

The Democracy Box Report Highlights



chosen by The Democracy Box young co-creators

The Democracy Box prototypes use creative approaches to democratic deliberation, information, education and conversation.

“ Democracy is a process, not an event

” Democracy Box survey response

The problem

The two main barriers to democratic participation identified through the Democracy Box research are:

1.

A frenzied focus on elections and voting.

2.

A lack of knowledge of, and access to, our democratic systems and structures

The importance of democratic education

Basic democratic education is the right of every citizen within a democratic society.

We need to prioritise democratic education ahead of focussing on voter registration, voter turnout, national conversations and constitutional and electoral reviews and reforms.

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.

Widespread democratic education and information must come before, and underpin, electoral reform.

Key Findings

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.

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

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Cultural Learning Alliance, Imagine Nation
The Case For Cultural Learning

77%

[of people across all ages] don't know who their councillors are or what a councillor does or is responsible for.

More than **91%** of those responding to The Democracy Box survey said that young people should be taught about our democracy in primary and secondary school.

75%

do not understand or only partly understand what devolution is and what is devolved

67%

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

65%

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

39%

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

Young people and democracy

There is a popular misconception that young people are not interested in democratic participation. However, every single young person who has contributed to The Democracy Box, was angry or frustrated that they hadn't been provided with the basic information which would enable them to meaningfully participate.

People (of all ages) are engaged. 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 need to know how their democracy actually works and fits together in order to make their voices heard. This lack of basic information creates an inability to contribute and influence.

Solutions

We must immediately cease to focus all of our energy, resources and media attention on elections and 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.

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

2. One-stop shop democracy hubs both in-person and online

3. Democratic education must be baked into the primary and secondary school curriculums from age 7 to age 16

[The Democracy Box Story of our UK Democracy That Every Citizen Should Know in Seven Short Chapters](#) contains all the foundation knowledge which all citizens need in order to participate in our UK democracy and which can form the basis of all democratic and citizenship education and information

We need to close the feedback loop. For the minority who actually do know how to contact their elected representatives and get no response at the first attempt they will often then give up. If someone writes to one of their elected representative, they want a reply, even if it's a negative one.

Information campaigns run directly by government (of any political party) were deemed not to be suitable, neutral or trustworthy.

Scaling up The Democracy Box prototypes

Participant feedback confirmed a direct correlation between this activity [peer to peer learning] 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.

The platforms that are being currently used [in the Democracy Box public information campaign prototype] 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.

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 and independent and trusted sources of factual, non-partisan information. This report strongly recommends that the Electoral Commission are promoted and funded to be the number one source for democratic information in the UK.

Recommendation 4

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

Recommendation 5

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

Recommendation 6

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

Recommendation 7

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

Recommendation 8

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

Recommendation 9

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

www.writetothem.com

www.theyworkforyou.com

www.whocanivotefor.co.uk

Recommendation 10

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