



# Beyond THE BALLOT BOX

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**The Democracy Box Report and  
Proof of Concept 2020 to 2023  
(Abridged Version)**

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Omidaze Productions  
November 2023**

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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](http://www.writetothem.com)

[www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)

[www.whocanivotefor.co.uk](http://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 research and development (R&D) project from 2020 to 2021. Part of the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CIPC), Clwstwr was an ambitious research, development and innovation programme (2018 to 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 Theatre Director, Producer, Creative and Consultant for more than three decades and founded Omidaze Productions, a partnership organisation, in 2008. Yvonne is the lead partner, Artistic Director and Executive Producer of Omidaze and 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, with the main R&D commencing in 2019.

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

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

and ensure that our UK democracy is taught creatively and comprehensively within formal state education and conveyed via state-funded public information campaigns and democracy hubs. 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.

Since 2020, Omidaze has recruited and trained more than 60 young people from across Wales, aged 16 to 26, as young co-creators. This includes young people from the lowest voter turn-out constituencies in Wales. In addition, hundreds more young people have contributed via creative think-ins, focus groups, interviews, surveys and prototype testing. Feedback from close to 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 scaled up by spring 2024.

### **A Note From the Author**

Please note this is an abridged version of The Democracy Box report. The full report, which includes an overview of the current landscape of democratic education in the UK and more detail on each of the four prototypes, can be found [here](#).

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 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 ways that they have been systematically failing to do for 20 years since devolution was first introduced. We should not require a global pandemic to occur 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.

The two main barriers to democratic participation identified are:

- 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 through **year-round democratic education and information** and ensure meaningful **access to our existing democratic systems and structures**. This will then lay the foundation for engagement work on elections and voting and subsequent 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, contribute to and influence our democracy 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 that represent their needs and the needs 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.

The author, 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 three of 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 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 turn-out 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 all 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.



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# The Four Problems

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?

This research does not provide a simple answer. Rather, it highlights that the current situation is the responsibility of all past governments, all political parties, broadcasters, journalists, news providers and decision makers, policymakers, education ministers and curriculum designers, past and present.

**“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’

‘No shame, no blame’, as The Democracy Box young co-creators coined their tagline and approach, is a good mantra to move forward with. As is identifying, challenging and changing the modes of thought and/or behaviour that have got us here.

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.

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

– Talking Shop visitor



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.

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.

The Democracy Box research has evidenced that **how** and **where** we convey basic democratic information and **who** the messengers are key to success.

**Answer to Argument 1** - 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 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

Many people who have contributed to this research expressed a concern with why this lack of democratic education exists and whether it was deliberate.

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.

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.



### Problem 3 – The News/Media Problem

The main responsibility for delivering democratic education, within our UK media, currently appears to reside with rolling news, with some budget being given to education.

This is problematic and needs to change for two main reasons:

1. Democratic education becomes wrapped around '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 artificial intelligence (AI) also make it urgent that credible, non-partisan, trustworthy sources of information that are fully independent of government are protected, promoted and exist beyond rolling news.

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

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

**“Democracy is a process, not an event.”**

– Democracy Box survey response



## 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.

**“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





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 modern UK 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.

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.”**

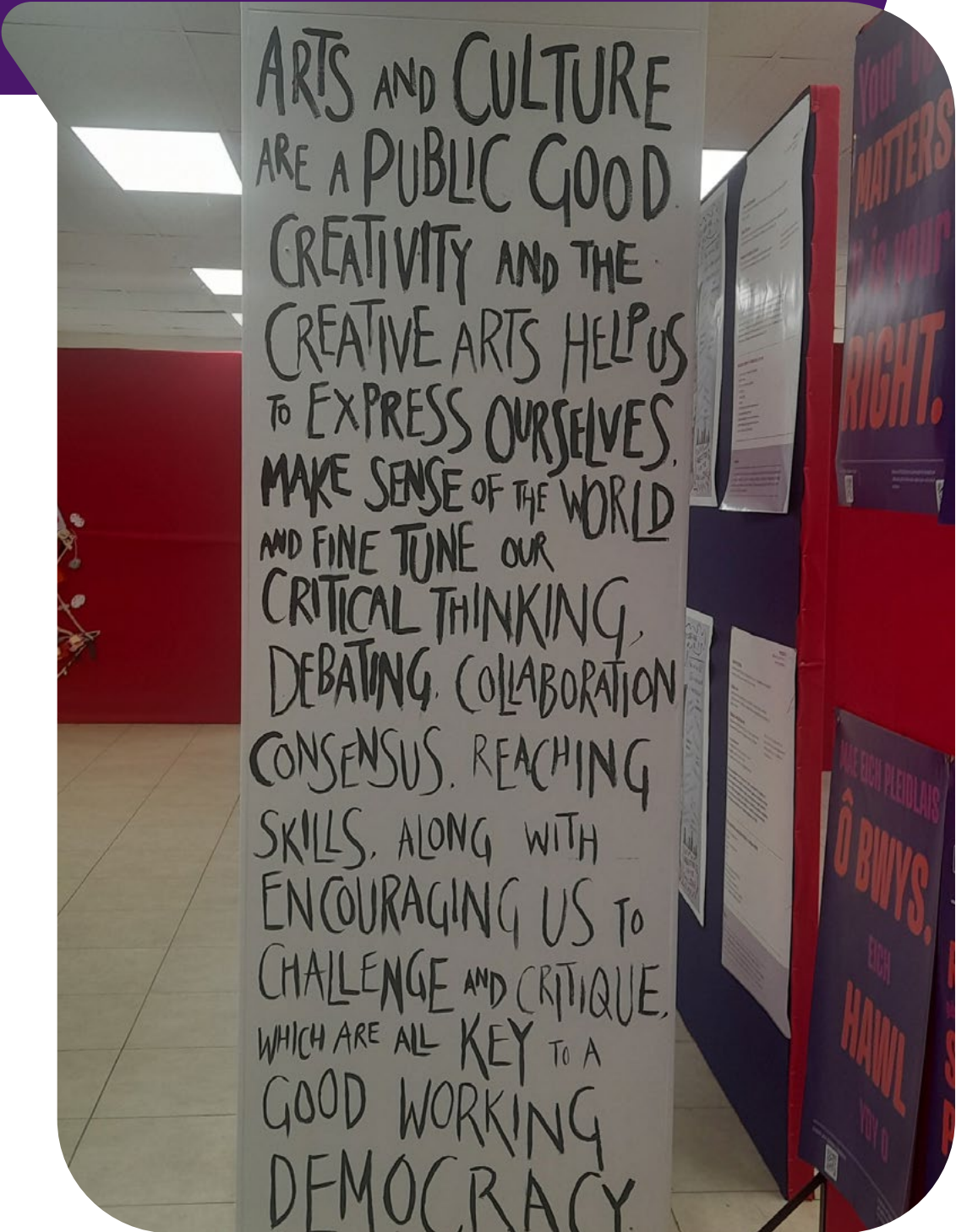
– President Obama, 2016

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 combining arts with democracy, it makes democracy seem artistic instead of dry. Far more appealing.”**

– Democracy Box sharing event attendee



ARTS AND CULTURE  
ARE A PUBLIC GOOD.  
CREATIVITY AND THE  
CREATIVE ARTS HELP US  
TO EXPRESS OURSELVES,  
MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD  
AND FINE TUNE OUR  
CRITICAL THINKING,  
DEBATING, COLLABORATION  
CONSENSUS, REACHING  
SKILLS, ALONG WITH  
ENCOURAGING US TO  
CHALLENGE AND CRITIQUE,  
WHICH ARE ALL KEY TO A  
GOOD WORKING  
DEMOCRACY.

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 sector 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.

**"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



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.

Further information on the Status of Creatives Problem can be found in the full-length Democracy Box report [here](#).

**All four problems 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.

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



# Three Steps

## 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, that are easy to access, welcoming, safe, creative and inspiring. Spaces where unexpected, informed, 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 Democracy Box prototypes have been created, trialled and tested for all three of these 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 that 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 to 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 direct our attention to 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 for young people and the general public – but for those in government, the media and positions of power who mainly focus on the ballot box and turnout 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 information contained in [The Story of Our UK Democracy](#) wants to know it and are angry and frustrated that they don't.

The last three years of bringing young people into 'Ivory Tower' rooms to let those in power hear directly from young people about why basic democratic education and information is key to tackling our democratic deficit have been frustrating and exhausting. After three years, the author and young people are still being routinely asked: '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 and are the problem. It is their attitudes, not those of young people and the majority of citizens that must change.

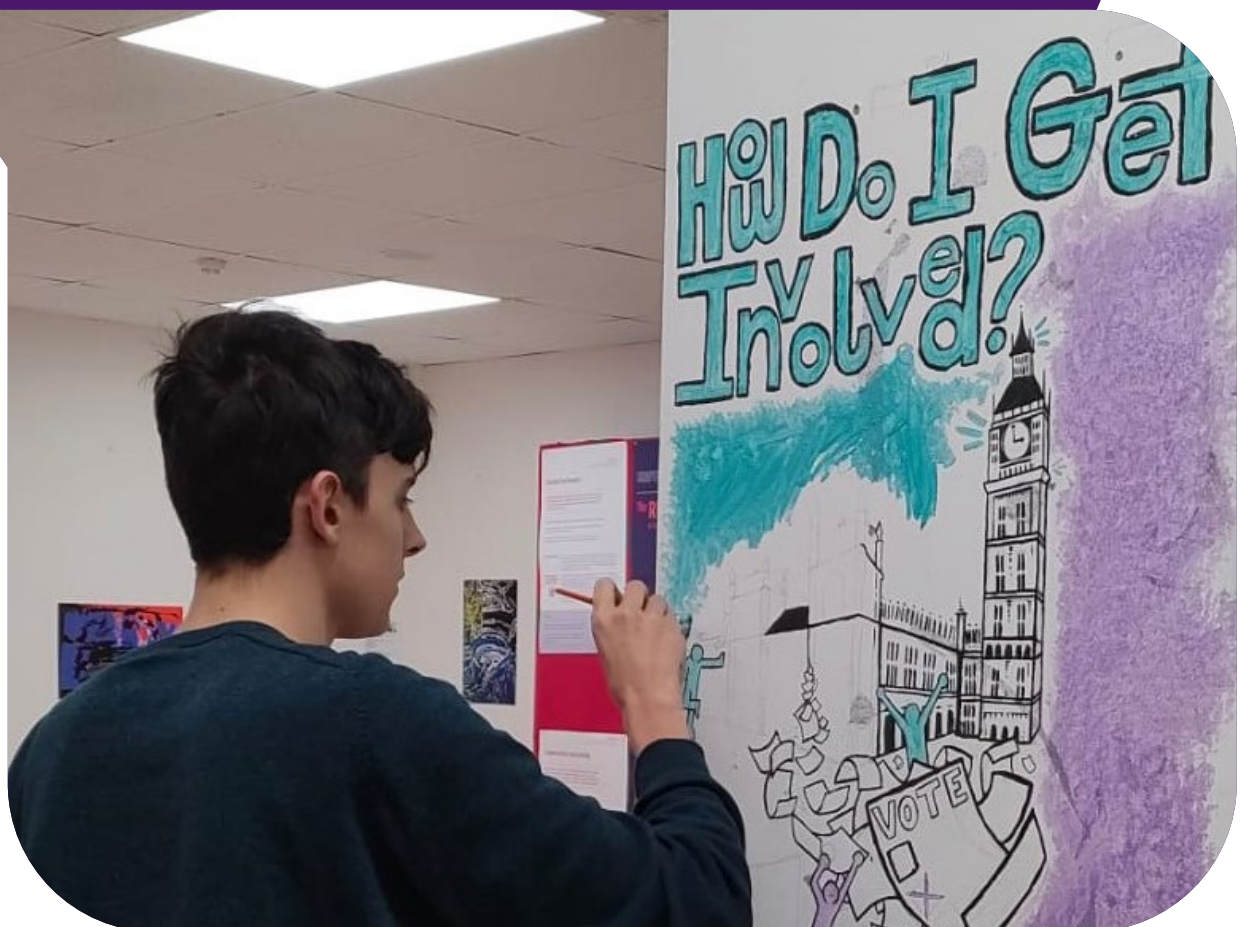
It is not just young people, who are experiencing significant barriers to participation. The main barrier for people of all ages is a lack of information and conversation.

[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 16 and 17 year olds being entitled to vote for the first time in some elections in Wales or the upcoming Welsh Parliament election.

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 this story and the basic facts it contains.

**“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



## 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.

**“I know for a fact that many young people my age, including myself, have issues they are passionate about and would love to see change, yet have done nothing to actually fight for change. This may be due to lack of education or belief that change can start from them.”**

– Young co-creator, aged 16

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 is 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.

## **In Summary**

This report argues that widespread democratic education and information must come before, and underpin, electoral reform.

The Institute for Community Studies and the Young Foundation's two year Civic Journey 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 Democracy Box young co-creator put it in a recent roundtable event:

**“We are using new technologies for old ideas.”**

This is indeed an important and critical challenge. 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.

The Democracy Box research evidences that:

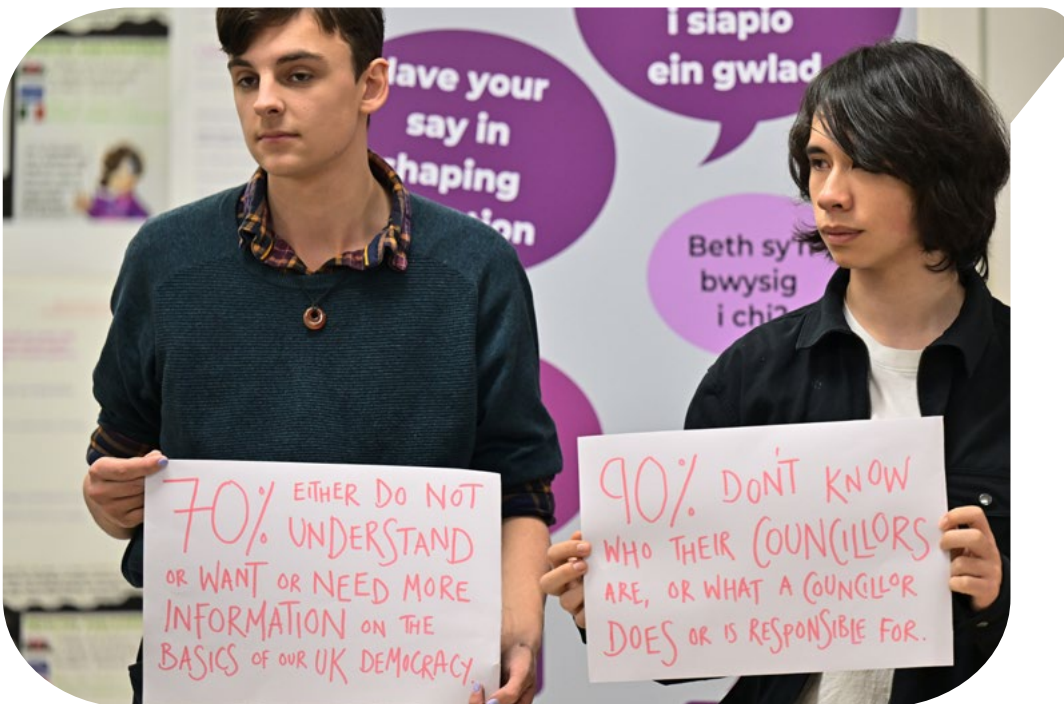
The common denominator in terms of democratic engagement is not age. It is having had the luxury and privilege of a home and/or classroom where the basics were discussed or taught.

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. 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 all adults have poor levels of civic learning and therefore poor civic agency. This in turn leads to what the author refers 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 in 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 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 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 that contains The Democracy Box
4. The Democracy Box Toolkit for working with young people as co-creators prototype

### Omidaze's vision is that in 10 years' time:

- The Democracy Box is embedded across multiple organisations and 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 Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme.
- All students in school years 2 to 11 are consistently developing their Creative Habits of Mind and working with professional creatives as part of The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme 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. That democracy begins with them and is them and is not fixed or set in stone. That it 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.

**"I feel like I learnt a lot more about American politics when I was a kid through watching cartoons and then I didn't really learn much about British politics 'til everyone was kicking off about Brexit on Instagram."**

– Young person giving feedback on prototypes.

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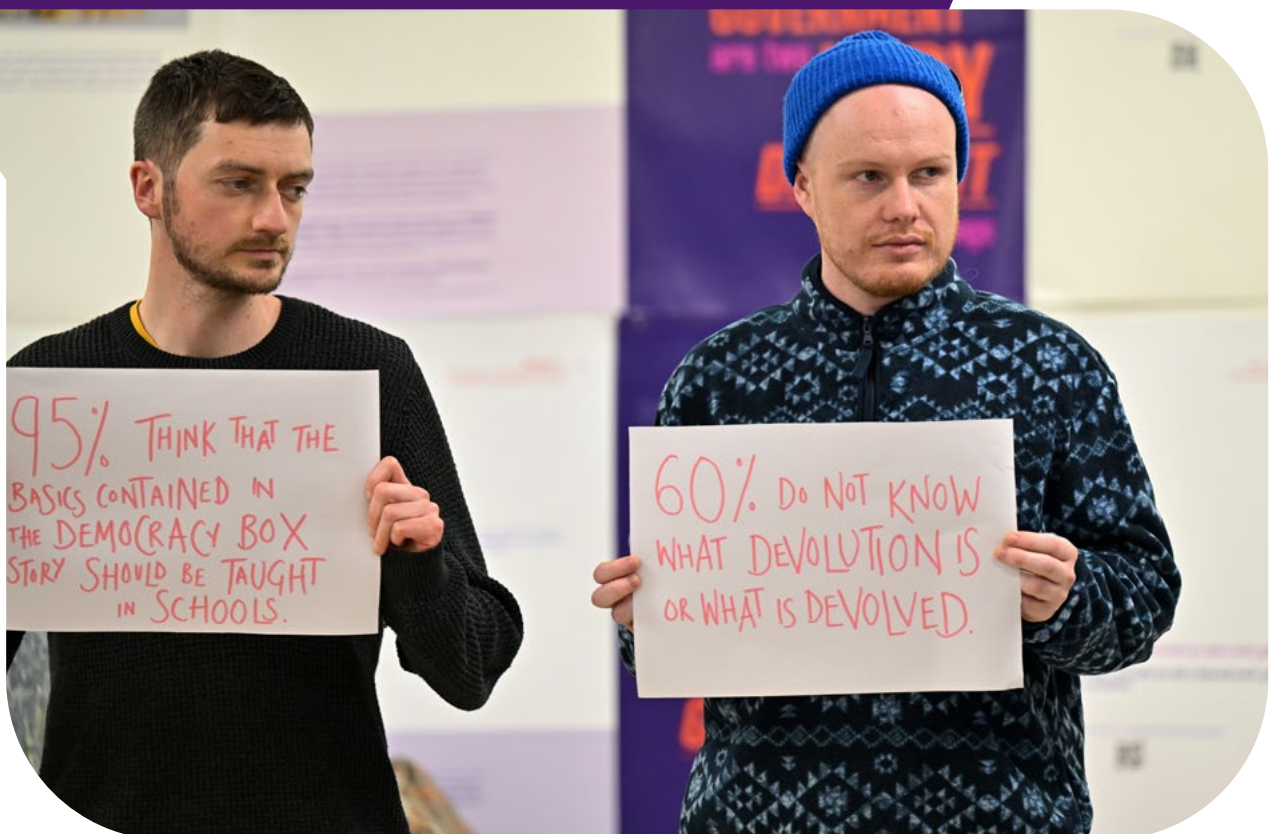
# Chapter 1 – Key Findings

**The Information gap** – A majority of people in the UK lack access to and knowledge of our democratic systems and structures.

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 or 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 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.”**

– The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century’ report

The majority 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.

**The Democracy Box survey** had 199 responses. Additional in-person responses from interviews, focus groups and thousands of visitors to The Talking Shop trials corroborate the findings below and confirm that these figures are representative across all ages of the population:

- **62%** either do not understand or do not have enough 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.

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? Why would you want to take part in and vote in a system that you do not understand? Only a minority turn out to vote in local elections and yet the majority (evidenced by thousands of people who have contributed to the research from all over Wales) care passionately about their local area and community.

More than 90% of those responding to The Democracy Box survey said that young people should be taught about our democracy in primary and secondary school. Subsequent focus groups have specified that democratic education in schools should focus on democracy in general before specifically focusing on elections and voting.

**A frenzied focus on elections and voting** – The Democracy Box research evidences 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. 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 feeling disillusioned with the ballot box being 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 focused on addressing elections and voting which, without meaning to, is maintaining the status quo and contributing to continuing low level democratic participation.

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, misplaced concern. We aren't worried 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.

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

– Democracy Box survey response



**Language as a barrier** was a recurring theme. 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 for 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.

The words ‘civics’, ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’ were also commonly disliked during the course of this research and not understood by many and said to be alienating. This was also found to be the case with much of the vocabulary and language traditionally surrounding this subject.

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

– Young person in a focus group

Glossaries, explainers, easy-to-understand guides and simple, digestible information have all been routinely requested over the last three years.

The FrameWorks Institute’s research into reframing government aligns completely with our 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.

**Trust and truth.** Trust, or rather the lack of it, and a general concern about how to find the truth in an over-saturated 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, together with a lack of information and lack of opportunity to contribute or be heard beyond elections, are significant factors in leading people to feel ‘fed up’ with politics and feeling like their vote doesn’t count or make a difference. A lack of information, the feedback loop not being closed, a perceived lack of dialogue and one direction of communication are all main reasons consistently given for not participating, registering to vote or turning out to vote.





## What do 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. Relevant to people's lives
2. Easy to find and all in one place
3. Simple and easy to understand.

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

**Non-election-specific and non-partisan public information for all ages** provided year round by neutral and independent organisations was the second priority (after in-school democratic education) 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 – were 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 for the majority of people who contributed.

**“Don’t just ram information down people’s throats. They need to have a part to play... they need to join the dots for themselves and do the work... Give them the tools and a reason to go explore.”**

– Young person in a creative think-in

**A response.** We need to close the feedback loop. For the minority who actually do know how to contact their elected representative and get no response at the first attempt they will often then give up. If someone writes to their elected representative, they want a reply, even if it's a negative one. Councillors were anecdotally rated as the most poor out of all elected representatives in replying to their constituents. This could be related to the fact that for most councillors their elected position is not their full-time job or even a paid role when it comes to town, community and parish councillors. However the need to close the feedback loop still exists as a top priority which must be addressed by all elected representatives and civil servants within our democratic institutions.

**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.

**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.

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

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

The Democracy Box body of research has evidenced that people of all ages 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://whocanivote.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.
- 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.

**Finding a balance between entertainment/keeping it light and 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 aspects requested and liked 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 we began in 2020. They have now created a jingle as part of their work with the Electoral Commission in 2023. The concept of environmentally friendly Democracy Box collectables and merchandise has been a recurring theme in think-ins and focus groups, (e.g. including pins, badges, pens, hoodies and mugs) and suggested by all ages of young people.

**Going back to basics** was a recurring theme of the research. In focus groups and creative think-ins, young people routinely suggested the idea of giving out posters and displaying them in shops, cafes, colleges, universities and schools and using eye-catching adverts in public places (e.g. on billboards and in shopping centres).

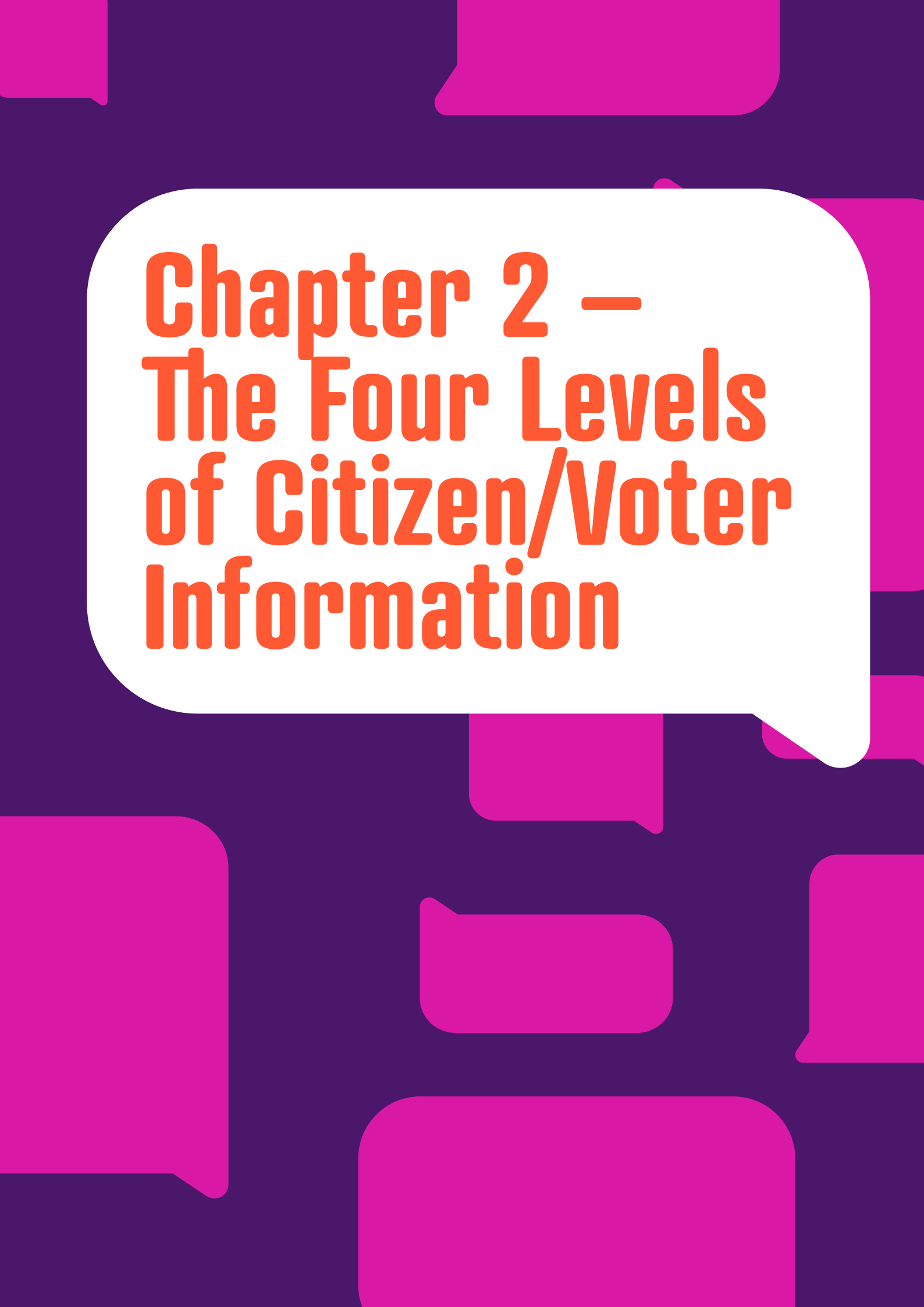
They have also told us that an interactive element (e.g. QR codes and/or tear-off takeaway strips for links and websites) is essential, as is proactive, in-person signposting, interaction and facilitation of these materials.

**The idea of state-funded public information films being revived** to explain our democracy was welcomed by more than 50% of those surveyed. A further 30% answered 'maybe' with certain caveats – namely, the films need to be made by a non-partisan organisation, 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 shops were identified as an alternative means of engagement, especially in places where young people spend time.** There was also support for events and spaces where young people can turn up without any pressure to contribute and can choose to access information and have conversations.
- **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.

For detailed information on what we found matters most to young people and what they tell us should be key messages in future democratic information campaigns, and where and how young people want that democratic information, can be found in the full Democracy Box report [here](#)

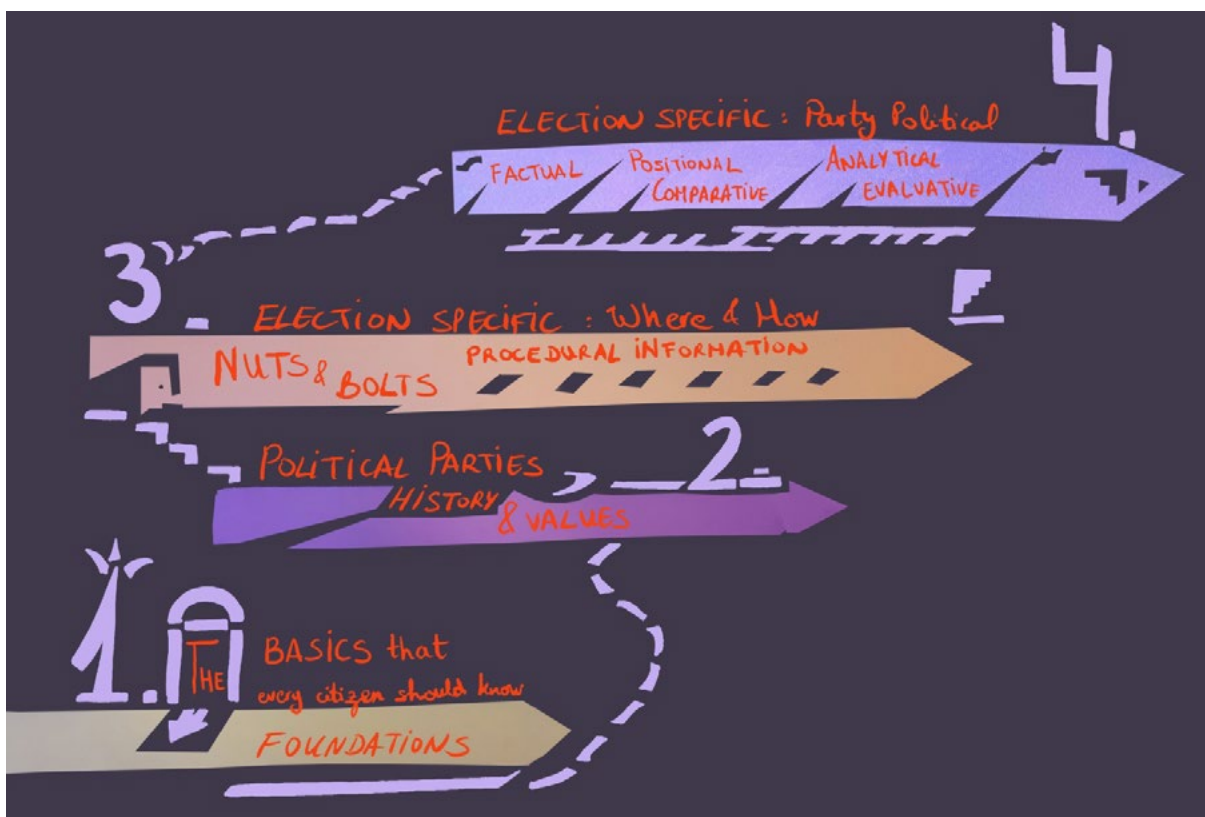
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# **Chapter 2 – The Four Levels of Citizen/Voter Information**

The starting point of The Democracy Box research and development was to separate into categories all voter/citizen information and 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 the foundation of all other democratic education and information. 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. Level 1 is the missing level, where historically the least time, energy and resources have been focused and is the focus for The Democracy Box young co-creators and all four prototypes.

**Level 2** is information about all the political parties outside of an election – their history, values and ideologies. This information needs to be publicly available all year, every year 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.



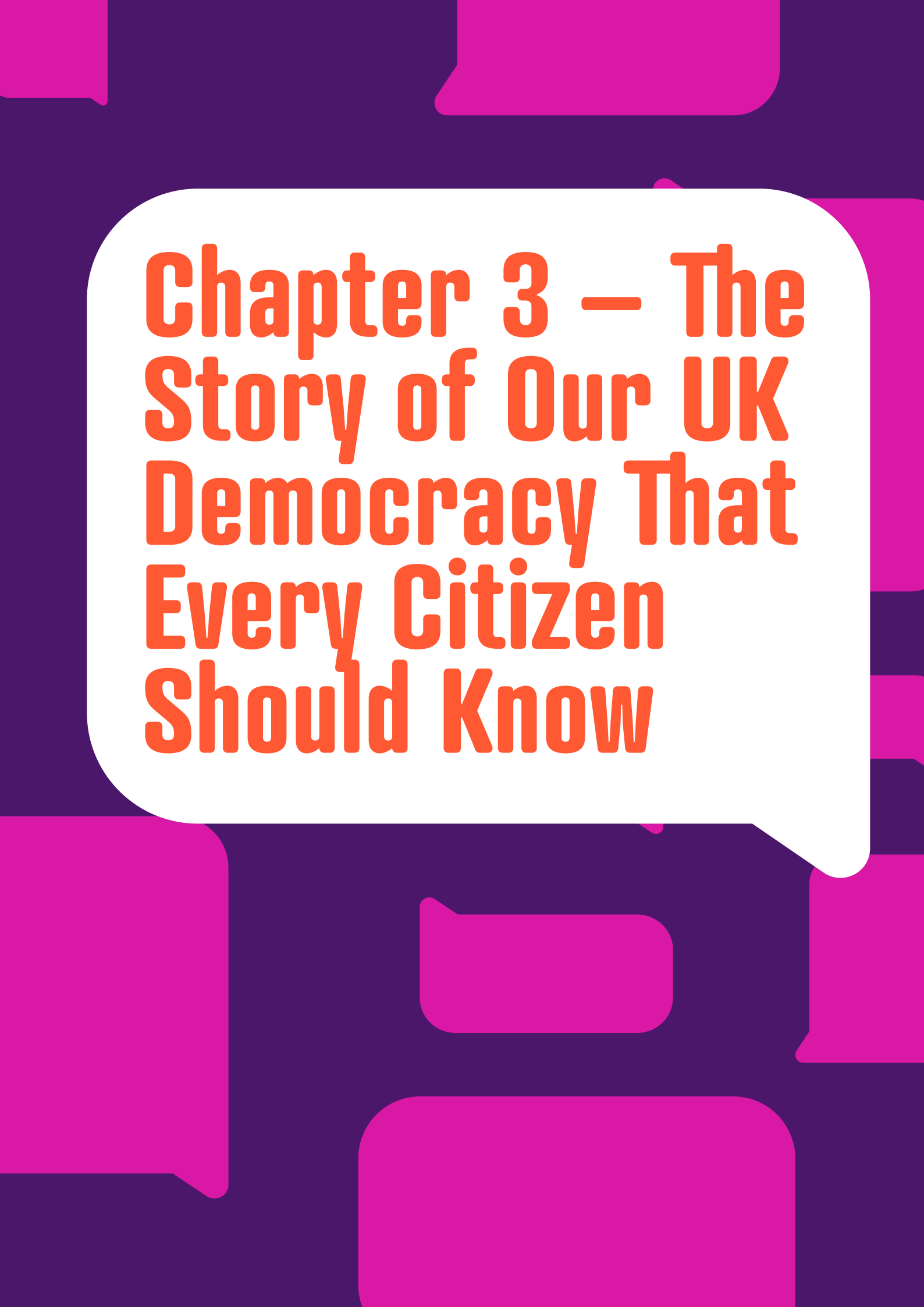
**Level 3** is election voter/citizen information that covers ‘how to vote’. Election procedural material that the Electoral Commission does so well; how to register; where your polling station is; election timelines; how to complete a postal vote or vote by proxy, etc. The nuts and bolts.

**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.



# **Chapter 3 – The Story of Our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know**

Yvonne Murphy has compiled all Level 1 information into The Democracy Box Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters.

You can view and download the story for free in Welsh or English on The Democracy Box prototype website. The story was written by Yvonne Murphy and 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. The story has been fact-checked by the Electoral Commission. The aim, in future, is to add a glossary and historical timeline and create British Sign Language (BSL) and audio versions of the story.

The information is in a story format because the research demonstrated that it is the best way to enable people to engage with and share complex and dry information. Stories are how we understand and make sense of the world. Creative and interesting stories engage and inspire us. In the UK, we have lost our collective story.

The story of  
**OUR** UK Democracy that  
**EVERY UK**  
**CITIZEN**  
*should know.*

A story structure, namely the classical hero story structure, was adopted following extensive research into:

- Story and story structure
- Storytelling
- Neuroscience behind storytelling and 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 has more impact than dry, 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.

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. All Democracy Box young co-creators, participants in the Democracy Box schools programme and Talking Shop hosts are storytellers retelling the [Democracy Box story](#) in myriad ways, across multiple media platforms and in person.

The story has also been made into bilingual booklets by Conwy Local Authority and distributed to secondary school students and young people in the county as they turn 14 and become eligible to register to vote. The ambition is for this to be replicated across Wales and the UK so that all young people and, eventually, people of all ages have access to and know the story.

This story underpins all four Democracy Box prototypes.

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# **Chapter 4 – 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. Information on the testing of the prototypes can be found in the appendix. For more detailed information on all four prototypes, please see the [full Democracy Box report](#).



## 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 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. Additional young people are recruited and paid to attend creative think-ins and focus/feedback groups.

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 school assemblies, community events and sessions held at higher and further education institutions. A Blaenau Gwent Council secondary school event (covered by the BBC), involved young co-creators working alongside freelance facilitators to welcome every year 11 student in the county to the start of their democratic journey.

The Democracy Box information campaign has been branded by one of the young co-creators to be recognisable across multiple media platforms.

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 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 possible with investment and resourcing.

**“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. 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 giving feedback



## Prototype 2

**The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Schools Programme** can equip and prepare teachers to replicate the Democracy Box process with their students. Secondary and primary school teachers of students aged 7 to 16 (and youth workers in non-formal education settings) will be taken through a programme which will enable them to mirror the Democracy Box young co-creators process with their students.

Teachers and students across Wales (and potentially the UK) will creatively re-tell and cascade The Democracy Box Story of our UK Democracy in multiple ways, developing democratic awareness, understanding and participation among school children and educators in Wales.

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

**“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 Generations Commissioner for Wales on The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme

The programme was piloted in collaboration with Central South Education Consortium and 15 primary and secondary schools. The pilot was successfully completed in February 2022 with outstanding feedback. The ultimate goal is for every school, first in Wales, and then the UK, to have access to this model of professional development to create a strong foundation for democratic education and citizenship teaching.

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 democratic education and citizenship teaching providers and resources.

The Democracy Box Creative Cascade programme begins by introducing teachers to The Democracy Box project and its research methodology and findings. Teachers are then taught the basics of our UK democracy using the Omidaze [Story of our UK Democracy that Every Citizen Should Know](#) and content co-created with young people. They meet some of the young co-creators and begin to explore how they can replicate The Democracy Box process in their primary or secondary school.

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 questions and inform them about their organisation's work and how they can support the school going forward.

**“The project fits so well with the new curriculum for Wales...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. The children said it was their favourite work all year and are so proud of it.”**

– Claire Holcombe, year 5 class teacher in Thornhill Primary School, Cardiff, on The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme

Imagine 10 years from now. A student who is currently in year 2 will have been told and 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 all 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 [statements of what matters](#), [principles of progression](#) and [descriptions of learning](#) in this Humanities area of the new curriculum. This foundational knowledge for educators and their students in Wales is vital if the main purpose of the new curriculum, around creating informed citizens, is to succeed.

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](#)

Full details on the Creative Cascade Programme for schools can be found in the [full-length Democracy Box report](#).

## Prototype 3

**The Talking Shop** was piloted in Cardiff in 2019 in an empty shop opposite Cardiff Castle. Visitors repeatedly asked if we could show them content, on their phone, where they could find our UK democracy explained simply and succinctly. This led to the creation of [The Democracy Box](#).

During the course of the Democracy Box research, people of all ages told us that as well as digital public information and democratic information in schools, they wanted this information face-to-face. Our research came full circle back to The Talking Shop where it all 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.



## What Happens Inside?

Inside The Talking Shop you will find The Democracy Box story on the walls, in takeaway booklets and via content on screens and through headphones and QR codes. Comfortable sofas and armchairs and kitchen and dining room tables and chairs replicate a homely setting. A voting booth and ballot box are integrated into the shop. It is like a cross between an art installation and your Nan's house.

A 'what's on' wall is available for anyone to display posters and information about cultural and creative events and activities happening nearby. A 'what's what' wall is used to display local democratic information and services. A rolling weekly calendar of events happening inside The Talking Shop and around the local area is also curated by the hosts and visitors who can also add their thoughts, ideas and feedback to The Talking Shop visitor books, The Talking Shop Tree of Thought and via ongoing interactive creative activities.

Every visitor is welcomed, offered a free 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 (including young co-creators) begin open conversations around democratic and cultural engagement, introduce the public to The Democracy Box's [Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters](#) and signpost visitors to democratic and cultural information, organisations, resources and services. They use creative approaches to facilitate conversation and democratic deliberation.

Language incorporated into the shop design and resources displayed by Omidaze inside the shop are in Welsh and English. Hosts wear lanyards to inform visitors if they are a Welsh speaker or learner, and we host Welsh Wednesdays for everyone to practise, learn and listen to the Welsh language. In the final trial in spring 2024, Omidaze would like to continue early research into a Welsh-to-English speech-to-text app that could enable fully bilingual conversations inside The Talking Shop without the aid of a simultaneous translator.

The Talking Shop model is also being researched and developed with D/deaf and disabled creatives and practitioners to ensure that the model is accessible for everyone.

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.

Visitors are encouraged to use the shop for meetings, workshops, rehearsals, book and poetry readings, art exhibitions, performances and as a space to meet, work, network and just be.

**Freelance hosts and co-hosts.** Each shop is open six days a week, Monday to Saturday, from 9.30am to 5.30pm, and is facilitated by two trained hosts. The main host is a paid freelance creative or Democracy Box young co-creator, and the co-host will ideally be a member of salaried staff from a collaborating or partner organisation.

**The Talking Shop Trials – 2022 to 2023** - The Talking Shop is being trialled in towns across Wales as Omidaze works out how to replicate the 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 recorded 8,434 visits with no dedicated marketing budget. The pilot in 2019 recorded over 550 visits. The visitors range from six months to 96 years old and include all socio/economic demographics, with a high percentage of young people aged 16 to 30 attending. 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.

The Talking Shop prototyping will be complete by spring 2024. The final stage will consist of a series of stakeholder conversations, a final trial and creating and trialling the accompanying 'Talking Shop on Tour' concept. This final stage will allow us to explore:

1. How we make the conversations fully bilingual.
2. How much additional structure we can give the creative conversations and democratic deliberations whilst maintaining the open and responsive approach.
3. How we feed the outcomes of these deliberations into our representative democratic system and policy and law making structures and help to begin to bridge the divide between activism and our current constitutional mechanisms.



4. How The Talking Shop can be financially viable and sustainable long-term 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](#).

**A digital Talking Shop** - 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 a sustainable digital democracy hub solution – a one-stop shop or signpost mechanism to all things democracy online. Capacity has meant that this fifth prototype has stalled.

Omidaze would welcome the opportunity to continue this early stage research and development to explore digital signposting technology and new democratic distributed digital networks that could utilise the existing Democracy Box brand and prototypes, including The Democracy Box website, YouTube channel, social media channels and the methodology of The Talking Shop model.

[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](#)

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

-Talking Shop visitor





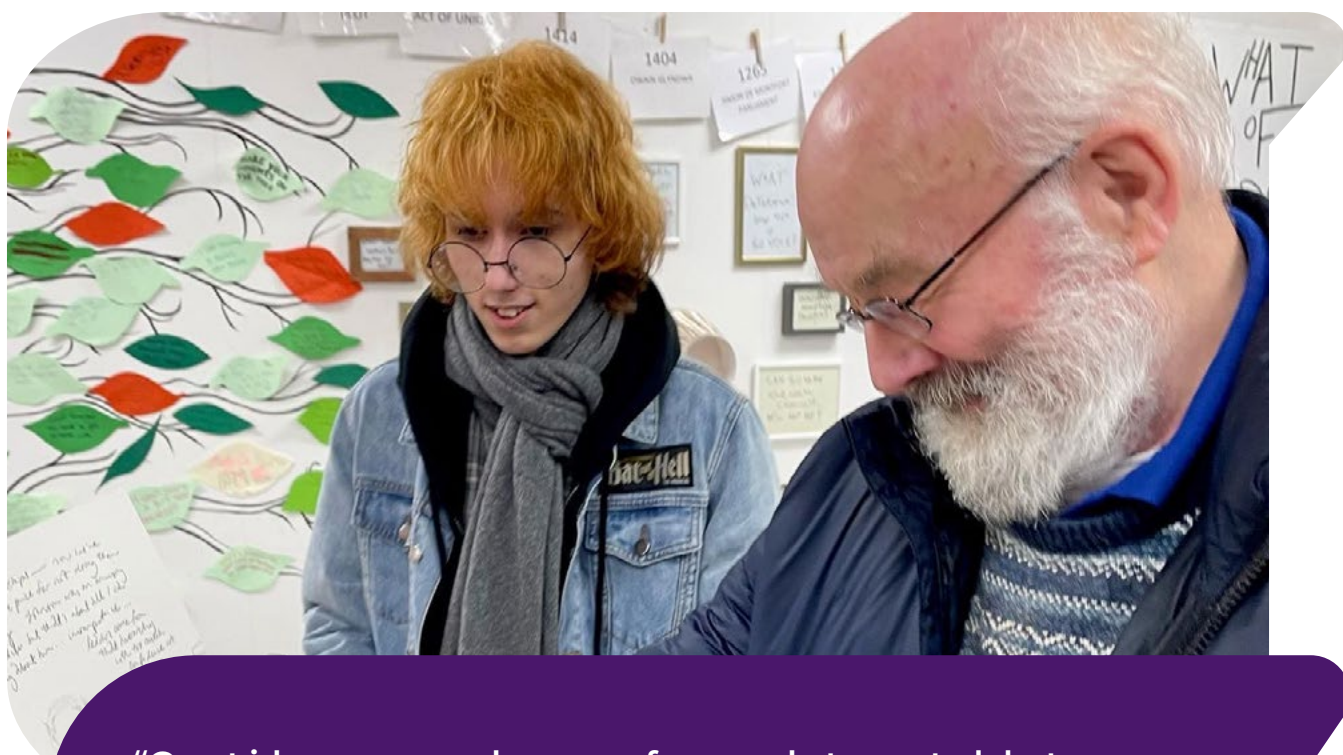
**"Every town and city should have a Talking Shop."**

– Talking Shop visitor, 2019

## Prototype 4

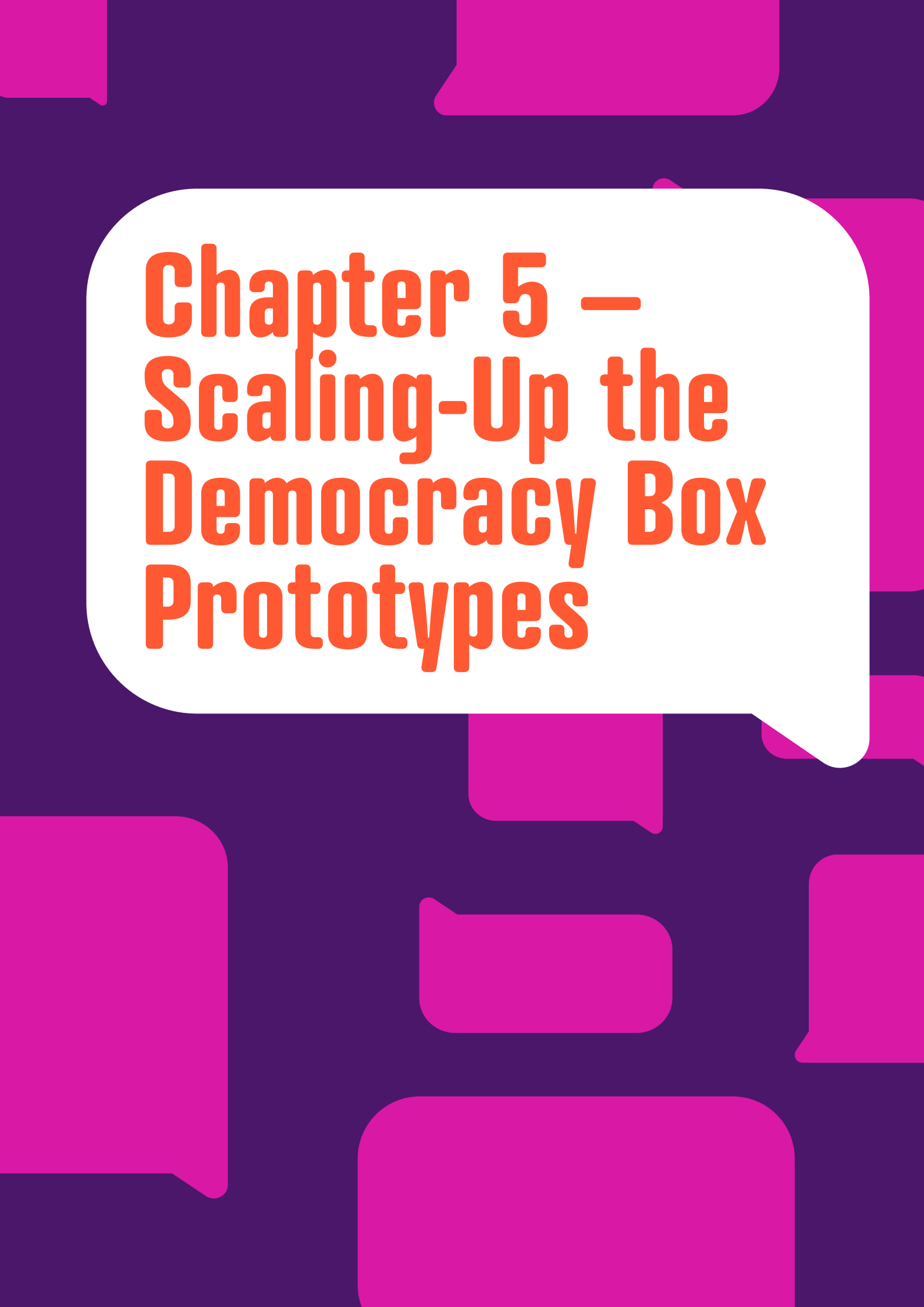
**The Democracy Box Toolkit** is a best practice guide for anyone co-creating and collaborating with young people. This toolkit will enable organisations to place young people at the heart of all work that is created to reach their age range. It will support organisations and individuals, in both the 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 (Hart, UNICEF 1992); The Lundy model of child participation; the ArtWorks Cymru Quality Principles; A Children's Rights Approach; the European Youth Information Charter (ERIYCA); 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 more than 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.



**“Great idea – we need a space for people to vent, debate, discuss, understand and engage.”**

– Talking Shop visitor

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# **Chapter 5 – 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 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 together 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 fixed-term 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.

**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, in collaboration or partnership with 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.

"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

# 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 turn-out 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.

The two key findings of this research are that:

1. the best way to help people of all ages engage and participate in our democracy is to ensure they understand our democracy and know how to influence decisions, policy and legislation, and get their voices heard 365 days a year, every year.
2. 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.



It has been fed back many times by young people that being paid is a game-changer and essential to their feeling that their contribution is valued and taken seriously on a professional level. It provides them with a platform, networks, raised profiles and education, as well as employment and personal development opportunities.

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.

Basic democratic education is the right of every citizen within a democratic society. The solution(s) therefore is the responsibility of the state and needs to be funded by government (both UK and devolved) and implemented by existing independent, non-partisan and publicly funded organisations (for whom democratic education is core to their purpose, mission or charter) with young people aged 16 to 26 as young co-creators at the very heart of the work.

The Democracy Box prototypes have been created, 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 ultimate aim, as outlined in the previous chapter, is for Omidaze to incrementally step away from The Democracy Box and for it to run and be managed by young people in partnership with and under the guardianship of the BBC, the Electoral Commission and possibly more key stakeholder organisations.

**“Being paid as a young co-creator 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.”**

– Young co-creator

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?

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 of Yvonne Murphy/Omidaze Productions 2020.

**“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 Omidaze's Instagram post

# WELCOME TO THE TALKING SHOP

WOULD YOU  
LIKE A CUP OF  
TEA?

[www.omidaze.co.uk](http://www.omidaze.co.uk)  
[www.thedemocracybox.co.uk](http://www.thedemocracybox.co.uk)  
@omidaze  
@thedemocracybox

"EVERY TOWN  
SHOULD HAVE  
A TALKING  
SHOP"

"DYLE BOB  
DREF CAEL  
SIOP SIARAD"



## 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](#)

<https://linktr.ee/TheDemocracyBox>

[Omidaze Productions website](#)

[Information on The Talking Shop](#)

[Information on The Democracy Box](#)

[The Talking Shop 2019 pilot report](#)

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

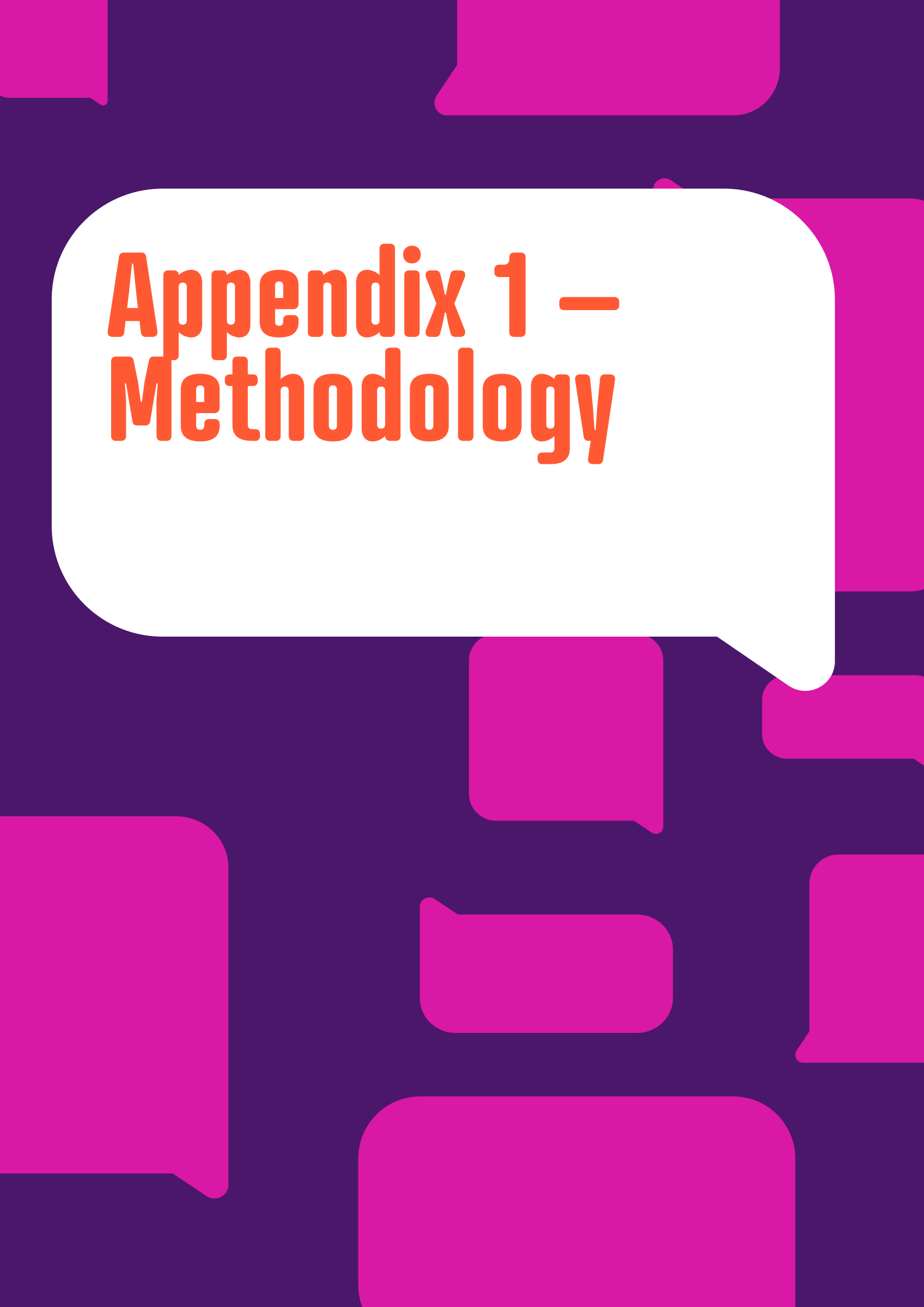
[Thornhill Primary – The Democracy Box Creative Cascade project](#)

[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](#)



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# Appendix 1 – Methodology

Since 2017, thousands of people of all ages, 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:

- 1.** 2017 to 2019 Pre-project research and development, including 'Democracy Explained' workshops to primary and secondary schools and The Talking Shop pilot.
- 2.** 2020 Phase 1: Clwstwr ideas lab and Clwstwr seed funded research and development.

3. 2020 to 2021 Phase 2: Clwstwr-funded, large-scale research and development.
4. 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.

Further details can be found in the [full Democracy Box report](#).

## Pre-Project R&D (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.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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:**

- A public information campaign
- An educational information campaign
- A public information hub
- A toolkit for working with young people as co-creators

## 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

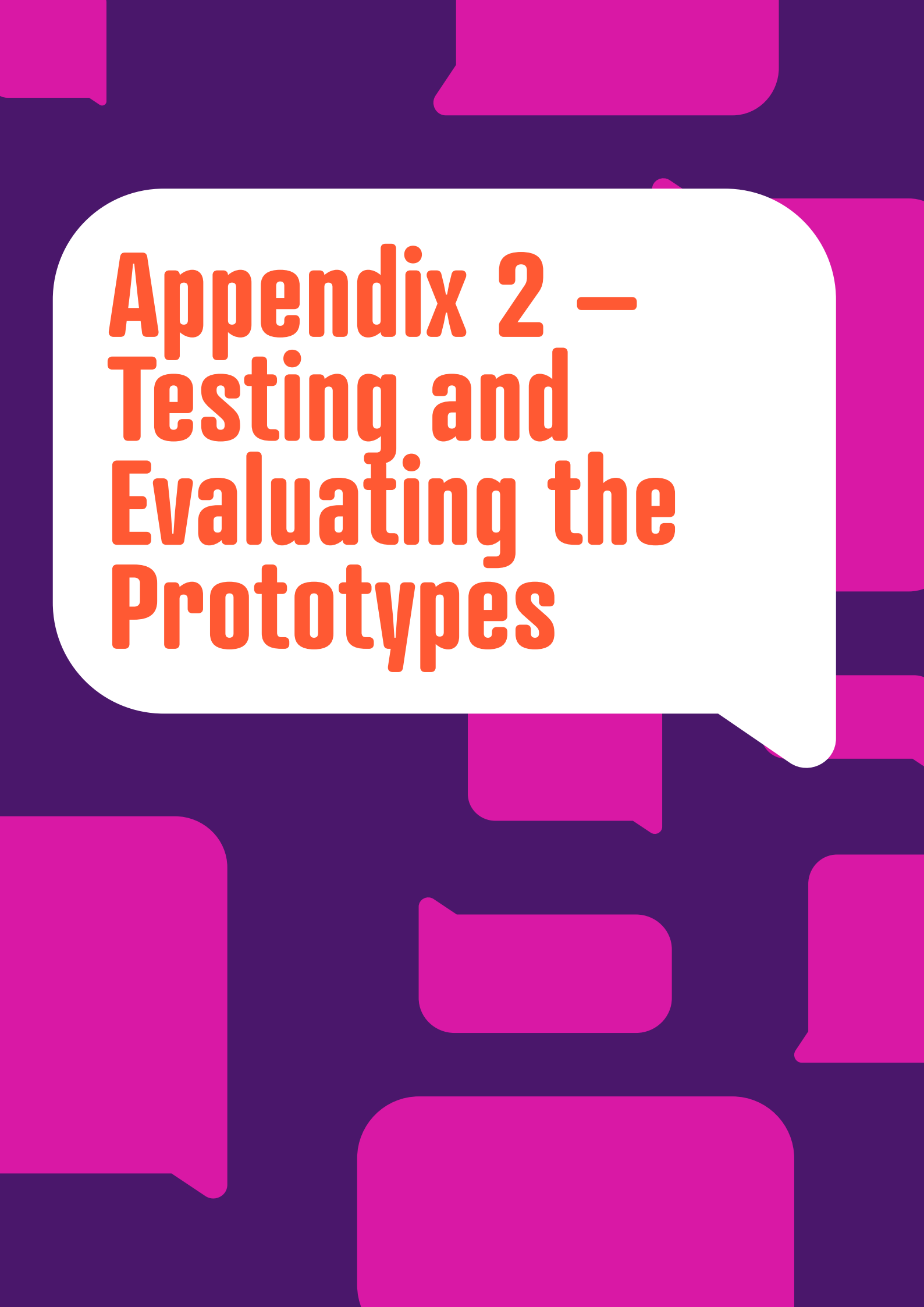
- Prototype development in partnership with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.
- Pilot of The Democracy Box Creative Cascade Programme for Schools in collaboration with Central South Education Consortium in Wales and 15 primary and secondary schools.
- Awarded Electoral Commission Youth Voice 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 with additional funding from the Cares Family/UnLtd 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 City 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; a Democracy Box jingle creation; 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 exploration of a 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.

#### Media coverage:

- BBC Radio Wales – The Idea Debate Live
- 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’
- Wales Arts Review, April 2023

The background is a solid dark purple color. It is decorated with several speech bubbles of different sizes and orientations. Most of these bubbles are a bright pink color, while one large bubble in the upper center is white. The white bubble contains the title text in a bold, orange font. The pink bubbles are scattered around the white bubble, some overlapping it slightly.

# **Appendix 2 – Testing and Evaluating the Prototypes**

All four of the prototypes have been put in front of young people throughout the project. Young people have told us that The Democracy Box prototypes make democracy feel more accessible, and that they feel that they can get involved and make a difference.

Young people have told us The Democracy Box prototypes make them feel more passionate, confident, included, interested, inspired, involved, empowered, educated, positive and less bored by the topic.

Words to describe the Democracy Box have included:

- 'Inclusive'
- 'Non-elitist'
- 'Informative'
- 'Positive'
- 'Approachable'
- 'Powerful'
- 'Important'
- 'Simple and easy to follow'
- 'Interesting'
- 'Fun'
- 'Engaging'.

As well as the young co-creators, Omidaze has been supported in the testing of the prototypes by over 600 young people including school, college and university students, youth groups and focus group participants and thousands of Talking Shop visitors to three Talking Shop trials.

Prototype testing has included:

- **The Democracy Box Creative Cascade pilot programme for schools** in partnership with Central South Education Consortium and 15 secondary and primary schools and 450 pupils
- **The in-person Blaenau Gwent County Council/The Democracy Box introduction to democracy event** with four secondary schools' year 11 students (a large-scale event and follow-up school assemblies)

- **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 over 40 participants aged 16 to 26 born or based in Wales (participants found through open recruitment)
- **Online with Blaenau Gwent Youth Group**
- **Online with students from the University of South Wales**
- **Online with Hub Cymru Africa and Sub-Sahara Advisory Panel (SSAP) youth members**
- **Online with Dr Anwen Elias, Aberystwyth University, and Dr Matthew Wall, Swansea University, as part of their Constitutional Futures project** and young people through open recruitment
- **In person via an installation of The Democracy Box inside Cardiff Council's Child-Friendly Cardiff Pop Up** venue in early 2022
- **Online with Youth Cymru and RecRock** and professional and young creatives
- **In person with Dinas Powys Brownie pack** members aged six to 11
- **In person with Democracy Box young co-creators facilitating events as ambassadors** at Cardiff Metropolitan University, Pembrokeshire College and the Centre for African Entrepreneurship in Swansea
- **In person at Talking Shops trials** held in 2022 and 2023, with more than 8,400 recorded visits to date (Cardiff April to July 2022; Newport April 2022; Merthyr Tydfil October 2022 to February 2023)



