

# TOWARDS INNOVATION IN ONLINE PUBLIC DELIBERATION

Inspiration from a workshop convened  
by Ipsos MORI and Engage Britain

Authors: Sarah Castell and Chloe Juliette



GAME CHANGERS



# About the organisations behind the workshop initiative

## Engage Britain

Engage Britain is a new charity focused on bringing people together from across the country to find ways forward on some of the biggest challenges we face. It will put people at the heart of policy development, ensuring that those who are affected by policies can contribute their knowledge and experiences to their creation. Engage Britain will work with people with different views and experiences so they can use these differences to generate ideas that will create positive change. These ideas will then be tested, discussed and re-tested, until everyone is confident they will make a difference and lead to imaginative, practical and radical answers to the problems our country faces.

## Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI, part of the international Ipsos group, is a leading United Kingdom research company with global reach and a strong emphasis on quality and service. Our Social Research Institute (SRI), the leader in public sector research, helps policy and decision makers understand what works. In our Dialogue Centre we bring together decision makers, experts, wider stakeholder groups and publics to explore the complex policy challenges of the future.

## For further information contact

### **Sarah Castell**

Head of Futures, Ipsos MORI

3 Thomas More Square  
London E1W 1YW - UK

Phone: +442073463

Mobile: +447968547712

[sarah.castell@ipsos.com](mailto:sarah.castell@ipsos.com)



# Summary

**This report includes findings from a workshop. In the workshop, we discussed practical ideas to realise the potential of existing technology to improve public deliberations on big policy challenges.**

## **What we did**

Ipsos MORI and Engage Britain convened a forum together on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, in the middle of lockdown. Working online was at the forefront of our minds, and we wanted to find ways to take advantage of the disruptions of Covid-19 to innovate in our practice of **online public engagement on the big policy challenges of our times**. There are many examples of innovation in online public engagement under way already; and more emerge every day. We want to play our part in building on what's been done, finding and supporting practitioners, and continuing to help innovation flourish.

At the session, we brought together experts in gaming, communications and entertainment, public engagement funders and practitioners, futurists and grass-roots digital democracy activists. We put to the group one overarching question - **“What is the best, innovative, use of existing technology and user experience (UX) insights to facilitate public conversations about our big policy challenges?”**

Ipsos MORI shared some best practice ideas upfront. Inspired by these, the workshop groups created their own blueprints for further innovation. In this report Ipsos MORI's Trends and Futures team builds on the ideas from the conversation to present ideas for innovation, or extended practice, in online deliberation. While most of these ideas are already present in best practice, we would recommend further piloting, evaluating and stretching of some ideas.

## Success factors for scope, depth and quality in online deliberation

We discussed how to meet three challenges in online deliberation; scope, depth and quality. The discussion was designed to generate as many ideas as possible, rather than to achieve consensus. Even so, there were high levels of agreement on how online public engagement could best meet these challenges.

Ipsos posited that the **online world has unique strengths**. Participants agreed that we need to break deliberative processes down to their component parts, agree which aspects will be less effective if undertaken online, and explore which could actually be *improved* by taking place digitally.

For example, capturing data online could be particularly effective in dealing with large numbers of people, or online forums can handle great numbers of people coming through asynchronously. Online settings may provide some scaffolding for consensus building among large groups. On the other hand, online settings may be less well adapted to sustained, person-to-person dialogue in depth. The challenges of engaging online for many groups are well documented (for example some low-income groups do not have access). However, other groups could potentially find it **easier** to engage online than in face to face settings (for example those with some types of physical or mental health challenges); and the online world can bring together groups across geographies more cost-effectively than face to face engagements can. In summary, the online world is not the poor relation of offline deliberation; rather, a different setting with unique benefits and drawbacks.

Participants emphasised the need to start from **user need from the online intervention**, once the decision has been taken to use an online approach. Participants considered **design thinking** to be vital and supported efforts such as the Design Council's work on digital community engagement. They wanted interfaces to be optimised for best engagement, and also felt that they should be designed to support participants gaining broader skills and experiences simply from engaging with the process.

Across the group, some practitioners and funders pointed out that those commissioning online deliberations do not yet have a wide enough **range of evidence** of how online approaches can work. Ipsos MORI recommends that practitioners, including ourselves, should work together as a community to achieve several outcomes.

- **Advocate:** the **benefits of engaging online** (for example, designing and recommending methods to funders) where the benefits can be clearly established and evidenced.
- **Pilot:** try out more **ideas on the ground** in the UK (for example, trying AI-driven facilitation in different settings).
- **Evaluate:** ideas which are currently being used (for example, comparing crowdsourced ideas to those which are not crowdsourced).
- **Stretch:** current good practice in the online world into new settings, so that we can trial, explore, "fail fast" and see what works (for example building different kinds of communities or games and exploring virality).

Taking forward these thoughts from the June workshop, Ipsos MORI recommends five areas where such piloting, evaluating and stretching could take place. We know we are not the only ones interested in and working in these areas. We have made a commitment to take these ideas forward and would warmly welcome discussion from other interested groups looking in the same direction.

## Online engagement ideas building on the unique strengths of the online world

What is a unique strength of the online world (which the offline world doesn't have)?	What is the idea which could be trialled, stretched or further evaluated?
Idea generation and qualitative analysis at scale, in particular tracking how ideas move through a population	<p>Crowdsourcing the themes for deliberations.</p> <p>Crowdsourcing the mechanisms for deliberation.</p>
Collating mass analysis of a very wide range of generated knowledge	<p>Upskill peer-led facilitation, possibly aided by AI facilitation.</p> <p>Coordinate different platforms to gather a range of knowledge and build knowledge at scale.</p> <p>Peer-produce recommendations using collaborative documents and tools.</p>
Access to a vast, pre-existing data set of spontaneous views about issues (in social media)	<p>Mapping issues as they are currently discussed in unmediated, spontaneous settings online – and observing the impact of wider culture and other information sources on groups.</p> <p>Develop tools to scrape publicly available information and analyse thematic content in social media.</p> <p>Use non-traditional platforms for recruitment or as venues for deliberation (games or social media).</p>
Gamification and interactivity is possible both at scale and for individuals	Gamified deliberation, designed to create trade off exercises, and with potential to go viral rather than be confined to a recruited public.
Worldbuilding and immersive experiences are powerful and scalable	Create partnerships between storytellers and deliberative practitioners, so that we can create online “worlds of the future” which publics can explore. To support discussions of decisions which need to be made, we can bring to life the potential results of different decisions, and create online worlds in which to immerse our participants. This might help us all find new ways to view the challenges of today.





# Background

## Why talk about innovation in online engagement now?

In recent years, a range of deliberative and dialogic methods of public engagement have been used extensively to inform and influence policymaking and strategy. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck in early 2020 it transformed how we live our lives and accelerated change, which meant canvassing the views of citizens on complex issues became even more important. However, in a time of social distancing, in-depth and complex deliberation also became more difficult. As a result, many public deliberations moved online.

The French Citizens' Convention on Climate<sup>1</sup> and the UK Climate Assembly<sup>2</sup> successfully transitioned, confirming that online approaches could yield rich and useful findings. Meanwhile, other deliberative dialogues were designed, or redesigned, with an online-first approach. Rapid dialogues on Covid-19 related subjects<sup>3</sup>, longer-term participatory futures projects<sup>4</sup>, and citizens' assemblies<sup>5</sup>, form a growing body of work. These deliberations gave the sector many learnings on the techniques which worked well in the online environment, and on the best ways to recast and improve others. These projects also provide examples of ways to bring less digitally literate groups into the process, for example including individual diaries and journals, in-depth interviewing, asynchronous community deliberations, video ethnographies, and other methods, so that the voices of diverse groups with particular needs can be heard in the ways that best suit them.

During the lockdown, practitioners crystallised best practice and new thinking in methods and theory of online deliberation, piloting and drawing together expertise. Involve<sup>6</sup>, Bang the Table/Traverse/Ada Lovelace Institute<sup>7</sup> and Sciencewise<sup>8</sup>, have all contributed.

Ipsos MORI wanted to add to this growing body of thought leadership by considering **what more could be done with the online technologies at our disposal**.

To do this, we wanted to bring public engagement practitioners and stakeholders together to ideate with a **wider range of experts who might bring a broader knowledge of the online world**, including representatives from social media and communications, gaming, design, entertainment and activism. We hoped to infuse our own experience with some new and challenging ideas about how the online world worked, and inspiration for what could come next in the world of online engagement.

1 <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/en/>

2 <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/project-update/assembly-members-gather-online-final-climate-assembly-uk-weekend>

3 Such as Ipsos' work on winter preparedness for the Academy of Medical Sciences, <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/public-dialogue-covid-19-winter-preparedness> and the Ada Lovelace Institute's rapid dialogue on Covid-19 exit strategies with Traverse <https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/reports/lockdowndebate-learning-rapid-online-deliberation>

4 Such as Ipsos MORI's current participatory futures project for the Royal Society on the future of landscape.

5 <https://new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/climate-change/brighton-hove-climate-assembly>

6 <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/news/deliberative-democracy-age-covid-19> ; <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/project-update/reflecting-reflections-exploring-participant-thoughts-online>

7 <https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/a-rapid-online-deliberation-on-covid-19-technologies-building-public-confidence-and-trust/>

8 <https://sciencewise.org.uk/2020/06/dialogue-in-the-time-of-distancing/>



## What did we do?

Partnering with Engage Britain, on 2nd June 2020 we held an online workshop with 24 participants from the organisations listed (below).

Our overarching question for our expert team was **“what is the best, innovative use of existing technology and user experience (UX) insights to facilitate public conversations about our big policy challenges?”**



The participants worked in groups on Miro and Zoom to complete two tasks:-

- Explore how tools and approaches for online deliberation could achieve scale, depth and quality of deliberation in the future, in a way that inspires participants to get, and stay, involved.
- Form clear ideas that can be trialled now, that rely on existing technology, and clarify their potential benefits and limitations – ideally, with some commitment to take these ideas forward.

After the session the Ipsos team worked to develop ideas and explore what was already out there in terms of best practice. Now, in autumn of 2020, the “low touch” economy looks likely to stay for the medium term, making this report timely. The lockdown forced us to fast-track new approaches; it is now vital to embed the learnings of the ongoing online public engagement, and continue to innovate, to make sure even more citizens can be reached online.

This report describes what emerged from the sessions, along with Ipsos MORI’s subsequent thinking and builds on the participants’ ideas.

# Green Team



Stickies bank

You're planning to engage the public to understand their priorities and views on trade-offs around education post-covid. Specifically, you plan to deliberate on equality of education opportunities, public views of the future of education, and the personal safety of students and teachers.

Your heavily digital engagement strategy must:

- Bring in participants at mass scale (1000s)
- Retain active participation over several days/weekends over the course of three months
- Only use technology that is already available.

The final output of the process should:

- Detail peoples' initial views, how people reached their considered views and what arguments are most important to them (and why)

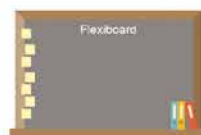
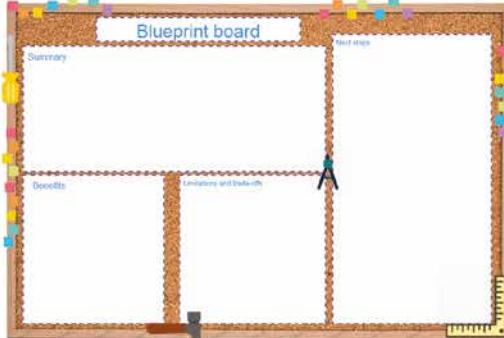
Elements of dialogue:


1. Facilitation
2. Learning
3. Collaboration

Considerations:

1. Scale of deliberation
2. Depth and quality of engagement
3. Gaining and retaining participation

Stickies bank



A close-up photograph of an elderly man with a balding head and wrinkled skin, looking down at a white smartphone he is holding with both hands. He is wearing a blue and white striped collared shirt under a dark brown sweater. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# **Success factors for scope, depth and quality in online deliberation**



Because of the diverse backgrounds of our expert group, we spent some fruitful time in the session getting up to speed on some of the principles of public engagement. Ipsos MORI provided a pre-read, and participants from outside the worlds of public engagement needed to become familiar with the core principles behind deliberation in general, and some of the attributes of deliberative public engagement in particular.

This reflection was useful, as it helped us all recognise that online methods would not necessarily be able to achieve all the ends of face to face ones. Some participants were keen to emphasise that online methods would still need to meet the criteria of deliberative interventions in general, for example, sustained engagement between different types of people, or collective recommendations coproduced by participants. There was not seen to be one approach which could do all this – rather, there was a need for a range of different techniques which would be applied to different projects. In the case of new approaches, practitioners will need to be very clear about what they can and can't do.

## Play to the unique strengths of the online world

Ipsos started from the premise that the **online world has unique strengths**. The group agreed that we need to be mindful of aspects of a face-to-face deliberative process which may be lost online, but also work with the new aspects which can be gained online. Sometimes, these new aspects can give us more than we could get from face to face approaches.

The groups felt that these strengths included: idea generation and crowdsourcing; bringing people together across geographies; creating stories and narratives; gamification and new ways of bringing participatory, experiential immersions to publics; generating recommendations through consensus; and capturing a large number of individual trajectories, including an individual's changing views through a process.

The **challenges** of using online platforms to deliver deliberation include how best to ensure access and support diverse groups in an environment where they might not naturally interact; plus, how to support engagement with high quality evidence, whilst making the evidence relevant to people who may feel distant from it. Expert engagement practitioners underlined that online engagement would always need to be blended with face-to-face engagement in order to achieve good outcomes in these areas.

I think there can be ways of making online more social but then I often get caught in conversations about the relative merits of trying to replicate F2F experiences online – interested to hear others' reflections on this

”

## Once online methods are selected, focus on how to motivate, engage, and reward participants

Participants suggested that the technology needed for at-scale online deliberation largely exists, and so the design focus for digital engagements should be on how exactly it is used, how to create the best user experience and how to consolidate engagement. Whatever industries our participants worked in, they focused at first on how to achieve deliberation through 'human' rather than 'tech' solutions. Different tech solutions need trialling; different interfaces and designs will work best for different objectives – but design thinking from the start is vital.

Participants stressed that any effective public engagement will need to demonstrate the value of the process. At best, engagement motivates people through giving them a voice and asking them to contribute to influencing policy. The experts in our groups felt that if we are working online, we need to go further. In the online space participants are alone, not in a group, and need to be motivated all the way through their interaction with the interfaces they engage with and by the process itself. Creating a process where, for example, participants are expected to work through written materials, feed back online, and then incentivised financially to participate at the end will not be enough.

Our wider work in Trends at Ipsos MORI would support this. Our work in “liquid expectations”<sup>9</sup> of brands and services suggests that consumers may have expectations that online interfaces across sectors will all naturally meet the high standards of usability, entertainment and interoperability they see in the most high-end digital service providers. This sets a high standard for online deliberation, where interfaces have historically needed to meet tight budgets as well as stringent data protection requirements.

Teams in this workshop had two concrete ideas for success in this area:

- Commissioners should include design thinking and behavioural science in the design of online dialogue, to optimise the engagement of online interfaces;
- The engagement which is designed should include ways for participants to gain broader skills and experiences which would benefit them in the longer term, for example building capacity in communities for future self-organised engagement.

What’s the benefit for me?  
You have to give participants  
something back

”

We target and empower community leaders with resources, training,  
a feedback loop in the way social media is used

”

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2017-11/great-expectations-are-service-expectations-really-rising-2017\\_0.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2017-11/great-expectations-are-service-expectations-really-rising-2017_0.pdf)



## Work hard on evidencing the benefits of what's already happening, and stretching and piloting new ideas

Across the group, many practitioners and funders pointed out that those commissioning online deliberations do not yet have hard evidence of how (some) online approaches can work. Through 2020, this body of evidence has been growing fast, but more piloting and expansion of these methods is still needed to create a wider suite of evidence-based tools for online engagement. Ipsos MORI recommends that practitioners, including ourselves, should work together as a community to advocate the benefits of engaging online. To be convincing, we will need to demonstrate any benefits.

Perhaps we need to do some analytical work, breaking down deliberative processes into component parts and thinking carefully about how they might be undertaken digitally and what sort of platforms can support that work - my sense is we will need to blend

”

A photograph of two women with curly hair, wearing black long-sleeved shirts and black pants, standing in a server room. They are both looking down at white tablets they are holding. The woman on the left is wearing a shirt with 'AMERICAN' printed on it, and the woman on the right is wearing a shirt with 'KARMA' printed on it. They are standing in front of a glass partition that reflects the server racks and blue lighting. The server racks are filled with various electronic components and have blue cables hanging from them. The floor is a dark grey carpet. The overall lighting is dim, with blue light emanating from the server racks and white light from the ceiling fixtures.

**Innovation ideas  
building on the  
unique capacities  
of the online world**

Focusing on what the online world can do uniquely well, and inspired by and building on the June workshop, Ipsos MORI recommends five areas where stretching, piloting, evaluating and “failing fast” should be prioritised.

Many practitioners, in our workshops and beyond, are already using and working with many of these ideas, we do not take credit for them ourselves. We have referenced examples of where similar ideas are being used to give a few examples. Some of these were generated at the workshop and some as examples for discussion by Ipsos MORI. These are not exhaustive; we know that there are many existing case studies and that participants at this workshop, and others working in this space are involved with many different new opportunities. We simply hope that by collating some ideas we can create a head of steam behind the work and encourage other bodies to get involved.



## A) Crowdsource themes and mechanisms for deliberation

**What is the unique online capacity?** Idea generation, filtering and prioritisation at scale to map out a wide range of views efficiently, plus qualitative analytic capability.

**What are the ideas?** One of our participant groups suggested more deliberations should include large scale crowdsourced ideation to frame the issues and also to create a more democratic approach to designing the mechanisms for deliberation. This would demand a careful deploying of open source engagement tools to enable thousands of people to shape agendas. This aspect of deliberation does not necessarily meet the requirement to reflect a balanced diversity of views from across society – but participants felt this could be included at other stages in a project.

**Where is this already being done?** There are a range of global examples especially in open government, for example crowdsourced ideas for road traffic laws in Finland. Engage Britain worked with the wiki-survey tool Polis to crowdsource what people felt were the biggest challenges facing the UK, and have identified where the areas of most contention and agreement lie<sup>10</sup>.

**What could be trialled or stretched?** Evaluate crowdsourced themes used in practice as part of a broader more formal deliberative process; potentially comparing this approach with other ways of generating themes (From experts? From policymakers themselves?)

<sup>10</sup> <https://engagebritain.org/your-opinion/results/>

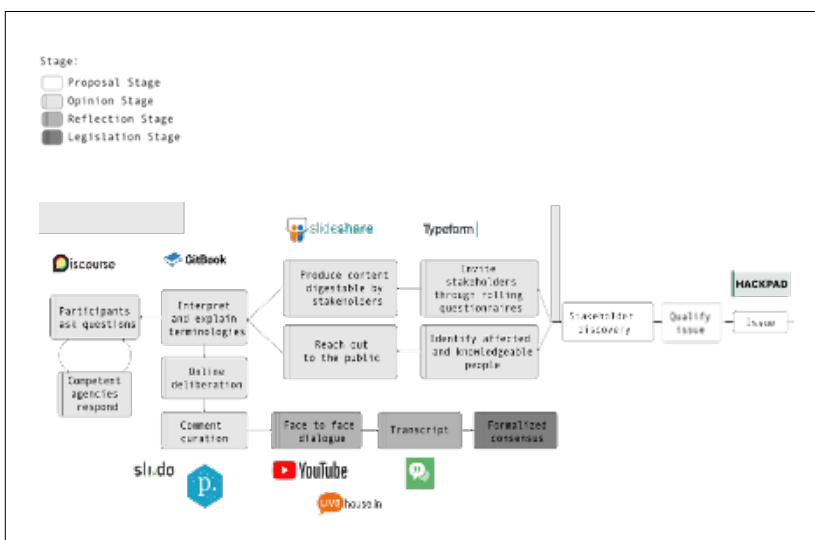
## B) Distributed knowledge capture towards a large co-owned process

**What is the unique online capacity?** Building a picture from the many different kinds of knowledge found in civil society. Collating mass analyses from knowledge gathered from a very wide range of different places.

**What are the ideas?** One group suggested that online deliberations should provide resources for offline work and create mechanisms for individual conversations to feed back into the wider picture. This is different from crowdsourcing as the aim would be to create many small conversations and then create a way for them to be brought together, potentially with meaning peer-produced by the participants. There are two big areas of potential – first, for a massive distributed dialogue pushed entirely online, where the conveners could still retain analytical capabilities over the outputs. Second, for a mass deliberation which would use the resources of the online world to help change behaviours of participants as part of the process.

Deliberation is the conversation the family would have with three other families, spreading new behaviour within the community

”



vTwain process

**Where is this already being done?** It is likely that this would involve a range of different platforms and some central coordination of how they should be deployed. The vTaiwan<sup>11</sup> programme uses a range of open source engagement tools to enable thousands of people to shape agendas, learn and deliberate towards a rudimentary consensus from a mass audience.

Meanwhile, the Covid Tech Handbook<sup>12</sup> is an example of peer production, collating the work of thousands of expert contributors, using custom-built software and a rapid crowdsourcing method.

**What could be trialled or stretched?** Testing the validity and practicalities of sampling of distributed deliberation. Testing ways to enable communities to upskill and run their own deliberations, and how effectively these could be fed online into a wider national discussion. Peer facilitation, supported by online approaches, could be evaluated. Further, this piece could involve trialling “on the ground” AI-driven facilitation to support the individual conversations at scale, for example, perhaps, drawing on the Stanford University chatbot facilitation programme<sup>13</sup> for moderating and policing civic discussions around important policy questions.

Asynchronous tasks and journeys, pulling in experts to act in Q&A forums (as opposed to presentation) will likely be part of this and could be used in more settings. Increased use of platforms and service providers like Kialo, Consider.it, Policy Kitchen and Engagement HQ to structure the deliberation.

# What does a 1,000 person plenary look like?

Participants also mentioned peer-production tools. The recently developed google doc with peer-to-peer video could be tested in recommendation design stages of deliberation, which would allow live discussion and deliberation while document editing was taking place.<sup>14</sup>

Part of helping participants see how their views feed into the wider deliberation will be using tools to visualise the overall structure of the deliberation as it is built. This could include trials of natural language processing and visual clustering responses to prompts using word clouds or spatial designs, to enable large scale numbers to be easily visualised.

<sup>11</sup> <https://info.vtaiwan.tw/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://coronavirustechhandbook.com/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://hai.stanford.edu/blog/moderator-chatbot-civic-discourse>,  
<https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/facpub/1384/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://docs.plus/>



## C) Explore how issues are framed spontaneously in social media

**What is the unique online capability?** Social media contain a vast pre-existing data set which can be explored for information about unmediated discussion of issues. There are spaces online where very diverse groups of people already convene spontaneously, without having to be recruited.

**What are the ideas?** Online mapping at the early stages of deliberation. Find people 'where they already are' and then work back to identify what characterises their views and whether this correlates with e.g. demographics or other important dimensions. This could utilise social intelligence analytics and network analysis models, already used extensively in consumer research. This enables public engagement to start from where people already convene, analyse how they discuss issues organically and potentially also how different sources of information influence them. Participants also suggested developing tools to scrape or analyse in situ the themes and compare the data across platforms in a reliable way.

These approaches were seen as having potential to add another tool to the toolkit of recruitment and design processes. Social media analysis could help us get to grips with how people are thinking and the information they are absorbing, which might aid the sampling and design process for deliberations among people with deeply contrasting views. An insight into use of language

might aid us in making deliberations more accessible and in approaching an issue as it is viewed by the public, rather than the policymaker, saving valuable time which could be spent getting to the bottom of potential solutions.

There is scope, then, to use these techniques to empower participants as well – if practitioners give the public access to these findings, people may see the way that opinions are built and shared online, and thereby might gain insight into their own thinking and decision processes.

Going further, some participants suggested more significant trials of platforms not usually used for deliberation or recruitment – repurposing public forums to find or talk to people in the places they already go, from SMS to Candy Crush.

Some also suggested using pre-existing online learning platforms to help participants study the issues under discussion.

A widget to link across platforms and communities, Facebook, Insta, Tik Tok – how to do the sentiment analysis of text and parse data?

”

**Where is this already being done?** The World Health Organisation is using the WhatsApp platform to answer questions from the public about Coronavirus<sup>15</sup> – while not a deliberation, this is an example of a context where direct communication on an everyday platform is enabled for many citizens. There are early indications that some social media platforms might start to act as convening spaces; for example the rapper Travis Scott drew 12 million live views to a recent concert held in Fortnite. The chief exec of Epic Games, makers of Fortnite, was asked last year if he viewed it as a game or a platform, to which he replied “Fortnite is a game. But please ask that question again in 12 months”.

**What could be trialled or stretched?** Development and testing of a widget to analyse themes across different media platforms. Trial and evaluation of recruitment processes which use unusual social media platforms, to identify levels of engagement and demographics who are interested. Early exploration of using existing game spaces (Minecraft? Fortnite?) as spaces for online deliberation.

It might also be possible to test and trial different communications around complex subjects on social media to test how different policy ideas play out in “unmediated” spaces. There are some significant ethical considerations here; so more work is needed to identify how this could be done in practice. The principle of open source knowledge is important here; we advise that any data collected is transparently used, and analysis shared to enable self-knowledge for the participants, to avoid the ethical and reputational issues around “mining” data for the gain only of decision makers.

Consider using social media where people are already, plus a tool like the IBM project debater”

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.whatsapp.com/coronavirus/who>

## D) Gamification with interactivity

**What is the unique online capability?** Interactive playing with tradeoffs, to help think through the pros and cons of different decisions, which can be done by individuals and at scale.

**What are the ideas?** Offers to engage in public policy deliberations online have had far lower response rates than offline offers<sup>16</sup>. While we introduced the idea of gamification in the pre-read, some participants also supported the idea of bringing to life tradeoffs in policy and wicked problems with gamified approaches, to enhance engagement and to work on the principle of making the engagement itself rewarding and fun. Games might also appeal to demographics who, while online, might be less involved with a policy or current affairs agenda. Several stressed that we would likely need also to deliberate face to face on how the game progressed.

**Where is this already being done?** There is a body of work on what successful gamification of an issue looks like, and a long tradition of serious game creation in policy from board games to card games. More recently, online apps have been designed to encourage individuals to nudge themselves into good behaviour in areas like personal health (Zombies, Run!<sup>17</sup> for example, a game where exercise is placed within a fun narrative). Apps are starting to emerge which rely on mass participation for personal benefits (e.g. Givling<sup>18</sup>, an app where playing trivia games can win you money in a lottery to pay back a student loan). There are gamified calculators such as the DECC calculator<sup>19</sup>, and research projects disguised as quizzes, such as the MIT AI game<sup>20</sup>, or Sea Hero Quest<sup>21</sup> exploring how those with dementia navigate.

**What could be trialled or stretched?** A whole deliberation cast in a clearly gamified format – with potential for virality. This could also trial ways to recruit subsets of players to a more targeted deliberation through online random selection via the game. Some participants in the workshop stressed that a key challenge to overcome is to define what “gamification” actually is, and how it can help, and avoid mis- or over-selling the benefits; so clearer case studies will benefit us all.

Introduce arts, creativity,  
different ways to hold  
people to account  
[i.e. so they continue  
to participate]

”

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/three-ideas-blending-digital-and-deliberative-democracy/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://zombiesrungame.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://giving.com/giving/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://2050-calculator-tool.decc.gov.uk/#/home>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316655389\\_The\\_MIT\\_Deliberatorium\\_Enabling\\_Large-Scale\\_Deliberation\\_About\\_Complex\\_Systemic\\_Problems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316655389_The_MIT_Deliberatorium_Enabling_Large-Scale_Deliberation_About_Complex_Systemic_Problems)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org/research/for-researchers/resources-and-information/sea-hero-quest/>

## E) Sensory, immersive online experiences as part of participatory futures

**What is the unique online capability?** Worldbuilding and creating landscapes which can create spatial environments for participants to explore. At the high end of tech, these can include VR, AR, and merge sound, video and storytelling to create future worlds which immerse participants in the different choices we must make about the future.

**What are the ideas?** To create partnerships between storytellers and deliberative practitioners, and create art or immersive approaches which can be rolled out online to large numbers of people. These will help us generate more rounded, experiential responses to deliberative issues, and take citizens out of the expected responses.

**Where is this already being done?** Immersive visioning and participatory futures thinking is being developed by a number of actors, including Nesta<sup>22</sup>, and practitioners such as Superflux<sup>23</sup> and The Liminal Space<sup>24</sup>. The Making Sense project<sup>25</sup> allows citizens to design their own Internet of Things sensors to learn about their environment.

**What could be trialled or stretched?** A deliberation where more resources are devolved to world building around the future - potentially combining storyteller skills with those of public engagement practitioners. Design thinking will be useful here, ensuring anything trialled presents the future as tangible, not just hypothetical, so that we can surface real responses and potential resistance.

Bandersnatch style interactive films, screened in partnership with a museum – people’s views influence story outcomes. Includes a final discussion between “viewers” and experts

”

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/our-futures/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://superflux.in/#>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.the-liminal-space.com/all-projects/the-departure-lounge>

<sup>25</sup> <http://making-sense.eu/>



# Conclusions



# How can these methods help in policy development?

Ipsos MORI suggest that there are questions which will be important to policymakers when we seek to **engage the public on the most significant challenges facing the UK**.

Policymakers ask, how do publics conceptualise and frame the problem? How are tradeoffs considered, and what are the possible ways through? We can map our five approaches to online deliberation onto these important engagement questions. We see that each approach is best suited to addressing a different question. Therefore, the range of ideas we present could be useful in addressing the key questions of policymakers.

## Engaging the public on the biggest challenges facing the UK

How do publics conceptualise and frame the problem?

How are trade-offs considered?

What are the possible ways through?

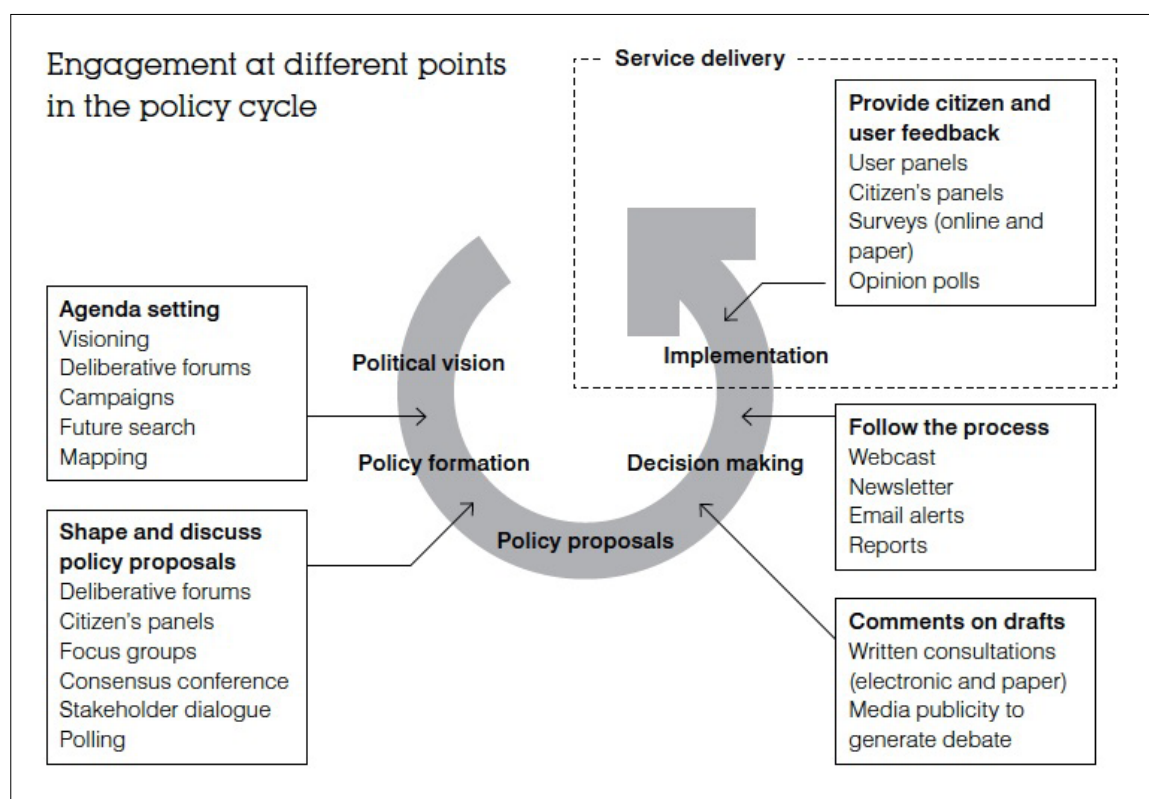
Crowdsource themes and mechanisms for deliberation

Distributed knowledge capture towards co-owned process

Explore how issues are discussed “in the world” online

Gamification with interactivity

Sensory, immersive online experiences



Building on this further, we might consider where in the process of policymaking our ideas will be most useful.

Involve's model<sup>26</sup> (above) sets out the many places public engagement can be useful – in summary, “as long as there is room for change in the policy and the results of the engagement will make a difference”.

This model takes us through different stages of the policymaking process. Each stage is described, through agenda setting for political vision, policy formation and shaping of proposals, decision making, and gathering feedback on the implementation of a policy.

We suggest that the online approaches in this document could give new depth and breadth to deliberation at all the stages of this policy cycle.

Ipsos MORI welcomes further discussion on these methods, and creative ideas as to how stretching, piloting, or further evaluation of these ideas could be used to support engagements now, or in the future. With this in mind, we invite anyone who wants to partner with, or talk to us, to do so – and help build a coalition to create new projects that evidence the value of

different kinds of online approaches. At the very least, we would like to co-ordinate so that the potential tools at our disposal are all tested for use across our sector.

We are likely to need to bring together design thinkers and those working well outside of our field of public engagement, as well as platform providers and dialogue specialists.

In many cases, we need to trial and evaluate in order to develop a shared vocabulary for the value of the insights, for example in participatory futures or gamified experiences online. In other cases, such as testing whether deliberative platforms give the same results as offline methods, we need to trial studies and robust measurement of reach, impact and quality of deliberation.

We know this won't answer all questions or replace all kinds of deliberative engagement, and we know we're not the only people thinking about the potential of online deliberation which reaches more ambitious goals of scale, depth and quality. We are grateful to our participants for sharing their expertise, and look forward to continuing the conversation.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/what/public-engagement-public-policy-making>

## Appendix 1 Resources Directory

This is not an exhaustive directory, but a collation of the publications, examples and platforms which were discussed in the workshop.

### Online Engagement Introductions

<https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/brief-introduction-online-engagement-platforms>

<https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/digital-tools-participation-where-start>

### Useful themes to explore

<b>A blog on the future of dialogue, with references, by the School of International Futures</b>	<a href="https://soif.org.uk/blog/science-dialogue-experience/?utm_source=hs_email&amp;utm_medium=email&amp;utm_content=88076003&amp;hsenc=p2ANqtz--gEh035iSvPALQXrqO5zlaRkBuyVM1xHwElhx3RzVztZhT-CKkQHAb-XLrjhM3J1IMd9nBbO0LwzMAAtnLdbzLP17TJw&amp;hsmi=88076003">https://soif.org.uk/blog/science-dialogue-experience/?utm_source=hs_email&amp;utm_medium=email&amp;utm_content=88076003&amp;hsenc=p2ANqtz--gEh035iSvPALQXrqO5zlaRkBuyVM1xHwElhx3RzVztZhT-CKkQHAb-XLrjhM3J1IMd9nBbO0LwzMAAtnLdbzLP17TJw&amp;hsmi=88076003</a>	
<b>'A systematic review of online deliberation research', by Dennis Friess, Christiane Eilders</b>	<a href="https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281145668_A_Systematic_Review_of_Online_Deliberation_Research">https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281145668_A_Systematic_Review_of_Online_Deliberation_Research</a>	
<b>'Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions' Catching the Deliberative Wave. Highlights 2020, by OECD</b>	<a href="https://www.oecd.org/publications/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions-339306da-en.htm">https://www.oecd.org/publications/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions-339306da-en.htm</a>	(see twitter dialogue in response - #delibwave and #delibrave)
<b>Future-scoping via engagement, by Nesta</b>	<a href="https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/our-futures-people-people/">https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/our-futures-people-people/</a>	<a href="https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Our_futures_by_the_people_for_the_people_WEB_v5.pdf">https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Our_futures_by_the_people_for_the_people_WEB_v5.pdf</a>
<b>'Enabling large-scale deliberation about complex systemic problems', by MIT</b>	<a href="https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316655389_The_MIT_Deliberatorium_Enabling_Large-Scale_Deliberation_About_Complex_Systemic_Problems">https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316655389_The_MIT_Deliberatorium_Enabling_Large-Scale_Deliberation_About_Complex_Systemic_Problems</a>	
<b>'Digital tools for citizens assemblies', by mysociety</b>	<a href="https://research.mysociety.org/publications/digital-tools-citizens-assemblies">https://research.mysociety.org/publications/digital-tools-citizens-assemblies</a>	
<b>The independent enquiry on 'Civil Society Futures'</b>	<a href="https://civilsocietyfutures.org/final-reports/">https://civilsocietyfutures.org/final-reports/</a>	
<b>Dialogue as a system</b>	<a href="https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Room-for-a-View-summary.pdf">https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Room-for-a-View-summary.pdf</a>	<a href="https://facilitatingpublicdeliberation.libsyn.com/episode-17-online-deliberation-evaluation-with-dannica-fleuss">https://facilitatingpublicdeliberation.libsyn.com/episode-17-online-deliberation-evaluation-with-dannica-fleuss</a>
<b>Gamification</b>	<a href="https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/gameification-and-engagement">https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/gameification-and-engagement</a>	
<b>Inclusion</b>	<a href="https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/inclusion-online">https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/inclusion-online</a>	<a href="https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/consulting-and-engaging-online">https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/blogs/consulting-and-engaging-online</a>
<b>Distributed dialogue</b>	<a href="https://www.involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/practice/how-can-data-sharing-debate-be-widened-and-sustained">https://www.involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/practice/how-can-data-sharing-debate-be-widened-and-sustained</a> , <a href="https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/distributed-dialogue">https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/distributed-dialogue</a>	<a href="https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Involve2010TalkingforaChange2.pdf">https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Involve2010TalkingforaChange2.pdf</a>



## Platforms and tools

Visual collaboration tool	<a href="https://mural.co/">https://mural.co/</a>	<a href="https://miro.com/">https://miro.com/</a>
Video conferencing app	<a href="https://www.bluejeans.com/mobile">https://www.bluejeans.com/mobile</a>	
Google doc with peer to peer video capability	<a href="https://docs.plus/">https://docs.plus/</a>	
Large video conference platform with chat capacity	<a href="https://education-nation.99math.com/">https://education-nation.99math.com/</a>	
List of remote learning platforms (for children)	<a href="https://education-nation.99math.com/">https://education-nation.99math.com/</a>	
Visualising dialogue tool	<a href="https://consider.it">https://consider.it</a>	
Crowdsourcing platforms	<a href="https://www.kialo.com/">https://www.kialo.com/</a>	<a href="https://participedia.net">https://participedia.net</a>

## Communities of practice, examples of practice, and 'top tips'

EngagementHQ for Tower Hamlets	<a href="https://talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/">https://talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/</a>
Crowdsourced prioritised lists, with dialogue	<a href="https://blogs.gov.scot/digital-engagement/2020/05/08/coronavirus-covid-19-conversation-proves-very-popular/">https://blogs.gov.scot/digital-engagement/2020/05/08/coronavirus-covid-19-conversation-proves-very-popular/</a>
Deliberation platform project (1-2-1 format)	<a href="https://www.mycountrytalks.org/">https://www.mycountrytalks.org/</a>
Top tips for online workshops thread	<a href="https://twitter.com/KHayhoe/status/1245761110948622336">https://twitter.com/KHayhoe/status/1245761110948622336</a>
Google doc resource toolkit for online facilitators	<a href="https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NyrEU7n6lUI5rgGiflx_dK8CrdoB2bwyl9XG-H7iw8/edit#heading=h.jb9co2l7jt1p">https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NyrEU7n6lUI5rgGiflx_dK8CrdoB2bwyl9XG-H7iw8/edit#heading=h.jb9co2l7jt1p</a>
Online working platform and workshop facilitation tools and tips	<a href="https://www.sessionlab.com/solutions/remote/">https://www.sessionlab.com/solutions/remote/</a>
Online facilitation resources	<a href="https://www.iaf-world.org/site/pages/making-virtual-facilitation-success">https://www.iaf-world.org/site/pages/making-virtual-facilitation-success</a>

## Appendix 2 : Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the stakeholders who gave up their time to take part in the workshop, and to comment to us afterwards.

Attendees	Organisations
Theo Bass	UKRI
Jonathan Bradley	Bang the Table
Simon Burrall	Involve
Iain Dodgeon	OKRE
Sarah Douglas	Liminal Space
Cat Drew	Design Council
Ben Fowkes	Delib
Tracey Hughes	Royal Society
Ben Lumsden	EPIC/Houseparty
Anna McKeon	Traverse
Jonas Nakonz	Policy Kitchen
Lydia Nichols	doteveryone
Dave Parsons	Citizens Foundation
Kathy Peach	Nesta
Ed Saperia	Citizen Beta
Tom Saunders	UKRI
Graham Smith	Westminster Uni
Shu Yang Lin	vTaiwan

Plus additional participants from the world of social media, community action, and entertainment, who wished to remain anonymous

**Sarah Castell** [sarah.castell@ipsos.com](mailto:sarah.castell@ipsos.com)

**Chloe Juliette** [chloe.juliette@ipsos.com](mailto:chloe.juliette@ipsos.com)

**Ipsos MORI**  
**3 Thomas More Square**  
**London E1W 1YW – UK**  
**[www.ipsos.com](http://www.ipsos.com)**

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