

# Notes from Workshop 1: Campaign for Deliberative Democracy 17<sup>th</sup> October 2018 The RSA

## OVERVIEW

This roundtable discussion was organised following Matthew Taylor's chief executive lecture in July 2018 at RSA House. In the speech he set out the case for a step-change in the use of deliberative democracy in the UK.

To achieve these goals, Involve and the RSA have teamed up to build a broad-based campaign for deliberative democracy in the UK. This workshop is an integral part of the process to build consensus of what sort of campaign, what policy asks and what tactics might be deployed in order to increase the visibility and the quality of deliberative approaches. We will need to build a strong coalition which pushes deliberative democracy up the public policy agenda in the UK. Involvement of all attendees of these are critical to achieve this.

Link to project page for further information: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/deliberative-democracy>

The workshop participants were introduced to the aims of the discussions, and Julie Mellor (Involve), Tim Hughes (Involve), Ed Cox (RSA) and Matthew Taylor (RSA) shared their thoughts on the current state of deliberative democracy in the UK today.

## SUMMARY OF OPENING REMARKS

Julie Mellor:

- We have a window out of a crisis and have an opportunity to take a big step forward
- We need a functioning politics where politicians have legitimacy for making difficult decisions because the public have been engaged in key issues.
- In 20 years' time I 'have a dream' that citizens juries will become as normal as doing jury service.

Tim Hughes:

- Focus of Involve's vision for democracy is around three values which we think are missing in our politics: openness, which includes transparency and being able to understand decisions that are being made and who is making them; participation, which means people have an opportunity to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives; deliberation, which is about the balancing and weighting up of options.
- Involve has three positions on how change needs to happen: 1) we need more demonstrations and experimentations of how deliberation creates better decisions and improved democracy 2) we need new institutions which scale up and normalise these

experiments 3) then we need new norms and narratives about how we practice democracy in the UK in order to keep these practices sustainable and institutionalised.

- Deliberation is not about one-off interventions, it is about a whole culture and systems. A political system can be 'more' or 'less' deliberative.

Ed Cox:

- The RSA has long-standing commitment and concern for democracy and strengthening institutions. Its podcast, blogs, research and events have consistently inspired and challenged us in terms of democracy and deliberation specifically
- Rather than race in and design a campaign that we engineer in RSA House we wanted, in a deliberative way, to develop a coalition that will work together to move forward an agenda, Involve is huge part of this.
- It's not just the RSA and Involve, we are conscious that if we develop a coalition together that we can all get behind a joint up campaign

Matthew Taylor:

- There is a groundswell on interest surrounding the current crisis of Liberal democracy a focus on economic and social issues and questions about whether we have become complacent about the resilience of liberal democracy and the quality of its ideas. Recent commentary and analysis found in Fukuyama's 'Identity'; Will Davis' 'Nervous States'; Yascha Mounk's 'The People vs. Democracy' are just a few examples of this continued interest.
- Deliberative democracy can be a "gateway reform" for wider democratic renewal. Citizen deliberation can unlock harder more structural changes i.e. constitutional reform.
- RSA is 'jumping on the bus that Involve have been driving' for a long time in terms of deliberative democracy and is grateful for the generosity of spirit that underpins the collaboration on the campaign.
- Link to Matthew Taylor's 2018 Chief Executive lecture 'What Democracy Needs Now': <https://www.thersa.org/events/2018/07/what-democracy-needs-now>

The workshop asked participants to consider two questions – why deliberative democracy is important, and what are the barriers to deliberative democracy. Below, we outline the outcomes of these discussions.

P.T.O.

## 1. WHY IS DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IMPORTANT?

In the first session of the workshop, participants were asked to consider the question: “why is deliberative democracy important”. Their responses can be grouped into seven broad themes:

Note: **Highlighted text** indicates the ideas that participants felt are most important.

### THEME ONE: CRITIQUES OF THE STATUS QUO

- **Democracy in its current form is not working well**  
eg “Current system isn’t working”  
eg “Addressing institutional gap”  
eg “Poor quality of political debate, driven by media”  
eg “Section of population completely disengaged/excluded”  
eg “Decision makers don’t feel they understand the public (and vice versa)”  
eg “Brexit conversation – need to find ways of navigating complexity with the public”  
eg “Current system promises to the public that I will take away complexity (not sustainable)”

### THEME TWO: IMPROVING DECISION-MAKING

- **Deliberative democracy can tackle difficult issues, including by opening up political space for politicians to act**  
eg “Ability to tackle too difficult box issues/issues politicians can’t touch”  
eg “Giving space for politicians to change mind. Move with public judgement/not opinion”
- **It creates better decisions**  
eg “Good-quality decision making”  
eg “it could be you – not vested interests, public spirited”  
eg “lived experience”

- **It is a more considered form of decision-making**  
eg “consideration vs ideological runaways”  
eg “negotiating/arriving at potential solutions”  
eg “addressing populism (consideration)”
- **It can help ensure a focus on the long-term as well as the short-term**  
eg “longer term decisions need to be considered as well as short term decisions”  
eg “capacity to respond to long term issues”
- **People as a resource**  
eg “people are a resource to draw upon – best players on the pitch”

### THEME THREE: INCLUSIVITY AND EQUALITY

- **Deliberative democracy is a more inclusive**  
eg “Inclusive decision making – greater equality of power/voice”  
eg “not a self-selected group”  
eg “when done well can enable participation of minorities”  
eg “bring together different identities”

### THEME FOUR: SOCIETAL BENEFITS

- **In a polarised society, deliberative democracy can bridge divides**  
eg “Bridge polarisation and develop a shared language”

eg “the EU ref: creating an environment where shared understanding is possible (as opposed to polarisation). There are no victories, just trade offs”

- **It produces a better-quality public discourse**  
eg “quality of public discourse”  
eg “mutual political education”  
eg “tackle public prejudices”  
eg “engaging public with complexity”
- **Can provide a model for society at large**  
eg “modelling for other areas of society”  
eg “building awareness of deliberation as key”

#### THEME FIVE: PUBLIC FEELING ABOUT POLITICS

- **Deliberative democracy can restore legitimacy and trust in the democratic system**  
eg “Feeling that decisions are fair and legitimate, and achieving buy-in”  
eg “Greater trust”  
eg “helps strengthen legitimacy of decision making in a more tangible way”

P.T.O.

- **It gives the public a greater sense of ownership in decision making**  
eg “Can give greater ownership over an issue - it could be you, perhaps greater sense of control”

#### THEME SIX: GATEWAY REFORM

- **Deliberative democratic processes can be a gateway to further democratic reform**  
eg “Gateway reform for wider democratic reform”

#### THEME SEVEN: BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

- **Positive impact on participants**  
eg “Experience of deliberation matters for people – can be transformative”

#### OTHER

“Lots of evidence of its success where tried (properly)”

“Improved public moral health”

It was also noted that the **combination of benefits** that deliberative democracy brings is unique and important.

## 2. WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY?

In the second session of the workshop, participants were asked to consider what the barriers might be to achieving deliberative democracy. Their responses are grouped into six broad themes:

Note: **Highlighted text** indicates the ideas that participants felt to be most important.

### THEME ONE: DECISION-MAKER BUY IN

- **Failure to commission**  
*Eg "Lack of commissioning/drive from senior decision makers"*  
*Eg "Not commissioned/driven by right people (decision makers)"*  
*Eg "Commissioning by politicians"*  
*Eg "Getting into right stage in decision making process"*
- **Political will**  
*Eg "Decision maker ignorance (wilful?)"*  
*Eg "Political apathy amongst those who do believe to take it forward"*  
*Eg "Kicking issues down the road"*  
*Eg "The status quo"*
- **Reluctance to cede power**  
*Eg "Will government cede power?"*  
*Eg "Power holders reluctant to give power away"*
- **Lack of control**  
*Eg "Fear of 'wrong answer'"*  
*Eg "Can't control answer"*
- **Need for cross party support**  
*Eg "Cross party support (not political football)"*
- **Opposition by vested interests**  
*Eg "Opposition by vested interests/lobby groups"*  
*Eg "Lobbying by vested interests"*

- **Lack of clarity and understanding of what deliberative democracy means and how it operates**

*Eg "Lack of clarity of advisory nature"*  
*Eg "Lack of understanding and scepticism goes with that (decision makers and public)"*  
*Eg "Ignorance -decision makers, especially parliamentarians, public – therefore prejudice and distrust (of proponents"*  
*Eg "Unfamiliarity"*

- **Concerns about the process**

*Eg "Will it exacerbate divides?"*  
*Eg "People feel they cannot do it – time, competence"*

### THEME TWO: (PERCEIVED) LIMITATIONS OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

- **Representation and legitimacy**  
*Eg "Legitimacy (perhaps based on electoral perceptions) – direct democracy trumps it"*  
*Eg "How represents whole population"*  
*Eg "Ensuring inclusiveness"*  
*Eg "Scepticism about representativeness"*  
*Eg "To pro-social/liberal people tend to self select for participation in these processes"*  
*Eg Compared to quantitative methods*
- **Scalability of deliberative methods**  
*Eg "Scalability to create a culture (link to cost)"*  
*Eg "How to permeate across systems. Easier options available"*

- **(Potential) Lack of impact on public**  
Eg “One off fleeting engagement (won’t change how people feel) limited number taking part”  
Eg “One off fleeting. Small number of participants”
- **Cost**  
Eg “Cost”  
Eg “Relatively expensive/culture of ‘free democracy’”
- **Damage when it’s done badly**  
Eg “Doing badly is worse than not doing it at all”
- **News value and media perceptions**  
Eg “Daily mail/media – low news value – need to think about making it interesting”  
Eg “Lack of media interest, news value and positivity”  
Eg “Communication – not interested in the process”
- **Other**  
Eg “Formulating meaningful/useful question”  
Eg “Danger we assume all people need is evidence and rationality”

### THEME THREE: ISSUES WITHIN THE DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY SECTOR

- **Practitioners are precious about the process**  
Eg “Practitioners too precious about process”  
Eg “Technocratic nature of deliberative democracy and infighting about process detail”  
Eg “Focus on process not values and norms”

- **Need to professionalise practitioners, facilitators etc**  
Eg “Professionalising the skillset and expanding it”

### THEME FOUR: (CONCERNS ABOUT) LACK OF PUBLIC SUPPORT

- **Consultation fatigue**  
Eg “Apathy caused by consultation fatigue”
- **Lack of trust in process**  
Eg “People won’t trust the process – suspicion of bias”  
Eg “People who do not take part won’t trust the process (links to how reported)”
- **Lack of understanding**  
Eg “Lack of understanding and scepticism goes with that (decision makers and public)”

### THEME FIVE: RELEVANCE

- **Is deliberation on the important issues?**  
Eg “Not on critical issues of the day”  
Eg “Not on the major questions? Critical issues of the day”
- **Lack of impact**  
Eg “Not just symbolic”

### THEME: LACK OF EVIDENCE

- Eg “Lack of evidence to back up claims of benefits including ultimate outcomes”

### THEME SEVEN: STATUS QUO

- Eg “Disruption of status quo/another layer of bureaucracy”

### OTHER

- Eg “Cynicism fuelled by negative media

## NEXT STEPS

Thank you for your involvement in the first workshop.

RSA and Involve are developing a campaign for deliberative democracy directly through the insight generated through these series of workshops convened between October and December 2018. These discussions with key stakeholders and experts in democratic reform will be pivotal in shaping the nature and form of the campaign in 2019.

Any comments and queries on this note please contact [tom.harrison@rsa.org.uk](mailto:tom.harrison@rsa.org.uk)

## REMINDER

Campaign for deliberative democracy workshop 2

Date: November 7th 2018

Venue: Romney Room, RSA House

Campaign for deliberative democracy workshop 3

Date: December 6th 2018

Please RSVP to [tom.harrison@rsa.org.uk](mailto:tom.harrison@rsa.org.uk)