spring 2022 to Winter 2023 in order to create a blueprint for how The Talking Shop and The Democracy Box models can exist permanently in any town or city and be used for a conversation with the nation and increase cultural and democratic participation both at and beyond the ballot box.

The blueprint will include economic modelling of how multiple organisations can join forces across the cultural and democratic sector and beyond with unlikely alliances and use their combined engagement and participation budget strands more efficiently and creatively to maximize reach and impact.

Omidaze passionately believes that new money is not needed to make The Talking Shop a sustainable and long-term initiative. Rather, multiple stakeholders (cross departments of local authorities, together with cultural organisations, health boards, public service boards, regional partnership boards and additional partners and collaborators including charities and third sector organisations) need to come together and use their various budgets strands for public consultation, engagement, outreach and participation in a more joined-up, creative and effective manner.

The potential return on investment of a permanent Talking Shop, both in actual monetary terms and in social and cultural value, is immeasurable. Investment in arts and culture has long been proven to be one of the most cost-effective, successful and long-term impact approaches to urban and economic redevelopment.

The positive impact of The Talking Shop on democratic engagement and participation as well as on community cohesion, health, well-being, loneliness and social isolation, and rehabilitation and reintegration for some of society's most vulnerable members, was overwhelming in the short time The Talking Shop was open in every town and city to date.

Omidaze also knows that the things that will encourage the general public and non-traditional arts attendees to engage is when the venue is in the centre of the shops. When it is visible. Open and accessible in all respects. When it is welcoming and asks questions and shares the power. And when it is clearly not trying to sell you anything and you get a free cup of tea.

“This is genuinely inspirational – mind opening. Society cohesion. Meeting others and learning different viewpoints. Getting challenged/educated. Thanks. I can grow as a person. Focussing on important issues. Free conversation. This is an amazing idea. Thanks for starting this. I really appreciate this.”

– Talking Shop visitor, 2019

Appendix 6.3 – Talking Shop Trials’ Visitor Numbers

Recorded Footfall

| Merthyr Tydfil Total Visitors | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Original Period | 3,216 |
| Ext. Period | 2,372 |
| Full Total | 5,773 |
| Monthly Breakdown | |
| October | 1,068 |
| November | 1,213 |
| December | 895 |
| January | 1,028 |
| February | 1,569 |
| Average Visitors | |
| Total Avg. | 54.53773585 |
| Original Avg. | 53.21538462 |
| Ext. Avg. | 56.47619048 |
| | |
| Cardiff Total Visitors | |
| Full Total | 1,656 |
| Newport Total Visitors | |
| Full Total | 1,005 |

Total recorded visitors across all three trials = 8,434

Appendix 6.4 – Visitor Profile

“The work you are doing here is absolutely essential.”

– Talking Shop visitor

Visitors included people of all classes, races, physical abilities and all socio-economic backgrounds. They were members of the homeless community and those recently released from prison desperate for something interesting to do to fill the long hours of the day, shoppers who were just passing by, those sheltering from the rain or who simply fancied a look and a chat, a cuppa or some information. They included visitors from other parts of Wales, the UK and even further afield. The Talking Shop quickly became a destination, a meeting place, as well as somewhere to pop into as you pass.

“Evocative and inspiring to a level I could not imagine.”

– Talking Shop visitor

Visitors included parents with their young, teenage and grown-up children, connecting with each other over the question of the day, conversation and a cup of tea. They were the lonely, the isolated and the vulnerable, mixing together with professional working people including lawyers, business people and society's most 'well-heeled'.

The politically engaged entered, as did the politically disaffected and disenfranchised.

Educators and those still in education came and talked with the retired, the unemployed, the employed, the self-employed, the homeless, the well-off and everything in between. Tourists, visitors and locals. Those who had fled war zones and conflict in their countries to those who had decided to leave Britain.

“As we become more technologically advanced and have better methods of communication, we’ve lost quality, emotional and purposeful connection. We need more spaces like this.”

– Talking Shop visitor, 2019

In the pilot some visitors had voted leave. Some had voted remain. Some would never vote again. Some had not yet had the opportunity to vote. They all came.

“The Talking Shop is amazing, because you don’t have to be privileged to be here.”

– Talking Shop visitor and asylum refugee

Appendix 6.5 – The Talking Shop on Tour Model

The Talking Shop on Tour© concept has been suggested by young people across Wales in numerous Democracy Box creative think-ins and focus groups and requested by stakeholders, collaborators and partners across Wales since the first Talking Shop pilot in 2019.

The concept of The Talking Shop on Tour© takes the concept of The Talking Shop© and the research and development to date – the design, ethos, and main key ingredients of The Talking Shop© (the hosts; the sofa; the lamps; the tea trolley; the questions on the walls and question of the day; the Story of Our UK Democracy©; the ballot box; the polling booth; the democratic and cultural information and creative activities and approaches to deliberative democracy facilitated by professional creatives) and programmes a tour where Omidaze sets up The Talking Shop ‘without walls’ for the day on a beach, housing estate, village green or high street.

The Talking Shop on Tour© is an outdoor, weather-dependent concept. Omidaze is looking to explore and test whether the 'on tour' model can exist independently or whether it needs to accompany and tour within a 25-mile radius of an indoor Talking Shop unit. The plan is to create, research and develop The Talking Shop as a tour model with Head4Arts and ideally in partnership with a local authority. Omidaze wants to research and develop the touring model preceding and accompanying a Talking Shop© trial to act as a provocation and engagement tool, reaching members of the public who may not be able to get to the site due to transport and access barriers, and encouraging and enticing those who may face multiple barriers to accessing the shop unit. Omidaze also wants to research and develop whether The Talking Shop on Tour could possibly exist independently without an accompanying site and whether it could be set up and installed indoors as well as outdoors. Once designed and tested, which is funding dependent, The Talking Shop on Tour© model could potentially be programmed to tour across Wales.

Appendix 6.6 – How The Talking Shop Is Funded

The main cost of The Talking Shop is the shop unit, plus the freelance hosts. To date (following the 2019 pilot made possible by National Theatre Wales under Artistic Director Kully Thiarai), Omidaze have secured funding for the one month trial in Newport, three months in Cardiff and five months in Merthyr Tydfil.

Omidaze was part of the first **Cares Family's The Multiplier programme** funded by UnLtd and were awarded a small grant towards reopening and developing The Talking Shop in 2022. This covered one month of the Cardiff shop.

A local government elections division third sector grant awarded to the Newport Riverfront Theatre & Arts Centre supported one month of the Cardiff Talking Shop and the one month Newport trial Talking Shop. The Cardiff/Newport Talking Shops acted as registration/democratic engagement hubs for the 2022 local elections. Omidaze worked closely with the Local Authority Registration Officers in Cardiff and Newport, increasing electoral registration through footfall in both Talking Shops and Democracy Box digital content.

Omidaze went into partnership with the **Future Generations Commissioner** for Wales in November 2021. Omidaze developed The Democracy Box and The Talking Shop through this partnership and their investment in Omidaze supported the third month of the Talking Shop in Cardiff. The Wales Millennium Centre funded the Merthyr Tydfil shop from a partner project - Creu Cyffro. A final trial is funding dependant, and Omidaze has already begun stakeholder conversations to explore how a permanent Talking Shop can exist.

We need **A Talking Shop** in every town, starting with each of the five lowest voter turn-out constituencies in Wales, to encourage face-to-face democratic participation and to provide a shop window for The Democracy Box and the story.

“I came here not knowing what to expect, but I’ve met some lovely new people from different places and cultures and walks of life. It’s a positive vibe to come to a place and actively engage with people – chat, have an open mind ... it feels like a good example of opening your door and people will come and engage on their own terms. Diverse Cardiff.”

– Talking Shop visitor

Information on The Talking Shop

Emerging Themes summary

The Talking Shop 2019 pilot report

Talking Shop pilot 2019 video

The Talking Shop **Merthyr Tydfil trailer**

The Talking Shop explainer film 2022

Video of The Newport Talking Shop made by Newport Youth Council

The Cares Family (Multiplier Programme) – The Talking Shop 2022 Cardiff film

The Democracy Box toolkit is a best practice guide or framework for co-creating and collaborating with young people, which includes paying young people aged 16 to 26 for their contribution.

Appendix 7 –

Democracy Box

Toolkit Prototype

The toolkit provides an easy-to-follow guide to co-creating with 16 to 26 year olds for any organisation wishing to reach, engage and communicate with that demographic.

The toolkit is also for teachers and educators participating in The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme for schools, which enables all students from years 2 to 11 to become student (unpaid) Democracy Box young co-creators.

What the Toolkit Includes

The Why

The Democracy Box research, co-creation principles and benefits

The What

Case study – What The Democracy Box has achieved to date

The How

From call out to recruitment, training and facilitating the young co-creators' journey to the content creation, content cascade, quality control, impact measuring, evaluation and beyond, the toolkit will take you through all the stages of working with young people as co-creators, including 10 Steps To Success and 10 Golden Rules of working with young people.

The toolkit contains:

- The Talking Shop, The Democracy Box and an identified need
- Co-creating with 16 to 26 year olds
- Underpinning principles
- Understanding co-creation
- Two special ingredients – the 'F factor' and the 'Six Cs'
- 10 Steps to Success
- 10 Golden Rules

The toolkit draws together:

- Yvonne Murphy's body of participatory work and artistic practice from over 30 years, her knowledge and experience of working with young people across the UK and internationally.

- 15 years' Omidaze Productions work with young people.
- 3.5 years of intensive research and development.

The draft toolkit was tested for the first time in mid-July 2021 with potential end users at Blaenau Gwent County Council and again with a second draft in September 2021. It received 100% excellent feedback. It has now been presented to several more councils and at the Wales-wide Democracy Group Cymru, formerly the Elections Engagement Working Group, and was extremely well-received.

Example use: 90% of young people surveyed by Omidaze do not know what their local council does, who their councillors are or how to get in touch with them. And yet the majority are interested and concerned about things happening locally where they live. The Democracy Box toolkit will help councils to inform, engage, recruit, train and co-create with young people in their local area and increase democratic knowledge, interest and participation both in the short-term for upcoming local elections and for the sustainable longer-term.

This toolkit will enable organisations to place young people at the heart of work that is created to reach their age range. It will help organisations and individuals in both the democracy sector and beyond to engage inclusively, meaningfully and creatively with young people.

Omidaze would welcome the opportunity to share this with more local authorities and organisation within and beyond the democracy and cultural sectors across Wales so that they can use the toolkit to engage young co-creators to inform other young people about everything including, but not limited to, our democracy.

Omidaze has now created a costing model for four options to access and licence The Democracy Box toolkit and embed it.

The Democracy Box toolkit is based on understanding what young people have told Omidaze they need. This includes, but is not limited, to:

- Skills
- Experience
- Networks, connections, contacts, platforms, access
- Exposure
- Finance/funding
- Work opportunities

- Training
- Facilitation
- Permission
- Equipment
- Professional guidance
- Access/signposting to knowledge/information
- Space and time to try out their ideas/thinking (and fail and learn and try again)
- Respect
- Safe, inclusive, creative and free public spaces

Underpinning Principles and Frameworks of the Toolkit

- The Ladder of Children's Participation (Hart, UNICEF 1992)
- A Children's Rights Approach
- Artworks Cymru Quality Principles
- The European Youth Information Charter (ERIYCA)
- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- The 7 Principles of Complete Co-Creation
- The Lundy model of child participation

Key to this research and the toolkit is the Design Council's research and development process, Double Diamond, and the key principles of co-creation.

Appendix 8 –

**Sample feedback to Democracy
Box Public Information
Prototype Content**

- “It makes it feel way more accessible.”
- “It makes me feel like we could get something done/our voices heard.”
- “More passionate about it.”
- “It’s nice hearing about politics in a song context – more inclusive and less elitist as usual.”
- “It’s informative without being confrontational; the information about politics feels more accessible.”
- “Empowered and positive.”
- “More powerful and important; makes it seem more approachable.”
- “Passionate to learn more.”
- “Makes me feel like politics is quite a positive thing.”
- “Like it is easy to follow, through the easy listings.”
- “More confident; it’s interesting and fun, as well as spreading important information!”
- “Important.”
- “It simplifies it, makes it more engaging and fun.”
- “Makes me think and very funny.”
- “I feel more educated; it makes it feel less of a boring topic.”

Appendix 9 –

Sample feedback to
pre-existing content

“A lot of white people who all sound the same.”

– Young person in focus group

- Age and ethnicity of presenter/messenger is important.
- Difficult/unexplained vocabulary and the use of jargon make people disengage.
- Assumptions of level of knowledge. Missing first steps. Need to explain the system in lay person’s terms.
- Animation helps and makes stuff easier to understand. Need more.
- Need to give real-life examples of how it affects lives.
- Humour generally thought to be very useful, although some found it too much at times.
- Length was mentioned a lot. Need really short form content (30 seconds or less), which then leads to longer form content. Think memes.
- Rants or long speeches proved disengaging for some.
- Use of colour is important.
- Videos often contain way too much information.
- Some were too childish and cringy.

Appendix 10 –

Extract from The Democracy Box/
Electoral Commission 2021/2022
Report

Omidaze Productions was awarded the Electoral Commission's 'Youth Voice Partner in Wales' tender in November 2021. This involved being commissioned to utilise 'The Democracy Box' body of research and four prototypes, to support the Commission in bringing young people into the design and creation of the Electoral Commission's educational resources. The aim was to ensure that young people have regular contact with the Electoral Commission and make recommendations for future education work.

This project was designed and delivered by [Yvonne Murphy](#) on behalf of [Omidaze Productions](#).

[Dr. Anwen Elias](#), Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University contributed to the monitoring and evaluation of the project. Together with one of her research assistants Dr Elias provided the analysis and theme extraction of the live and online feedback and ideation sessions and co-drafted the final report with Yvonne Murphy.

Omidaze conducted six focus group sessions prior to the Local Elections in May 2022 and four feedback/focus sessions and two follow-on ideation sessions. A total of 41 individuals participated in the focus groups overall.

A second phase of this work took place October 2022 – March 2023 with similar numbers of participants and has led to the creation of a new episode on The Democracy Box podcast series and the start of a specific Democracy Box series – the 'What is a ... Anyway?' series. The latter is a video glossary series which is being embedded into the Electoral Commission's youth facing part of their website.

Participants for both phases were a diverse cross section of the targeted demographic and recruited from across the whole of Wales with an almost equal representation across the three brackets of 16-18 year olds, 18-21 year olds and 21-26 year olds. The report detailed here is from phase one of this Youth Voice work in 2022 and is included as a representative sample of all focus groups where emerging themes documented below were replicated.

Two out of the four feedback/focus group sessions in phase one were held in person in Cardiff and two were held on-line. We recruited for a maximum of 15 participants per session and paid all participants £15 per hour to participate as per all Democracy Box work.

Summary of key findings/recommendations from the focus/ideation sessions:

1) Interest in, and awareness of democracy and local elections:

There are varying levels of interest in, and engagement with, elections and democracy amongst the young people who participated in these focus groups. Whilst most had already registered to vote, many were unaware of or lacked information/understanding of the forthcoming Local Elections. Many did not know or understand what those elections were for or indeed what a Council or Councillor does. It emerged that there are many factors which act as barriers to young people voting – chief among them being the lack of democratic education (understanding of our democratic structure, institutions and how and by who we are represented); procedural information (voting rights and processes) and basic non-election specific information about all political parties.

2) Ideas for new resources to engage people with elections and democracy in the UK:

Two principles emerged: i) involving young people in the creation of any new resources and strategies is critical as they better understand what their peers are interested in and are likely to engage with; ii) any new resources should be tailored to specific audiences and platforms – different things work for different people and in different places. There is no one size fits all and young people now use multiple platforms to access information and all democratic education information needs sit across all of these and be branded together so that the offer is joined up and easy to identify and access

3) The Democracy Box prototypes and associated content were shown and tested by all participants. The overwhelming response was positive with participants responding extremely positively to the overall branding, design and content

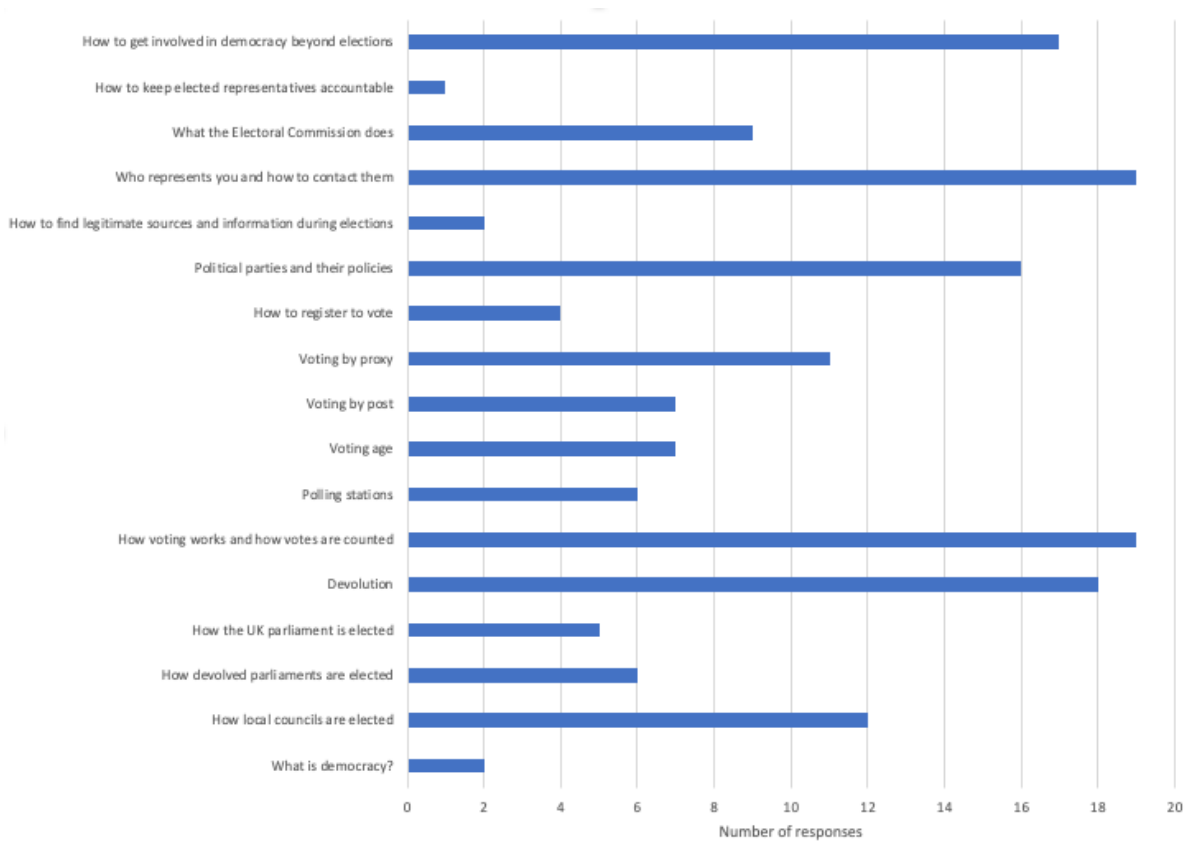
A first set of questions sought to elicit participants' interest in and general understanding of democracy, Participants were asked to indicate their **level of interest in "our UK democracy"**. Most responses ranged from "not at all interested" to "quite interested"; two participants answered "what is democracy?" and only a few indicated that they were "very interested".

Some of the issues raised included a dissatisfaction with politicians in general, to the effect that they make promises they cannot keep and that there is a lack of accountability when politicians break manifesto commitments. Several participants also perceived problems with party politics more broadly: some felt that existing political parties "don't represent me" and that elections do not lead to change (e.g. a perception of the UK's two-party system as "not a

true democracy”). One participant also mentioned challenges of accessibility for people with disabilities: “accessibility...is a huge turn off or stops people from bothering, because even if there’s the large print version of the form somewhere, it’s always 15 extra steps”.

By far the biggest challenge was considered to be the lack of information. Given this shared perception of lack of information as a major barrier to voting for young people, a follow-up question asked for an indication of the kinds of things that participants would like to have more information about. We asked participants to tell us something they would like to have more information about and tick all that applied. The results are shown in Figure 1. Amongst the priorities here are: how to find information on what political parties stand for, how voting systems work, who your representatives are and how to get in touch with them, how local councils are elected, devolution, and how to get involved in democracy beyond the ballot box.

Figure 2 – Responses to the question ‘What would you like to have more information about?’



Score

| | |
|----|--|
| 18 | What the different parties stand for/their policies |
| 18 | Devolution – difference between Welsh and UK parliaments |
| 16 | How you can get involved in our democracy beyond the ballot box |
| 14 | How voting systems work/how your vote is counted |
| 13 | Voting by proxy (nominating someone else to vote on your behalf) |
| 12 | How local councils are elected |
| 9 | Who your elected representatives are & how to contact them |
| 9 | What does the Electoral Commission do |
| 8 | How voting works |
| 6 | How devolved parliaments are elected |
| 7 | What age you have to be to vote |
| 5 | Polling stations |
| 5 | How the UK parliament is elected |
| 3 | How to register to vote |
| 2 | What even is democracy? |
| 1 | Voting by post |

Two general principles emerged that should inform the general approach to engaging with young people:

1) involving young people in the creation of any new resources and strategies is critical as they better understand what their peers are interested in and are likely to engage with;

2) any new resources should be tailored to specific audiences and platforms – different things work for different people and in different places.

There were common themes in relation both to the procedural aspects of elections and voting, and the broader provision of information about how democracy works. These are as follows.

In general:

- Resources should avoid using the clichéd phrase “making your voice heard”, and focus instead on the **problems people have in their daily lives**.
- It would be useful to have **more information about political parties, their candidates and policies**; this should be available on different platforms for different audiences. This could include young people talking to politicians directly. Resources such as quizzes and games would help individuals to see where on the political spectrum their views are.
- **Social media is a key way of reaching young people**. However, the presentation of information has to be tailored to each social media platform. In particular, videos and animations are the most engaging; these have to be engaging to be shared widely, and using young people to produce and feature

in these will enhance their appeal to this audience. **However, these should also be short and engaging, in order to capture and keep the interest of young people.**

- **New forms of engagement – such as use of QR codes should be considered as a way of accessing additional information.** These would work particularly well on eye-catching adverts in public places (e.g. on billboards, in restaurants and shopping centres).
- **Some forms of conventional merchandise used for advertising – such as mugs, tote bags – are unlikely to appeal to young people.** It should also be noted that Omidaze received concerned feedback from young people regarding the use of plastic in the merchandise that one council used in The Talking Shop and that single use plastic and non-environmentally friendly merchandise needed to be avoided. The request from young people for Democracy Box merchandise has been consistent since 2020

In addition to these general suggestions, there was a general consensus on the importance of engaging young people across a range of ages, and in a variety of settings. Introducing a programme of political education in school contexts – at primary and secondary levels – was considered critical in this respect, with specific recommendations as follows:

- **Resources and activities in schools must be engaging and appropriate for the age group of participants.** These should focus on democracy in general, as well as more specifically on elections and voting.

There were also specific suggestions for engaging with young people after they have left secondary school, or in addition to the formal school setting:

- **Activities in youth centres and for community groups were suggested as a less formal alternative to a school-based activities.**
- **Pop-up events and stores were identified as an alternative means of engagement, especially in places where young people spend time.** There was also support for events where young people can turn up without any pressure to contribute, but just to get information and talk informally to each other and others interested in democracy and elections.
- **Information stands at College and University fresher's fairs would be useful.** There was a consensus among participants that this kind of continued engagement across age groups is something that young people really want. In particular, this would enable targeted advice to students around registering to vote and voting whilst away from home.

Appendix 11 –

Who are Omidaze?

Omidaze (Oh My Days!) is a partnership organisation run by two freelancers, Yvonne Murphy and Dick Johns, and was founded in 2008. The majority of Omidaze's work is not-for-profit. Omidaze receives no core funding and contracts freelancers on a project-to-project basis. Both partners are self-employed, and the partnership company has no limited guarantee. Liability rests equally with the two named partners.

Yvonne Murphy is the lead partner, Executive Producer and Artistic Director and has sole responsibility for the day-to-day running of the partnership and all projects and productions.

The first Omidaze Shakespeare Summer School was produced in July 2008 and a bank account set up. **The website** was launched in Autumn 2010. The website was updated and re-launched in 2018 with the original being archived.

The turnover, vision, ambition and resulting workload of Omidaze Productions increased significantly between 2020 and 2023. The partners agreed that core funding was necessary in order to accommodate this increase and a board of directors was necessary to enable the company itself to grow in step with its level of output and reputation. In March 2023, Omidaze Productions Ltd by guarantee was registered with Companies House. No trading start date has been set. Omidaze Productions Ltd will become operational when an application for core funding is successful, at which point the Omidaze Productions partnership will cease to trade and be wound up as per Omidaze's constitutions and written statement of aims and objectives.

All intellectual property, portfolio of work and digital and physical assets belonging to the Omidaze Productions partnership will become the property of Omidaze Productions Ltd, which will continue the work begun by Omidaze Productions partnership.

The Directors of Omidaze Productions Ltd are Yvonne Murphy; Richard Johns; Leonora Thomson and Sally Griffith. Yvonne Murphy has sole ownership of Omidaze Productions Ltd and is the named guarantor.

Omidaze's Vision

Omidaze is more than a theatre company. It is a small creative company with very big ideas. It is made up of arts activists who use theatre, the arts and creativity and live and digital creative production to help create a fairer, more equal society, as well as creating and producing excellent live and digital content that is informative, empowering and entertaining. Omidaze seeks to foster as wide a range of partnerships, collaborations and unlikely alliances as possible to help achieve equality of voices, access, inclusion and power across society.

Omidaze's mission is to use theatre, the arts and creativity to empower, inform and entertain new audiences and inspire positive social change. Omidaze is passionate about the intersection between democratic and cultural participation and creative/artistic-centred approaches to problem solving and systems change.

It is a small company with **big** ideas. It is interested in the big stuff. It is driven by social justice, equality and the true sharing of privilege and power.

Omidaze's Values

- Social justice and well-being
- Environment and sustainability
- Collaboration, co-creation and partnership
- Creativity as core
- Motivation for life-long learning
- Empowerment
- Positive Reinforcement
- Information
- Inspiration

Omidaze's Track Record

Omidaze's first production Things Beginning with M toured across Wales in 2012 to sell-out venues and great reviews, culminating in performances in London. Five productions followed, including a critically acclaimed and sell-out Shakespeare Trilogy co-produced with the Wales Millennium Centre and two shows for children.

In 2019, Omidaze/Yvonne Murphy created **The Talking Shop pilot**, which led to the Clwstwr research and development project **The Democracy Box** with young people from all over Wales as co-creators.

Biography of Yvonne Murphy, Omidaze Productions Artistic Director and Executive Producer

Yvonne read Drama at Manchester University (1988 to 1991) before going on to train as an actor at The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama (1991 to 1992) and as a teacher of English and drama at University College London (1995 to 1996). Yvonne has been a freelance Theatre Director, Creative Producer and Creative Practitioner and Consultant since 1992, working across the UK and

Internationally. In 2008, Yvonne founded Omidaze Productions and in 2013 was awarded an Arts Council of Wales Clore Fellowship and was mentored by **Jude Kelly**. For her Clore secondment, Yvonne was Strategic Lead for the national arts and cultural movement – **What Next?** This post continued beyond the Clore Programme through until autumn 2014. Yvonne remains actively involved as a previous Chair and the founder of the Cardiff Chapter of What Next?

Yvonne has been an Associate Artist of Wales Millennium Centre, Theatr Iolo and Artis Community and a board member of Chapter Arts Centre and Awen Cultural Trust. She was one of the first Creative Agents for the Arts Council of Wales/ Welsh Government Lead Creative Schools Scheme and has also been a Creative Practitioner on the scheme.

She was an elected councillor for Penarth Town Council from 2019 to 2022 and stood as a Parliamentary Candidate in the 2019 general election. Yvonne was named one of **Wales' 100 Changemakers by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales in 2022** and one of **Wales most influential women in theatre in 2016**. Yvonne strives to make work that empowers, informs, entertains new audiences, challenges the status quo and inspires positive social change. Yvonne works across the cultural and creative, democracy and corporate sectors and is particularly interested in the intersection between cultural and democratic participation, access and engagement, alternative economic and business models and creative learning.

Yvonne Murphy and Richard Johns, have been working within the theatre and education sectors since 1992, with a broad range of arts and cultural organisations and academic institutions. Organisations they have worked with as individual freelancers include the BBC, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, Warwick University, The English Shakespeare Company, Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama; Theatr Clwyd, Sherman Theatre, Theatre Royal, Plymouth, National Theatre Wales, National Dance Company, Wales, Welsh National Opera, University of South Wales, University of South Wales Trinity Saint David, Northampton University, A2: Connect/Arts Active, ArtWorks Cymru, the Shakespeare Schools Foundation, Theatr Iolo and The Riverfront Theatre & Arts Centre, Newport.

Omidaze's work with young people reaches all across Wales, including tours with accompanying schools' workshops in North and South Wales. Their summer schools have run annually in South Wales from 2008 to 2019, as have their workshops in formal and informal educational settings all over Wales.

Appendix 12 –

List of Partners,
Collaborators and Funders

Partners and Funders:

Clwstwr

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

National Theatre Wales

The Cares Family

The Electoral Commission

The Riverfront Theatre & Arts Centre, Newport

Wales Millennium Centre and Creu Cyffro

Youth Cymru

Collaborators:

Anthem

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Caerphilly Council

Cardiff Council

Conwy Council

Creative Cardiff

Cwm Taf Public Services Board

Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board

Dr Anwen Elias, Reader in Politics, Department of International Politics,
Aberystwyth University

Dr Matthew Wall, Associate Professor, Politics, Philosophy and International
Relations, Swansea University

Electoral Reform Society Cymru

Head4Arts

Hub Cymru Africa

I Have a Voice

Institute for Welsh Affairs

Menter Iaith/Theatr Soar, Merthyr Tydfil

Merthyr Tydfil Central Library

Merthyr Tydfil Council

National Library of Wales archive

Neighbourhood Democracy Movement

Newport Council

Newport Rising

Operasonic

Professor Laura McAllister, Professor of Public Policy and the Governance of Wales at the Wales Governance Centre

Seren Publishing

Sub-Saharan Advisory Panel

Swansea MAD

The Abbey Theatre, Dublin

The Democratic Society

The Politics Project

The Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament Engagement Team

University of South Wales

Urdd

Welsh Centre for International Affairs

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Oh My Days! A colloquial expression of amazement and disbelief originating in schools at the turn of the last century.

