

## Crowdsourcing the UK Constitution



The **Institute of Public Affairs** (IPA) at LSE is crowdsourcing a new written codified constitution for the UK. Using an innovative online platform, **constitutionuk.com**, the IPA is asking the British public for their ideas, comments, suggestions and votes on what should be included in a new constitution for the UK. This is the first time that such a large scale crowdsourcing initiative has been undertaken in the field of constitutional law in the UK.

ConstitutionUK was launched at LSE in September 2013. Over the past two years, the team has travelled across the UK, engaging with people from all walks of life to hear what they have to say about how our country should be governed. Phase I of the project focused on live events with visits to regional centres such as Derby and Glasgow. One of the highlights of our project was the **Constitutional Carnival** held at LSE last summer. The Carnival created a public space where constitutional issues could be explored, discussed and debated in an informal setting.

In January 2015 phase II of the ConstitutionUK project was launched at LSE. This phase, '**Hacking the UK constitution**', uses an online platform to crowdsource a new constitution for the UK. At **constitutionuk.com**, **10 topics** have been laid down for the public to debate and discuss. These include broad constitutional questions such as: Is there still a place for the British monarchy in 2015? What rights should citizens have and should those rights be protected in the constitution? Should we remain part of the EU? What are British values and should they be written down in a constitution? The public are being asked to generate ideas; to comment, debate and vote on these issues and more which will feed into a new constitutional text for the UK.

Debate on the platform is driven by educational videos, designed to provide a basic introduction to some of the most complex elements of constitutional law. These online resources have been complemented by a series of live debates and discussions in Cambridge, Nottingham, Liverpool and Portsmouth. Videos of these live events are also available at **constitutionuk.com** and are designed to feed into the online debates. The online discussions and debates are moderated by a group of 20 facilitators who respond to ideas, questions and comments generated by 'the crowd'.

The 'ideation' phase of the online element of the project will remain open until 5 April. After this date, the ideas and suggestions generated on the online platform will move to a refining stage where the

project team at LSE, together with topic facilitators and legal experts, will moderate the online community as they move to format the ideas into coherent clauses to be used in drafting a constitutional text. The refining stage will culminate in a constitutional convention which will be held at LSE on 22 April. The top 20 participants on the online platform will be invited to represent 'the crowd' at the convention. Using the content from the online platform the top 20 participants, together with constitutional experts, will draft a new constitution for the UK.

June 2015 will mark the 800th anniversary of one of our foundational constitutional texts: Magna Carta. Eight hundred years after King John laid down the Grand Charter, it is critical that we not only celebrate this document but also reassess its legacy, contemporary significance and future prospects. ConstitutionUK's crowdsourcing process affords us a useful window into just such critical engagement.

Less than six months ago, **1.6 million UK citizens** (45% of the people who voted in the Scottish referendum) voted for independence from the UK. The aftermath of the Scottish referendum provides further cause for us to examine our constitutional arrangements. The critical questions thrown up by that referendum, questions about devolution, regional autonomy, political economy, the welfare state etc. are germane to our constitutional arrangements and merit scrutiny. The people of Scotland have had the opportunity to discuss and debate these issues over the course of the last number of years. It is important that people across the UK be afforded the same opportunity.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, 2015 is election year. Amidst widespread political discontent and voter apathy, it is important to re-examine the nature of our political system; how it works and whether it needs radical transformation. This process should not be reserved for the elites; for politicians, lawyers and constitutional experts. Scrutiny of our political and constitutional structures should be an open process where citizens, regardless of their expertise, have their say on our system of governance and government.

**Constitutionuk.com** will remain open until 22 April so get online, explore the debates, have your say and spread the word!

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This post originally appeared, on the **UK Constitutional Law Association Blog**. This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of ConstitutionUK, nor of the London School of Economics.

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