Report authors Freddy Fallon, Beccy Allen & Dr Andy Williamson.

Acknowledgements The authors are grateful to the staff of the UK Parliament, Parliament of Canada, Nanos Research, the Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile and the Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia for their support and assistance with this research and to the participants for generously giving their time. We are also grateful to Chris Kendall, Nettah Yoeli-Rimmer and Virginia Gibbons for their assistance with this project.

Cover pictures Parliament of Australia, Canberra (Julie Melrose 2011)
CONTENTS

Executive Summary.................................................................................................................ii
Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 1
Country Summaries................................................................................................................ 3
  The United Kingdom........................................................................................................ 3
    Focus Groups........................................................................................................ 3
    Key Themes.......................................................................................................... 8
  Canada ........................................................................................................................... 10
    Focus Group and Interview Results........................................................................ 10
    Key Themes........................................................................................................ 15
  Chile ............................................................................................................................... 16
    Focus Group and Interview Results........................................................................ 17
    Key Themes........................................................................................................ 21
  Australia.......................................................................................................................... 22
    Key Themes.......................................................................................................... 24
Recurring Themes Throughout the Project .......................................................................... 26
  Greater Use of New Technologies ............................................................................... 26
  Increasing Transparency and Access to Information ................................................... 27
  Language as a Barrier ............................................................................................... 27
  More Education and Outreach ................................................................................... 27
  Increased Interactivity between Representatives and the Public ................................ 28
  Increased Accountability ............................................................................................ 28
  Adequate Resources for Engagement ........................................................................ 29
  Maintaining the Role of Legislatures ......................................................................... 29
  Summary .................................................................................................................. 29
Recommendations................................................................................................................ 31
  Modernising Processes .............................................................................................. 31
  Improving Access to Information ............................................................................... 31
  Enhancing Engagement ............................................................................................. 32
  Effectively Using New Technology ............................................................................ 32
Vision for the Future Parliament ......................................................................................... 33
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 35
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parliament 2020 is about improving process and communication and is an international comparative study of parliaments, their response, and responsiveness, to digital media as perceived by members, officials and the public. This project explores how emergent technologies can be harnessed to transform the processes within parliaments and their relationships with the public. The three phases of the project undertaken so far – Canada, Chile and the United Kingdom – and a smaller sub-phase in Australia are described in this report. The focus of Parliament 2020 is on how parliaments can improve processes, enhance communication and better engage with citizens. The technologies are merely a tool – this report recommends how they can facilitate greater levels of transparency, accountability and, ultimately, trust.

This report draws out common themes that emerged from a number of focus groups and interviews held with parliamentarians, parliamentary officials and the public. The discussions focused on ways in which legislatures can improve engagement with citizens and increase transparency and accountability. There is no one-size-fits-all set of reforms or technological enhancements that will work for all elected bodies, what this project does is highlight recurring themes.

This report suggests how technology might be used to increase levels of accountability and engagement, and indicates what good practice could look like for the digital legislature. While there is a degree of local variation in how each phase of Parliament 2020 was undertaken, they are based on a core methodology that used semi-structured focus groups and interviews with different stakeholder groups; we identify as a core set, legislators, parliamentary officials and a public group (first time/young voters).

We found that digital media offers a unique opportunity to escape from some limiting and exclusionary traditional practices, to open up the work of parliament, increase the level of public scrutiny and, one hopes, interest such that parliaments and their members are more accountable and accessible. Accountability and transparency, along with the public feeling that the institution of parliament is relevant and listening, are important factors in rebuilding public trust in politics and political institutions.

The report reflects a clear expectation that more is needed from elected members in terms of how they engage with the public and that digital media (social media in particular) is a pivotal tool in bridging the gap that exists. Politicians are all too often seen to be in broadcast mode but what the public wants is dialogue and engagement.

The public has new levels of expectation regarding engagement and transparency and parliaments must adapt to reflect this. The young people who took part in this study, regardless of whether they are British, Canadian or Chilean, reject the status quo – they are
digital citizens, they want to be engaged but on their terms; and it is the equal responsibility of parliaments and their members to make this happen, to go out and meet citizens where they are and not expect the public to come to them.

What we have discovered in this research is that a parliament of the future must exude an air of transparency, from its physical building and the way its members communicate, to the provision of open, accessible and unrestricted digital information. Parliaments must become porous spaces, providing the public with physical and virtual access to members, information and the legislative process. In the future parliament engagement is not an after-thought, it is engrained as a core-principle in everything that is done.
INTRODUCTION

Parliament 2020 is a multi-country visioning exercise conducted in legislatures around the world, exploring how new and emergent technologies can be harnessed to transform internal processes and enhance relationships with the public. Three phases of the project have been undertaken so far – Canada, Chile and the United Kingdom – using semi-structured discussions with key stakeholders, including parliamentary officials, elected representatives and members of the public. A smaller sub-phase of the project took place in Australia using a public survey and interviews with members and parliamentary officials. Parliament 2020 is not an exhaustive project, its overarching aim is to discover what different representative groups thought their legislatures might look like in the future and to ask how digital media might work to support internal processes and transform the way citizens interact with their parliament and its members. The project was not, however, about changing parliamentary procedure and did not look at this directly.

The focus of Parliament 2020 is not on the technologies available but rather on how parliaments can improve processes and enhance communication and engagement thus facilitating greater levels of transparency, accountability and, ultimately, public trust.

This report describes each of the first three phases of the Parliament 2020 project, drawing out the common themes that emerged from the focus groups and interviews and bringing them together in order to provide a general outline of the ways in which legislatures around the world can work to improve engagement between themselves and the citizen and to increase transparency and accountability.

There is no one-size-fits-all set of reforms or technological enhancements that will work for all elected bodies around the world but this project is helpful as it highlights recurring themes that have emerged during each phase of this study and provides guidance on how increased levels of transparency and accountability might be brought about in the future. This report suggests a number of possible common themes and indicates good practices for the digital legislature.

While there is a degree of local variation in how each phase of Parliament 2020 is undertaken, each phase is based on a core overall methodology using semi-structured focus groups and interviews with different kinds of stakeholders; we identify a core set of legislators, parliamentary officials and a public group (the three full phases reported on here target first time/young voters). Focus groups are not intended to be statistically representative of the population but the sample is in all cases well considered. The selection of parliamentarians was based on availability and/or prior knowledge of them.
In addition to focus groups, the Canadian and Chilean phases used semi-structured interviews with individual parliamentarians for convenience. Again, the selection of these parliamentarians was based on their availability and prior knowledge of them, and the use of interviews in these cases was intended to generate more in-depth information from stakeholders. Parliamentary officials were again recruited through the researcher’s personal networks within the legislature but were also intended to broadly represent the key areas of work within a typical legislature; administration, clerks, libraries and research, member services, outreach, education and information technology.

This report first summarises the research undertaken in each country and then brings this together to describe a set of core themes that emerge across all the studies. It then provides a set of broad recommendations for good practice when embarking on the adoption of digital technologies and increased social media-led outreach and engagement – that are designed to able to be followed by any parliament. The report finishes by presenting a vision for the parliament of the future, based on the findings of this research and with some concluding remarks.
COUNTRY SUMMARIES

The next section of the report will summarise the findings of the three completed phases of Parliament 2020: The UK, Canada and Chile and will then provide a brief summary of the sub-phase that took place in Australia.

The United Kingdom

The UK Parliament has two houses, the lower house (House of Commons) consists of 650 members elected using the First-Past-The-Post system. The upper house (House of Lords) is currently made up of around 750 members; 90 are hereditary peers (who are elected by the wider body of hereditary title holders), 25 Lords Spiritual and the remainder are life peers who are either political appointments or appointed by the House of Lords Appointments Commission for their expertise and public standing.

The first phase of Parliament 2020, conducted in 2010, focused on what stakeholders from the UK Parliament (such as parliamentary officials and parliamentarians) along with members of the public, thought Parliament should look like in the future, particularly how digital media might affect and alter citizen engagement with Parliament. In total, three focus groups were conducted, with three distinct types of stakeholder: parliamentarians, parliamentary officials, and first-time voters. The first two focus groups were traditional open-ended discussions following a set of pre-determined questions seeking to explore how each group believed improvements could be made in the areas of communication, engagement, information provision, resources and culture.

The third focus group, conducted with first-time voters, employed a more creative method of data gathering, using the Lego Serious Play™ methodology. This allowed participants to develop their ideal Parliament by making metaphorical models using Lego and through discussion of the resultant models reach conclusions on priorities for engagement. The purpose of using this methodology was to make it easier for participants likely to have little prior knowledge or interest in politics, to express themselves and to ensure high-quality data collection.

Focus Groups

The UK phase consisted of three focus groups: First time voters, parliamentary officials and parliamentarians.

First Time Voters

With the use of Lego Serious Play¹, the first time voters characterised the UK Parliament in its current state as being confusing, inaccessible, and impenetrable. They noted that it was

¹ See: www.seriousplay.com
difficult to keep up with what was happening in politics due to its fast-moving nature and that politics in general seemed unstable and liable to break down at any minute. Participants regarded those that worked within the UK Parliament as being ‘old and dead’, and that the nature of politics made them feel like outsiders.

When asked to envisage what their ideal Parliament would look like, one group of first time voters imagined an island that was accessible via a speedboat, which actively went out and brought people to the island so that they did not have to struggle to find their way in. Their representatives, who were there to help people much like customer service staff, guided people around the UK Parliament. They imagined that members of the public would be able to discuss the issues that were important to them through their representatives who would help to inform them and answer their questions. This group stressed that diversity of opinion, innovation and transparency are important to them. With regard to communication, this group felt it was important that their representatives were shown in their day-to-day lives, presenting them as regular people. They felt that the link between politics and the ‘real world’ could be made more effectively through the use of digital media, such as Twitter.

Another group imagined their ideal Parliament as having no walls or doors, representing openness. At the same time, they imagined that the UK Parliament would be stable and built on solid foundations, accommodating many different views, ideologies, parties and backgrounds. They imagined that the public would be updated regularly on the goings on around Parliament, whilst at the same time being mindful of people’s problems and having the ability to fix them. This group also felt that the UK Parliament should be flexible and adapt to change and that a strong education programme was important to increase awareness about UK politics. Political education needs to begin early on in people’s lives. This would help engrain politics in young people’s culture, making it seem normal to participate in political activity. They felt that the processes and language used in the UK Parliament should be more accessible, making politics more approachable and fun for young people.
The final group of first time voters envisaged their ideal legislature as having a sturdy base, representing trustworthiness and reliability. They felt that power should be concentrated amongst the many and not the few, and that there should be equality between the different viewpoints. They highlighted transparency as being of high importance, with responsibility for holding the UK Parliament to account being shared by everyone. This group believed that education was of utmost importance in bringing Parliament closer to young people. In their view, politicians should speak directly to young people from an early age, informing them about politics and the political system. They imagined political education as being a gradual process, so as not to overwhelm those who are learning about it. It was suggested that small pieces of information communicated by celebrities would be most effective.

**Parliamentary Officials**

This focus group involved 12 officials working in the UK Parliament in a range of different capacities with varying seniority. The areas of work that participants dealt with included parliamentary procedure, management, information technology, and outreach. Officials highlighted a number of structural challenges that made it difficult to effectively communicate the message of Parliament. It was said that the variety of roles that Parliament has means that there is no single institutional focus, and that the differing views amongst members has resulted in different decisions being taken on the functions of the institution. The group said that there was a lack of understanding (both internally and externally) about Parliament’s role, and that this impacts on Parliament’s focus. The group noted that at present, information was generally not shared, with departments operating in their own silos.

The group highlighted a problem in knowing who their audience is when trying to communicate its message. It was said that Parliament was good at communicating with those who are already interested, but it struggles when trying to engage with those who are not. It was said that Parliament was good at broadcasting, but not so good at promoting its work or having two-way interactions with the public. It was said that highlighting issues arising in debates and parliamentary business thematically was a way to draw people in through keywords in search engines and links as opposed to highlighting the process. The group highlighted the fact that there are large amounts of information, which are not co-ordinated into one coherent message, and that parts of Parliament are trying to simply communicate their own messages.

Traditional media was generally not seen as helping Parliament communicate its message, and it was argued that direct connections with the public were one way for this to be done more effectively.

Parliamentary officials accepted that information had to be pushed out to the public through means that they were already engaged with, rather than expecting them to come to Parliament or their website. It was said that collecting data in ways that can be re-used by other organisations was crucial to engaging a broader range of people. It was argued that
outreach and education work are important in increasing understanding and engagement with the public. It was noted that whilst there are a number of ways of influencing Parliament, people are largely unaware of this, and these need to be communicated better in the future, along with the benefits that can result from doing so. It was noted that the method of engagement should be chosen based on the type of issue that is being dealt with.

The group felt that digital technology played an important role in their vision of a future Parliament, however at present they felt that they were years behind where they should be in terms of take-up of digital technology. It was remarked that procedures could incorporate new technologies relatively easily, but that there was resistance in certain departments in doing this. As mentioned earlier, using standardised data formats and making this data widely available was seen as crucial in increasing the reach of Parliament’s website through viral networks. The group believed that organising information thematically was likely to draw people in, and the UK Parliament’s recently redesigned website reflected this. The group felt that organising information by geographical area, and in relation to other levels of government (such as the EU or local government) would be attractive. The group felt that an integrated approach towards information would reduce duplication of work, and allow people to fully take advantage of expertise within Parliament.

It was noted that printed resources were privileged over online resources, with digital information being an added extra and only being created if time and resources allowed it. It was thought that members expected printed resources, and switching to digital resources would cause them to cease functioning. Neither petitioning nor lobbying was possible online, despite the potential for the reach of Parliament to be improved as a result. It was felt offline resources still need to be provided for those without access to digital technology. The group said that the need to commit significant resources to using new technologies has resulted in their not being rolled out. They gave the example of PDAs (personal digital assistants) being offered to Parliamentarians, that was not taken up due to the potential costs. There were concerns about the security of information, with the perceived risk of causing simple administrative functions to potentially become politically sensitive for Members.

Parliamentarians

This focus group was attended by 21 MPs and members of the House of Lords from a broad range of parties; in total six were Conservatives, five were from the Labour party, four from the Liberal Democrats, one from the Scottish Nationalist Party and five were Crossbench peers.

As with the parliamentary officials’ focus group, parliamentarians identified the structure of Parliament as being problematic, causing problems with communication and engagement with the public. Problems highlighted included questions about how much Parliament as an institution should market itself, what the role of Parliament as an institution should be and
how much people actually want to engage with an institution as opposed to the individuals that it is made up of.

Parliamentarians believed that many people are interested in politics and what happens in Parliament, when it relates to issues that are important to them. However, with bills in particular, they felt that the procedures and information were too hard to understand, especially, at what point the public is able to lobby Parliament before a bill becomes an Act of Parliament. Parliament was seen to be poor at providing details of its current business in an understandable way, with timings and the manner in which debates would be taking place poorly communicated.

It was suggested that more controversial or current private members’ bills had the potential to attract more interest than Government bills, and that it was important for people to see the outcomes of their inputs in a transparent way, as they currently feel powerless to effect any real change. Electronic petitions (ePetitions) were seen as a good way to engage people, however it was felt that Government did not want to pay for it. Parliamentarians also believed that ePetitions might simply engage the ‘usual suspects’ or the ‘single-issue fanatics’ as some felt had happened with the Downing Street petitions website. It was suggested that introducing new technologies could increase workloads, and resources will need to be allocated to deal with this.

The group felt that there was in fact more than one set of publics, and that talking about the public in general was unhelpful. They felt that the way in which Parliament currently communicates was not effective in bringing about more engagement due to archaic and complicated language and the perceived negative culture within Parliament. One participant argued that having a more professionalised way of operating with regard to the media and in understanding its audience would be a good thing, noting that MPs are already good at presenting themselves to the public and can get elected because they are better communicators.

Concerns were expressed about a lack of resources for communicating with members of the public, arguing that whilst communication methods have changed (and workload has increased), support and resources have not changed with them. It was felt that resources needed to be made available in order to communicate effectively. Some were concerned that there was too much emphasis being placed on digital technology, and believed that reaching people through innovative printed resources (such as free newspapers) could also be a good way of communicating Parliament’s message. Participants were concerned that little research had been done on how people actually wanted to be communicated with, and that they were simply making assumptions.

Participants saw television as a powerful and effective way of connecting with the public, but felt that in its present state it was not being used as well as it could be. When the rules for televising Parliament were originally drawn up it was decided that coverage should be
equal and that there should be no editorial bias. This has meant that the rules about what can and cannot be broadcast are fairly restrictive and inflexible, resulting in current coverage being disengaging. It was acknowledged that the existence of BBC Parliament (the UK’s dedicated parliamentary TV channel) was a good thing, but that proper interpretation of the material and packaged programmes was needed to engage and inform more effectively\(^2\). Participants felt that Prime Minister’s Questions, the most widely broadcast event in Parliament presented a childish and adversarial picture, and that more coverage of co-operation between members on important issues would be better. More coverage of different debates with commentary and explanations were what was wanted, but it was thought that Parliament would not be prepared to resource these kinds of changes.

With regard to resources for members, participants felt that the House of Lords was not as well resourced as the House of Commons, with fewer researchers and less secretarial support. They felt that more resources needed to be made available to Peers in order to support their current work. Participants felt that not enough information in the Commons was produced electronically, and that doing this would make their lives much easier, allowing them to keep up-to-date and work more efficiently.

The group felt that Parliament’s website was not updated quickly enough for their use, and that information is not available in one place in a coherent format. Some of the changes suggested to bring Parliament up-to-date included introducing computer screens for viewing during debates in order to follow amendments more easily, and also providing summaries of amendments to allow members to more efficiently grasp their meaning. Some barriers to these reforms include the need for seats for all members and also problems in implementing visual resources for the sight impaired.

**Key Themes**

A number of different themes emerged with varying emphases in all three focus groups. The table below illustrates the key themes that emerged during these focus groups, showing the levels of importance attached by the different types of stakeholder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>MPs and Peers</th>
<th>Parliamentary officials</th>
<th>First time voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater use of new technologies</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernising procedures</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive communication</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the public/outreach</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of representatives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) This has now happened with the introduction of BBC Democracy Live.
All three UK focus groups believed that there was room for new technologies to be introduced into Parliament as a way of improving internal processes and providing more channels for communication between the institution and the public. In particular, parliamentarians believed that digital technologies could aid them in their day-to-day lives in terms of following current business more efficiently, and felt that using ePetitioning would be an effective way of soliciting views from the public.

Parliamentary officials felt that collecting information in formats that can be used by others would help increase engagement and interest in Parliament, and that organising online information by theme and geographical area would be more engaging. Despite different expectations of what the others wanted, both parliamentarians and parliamentary officials felt that the privilege given to printed information over digital information was unhelpful, and more should be done to make information available for consumption on devices such as computers and smart phones. First time voters imagined that conversations and the spread of information would take place online through the use of social media in their ideal Parliament.

Parliamentarians believed that current procedures were over complicated and difficult to understand. This was partly echoed by parliamentary officials, whilst at the same time first time voters argued that language was over complicated at present and needed to be simplified to encourage interaction between Parliament and the public. All groups largely agreed that there needed to be greater levels of two-way interactivity between the public and Parliament, though participants were not unanimous on whether this interaction takes place with Parliament centrally or with individual representatives.

First time voters placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of educating the public on Parliament and politics from a young age, and envisaged representatives coming out to engage with them about their work. It was felt that this was extremely important in bringing Parliament closer to the public. This idea of representatives proactively going out to the public to engage was echoed by both parliamentarians and parliamentary officials.

Availability of information seemed to be extremely important to both parliamentarians and parliamentary officials, as they believed that this would bring about increased levels of
interest amongst the public. At the same time, first time voters felt that transparency in terms of Parliament's processes was important so that people could see how their contributions were taken on board.

Canada

Canada is in many ways similar to the UK in that it has a Westminster-style parliament and uses the same electoral system (First-Past-The-Post) to elect members to the House of Commons (lower house). Members of the upper house (Senate) are appointed by the Governor General, based on nominations from the political parties represented in the House of Commons and usually remain until they reach the age of 75.

The second phase of Parliament 2020 was undertaken by Nanos Research, and employed a slightly different methodology to that used in the UK. As opposed to using focus groups, 30 interviews were conducted with parliamentarians. These were conducted either in-person or over the telephone, and aimed to find out what parliamentarians thought of how the Parliament of Canada currently conducts its business. The interviews examined how the Parliament could enhance current procedures, using digital technologies to bring about greater levels of engagement with the public and improved internal processes within Parliament. A focus group was conducted with Parliamentary Officials, and aimed to find out their thoughts on how the Parliament of Canada operates internally, how it engages with the public, and what improvements could be made in these areas. This focus group was conducted in both English and French, so that participants could express themselves in their preferred language. Four focus groups were conducted with first time voters aged between 18 and 25, and sought to explore how they viewed Parliament, what could be done to increase interaction between the institution and the public, and how current ways of operating can be enhanced. Two focus groups in Ottawa were conducted in English whilst two groups in Montreal were conducted in French.

Focus Group and Interview Results

Focus groups were held for first time voters and parliamentary officials and parliamentarians were individually interviewed.

First Time Voters

As mentioned earlier, four focus groups were conducted with first time voters between the ages of 18 and 25. Participants felt that the information on the activities and procedures within Parliament were confusing and difficult to understand. They noted that language was unnecessarily complicated, archaic and thought that communication should be clearer and simpler. They felt that this would help to break down the barriers between themselves and the Canadian legislature. A minority had used the parliamentary website, and they felt that finding information was difficult. They argued that Parliament’s website should be more user-friendly, allowing the public to more easily find basic information. Some participants liked the idea of a parliamentary blog, where the public could comment on parliamentarians work and receive feedback. They believed that it was Parliament’s
responsibility to engage with the public through a number of different channels, including parliamentarians visiting schools and the use of traditional and social media. Participants said that the traditional media filtered information, choosing what information to report to the public. Participants believed that it was important that they could access information about Parliament through the mediums that they preferred, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (however some said that they were not interested in accessing information on Parliament through these mediums). Overall, first time voters seemed largely uninterested in following what Parliament was doing, and were distrustful of the partisan nature of politics, the parties, and the spin doctors, whom they perceived controlled the messages coming from Parliament.

First time voters believed education had an important role to play in increasing levels of public engagement with Parliament. They felt that it was important that everyone was provided with a strong educational understanding of Parliament and its processes, and felt that this should be compulsory. They felt parliamentarians could speak to classes at schools more, and also legislate to ensure that more civic education existed. Participants believed that Parliament was out of touch with the general public, and some even thought that parliamentary processes were intentionally confusing so as to restrict access. They believed that the younger generation would be more receptive to engaging with Parliament through digital technologies, and that this would provide more opportunities for their voices to be heard. Some were sceptical of information online, and felt that government websites were more trustworthy than those created by third parties.

Participants felt that social media had created an expectation that Members of Parliament should have a more intimate and immediate relationship with their constituents, and believed that parliamentary resources should be allocated to accommodate this. First time voters felt that it was important that parliamentarians should be seen as ‘regular people’ and that the more often they were seen to be present in their communities, the more likely it was, that levels of trust would improve and the public would engage with them. They felt that Parliament was generally receptive to new technologies, but that parliamentarians were not early adopters of different types of digital media and would only do so once the general population were already using it.

**Parliamentary Staff**

This group consisted of 15 participants, of which three worked in the House of Commons, eight worked in the Senate and four worked in the Library of Parliament. This group believed that current information on debates in Parliament was of a high standard, but that there was room to improve. They believed that committee proceedings could be released faster, and that the ability to view what was going on in real time would be make Parliament more effective. Much like first time voters, they felt that the language currently used in Parliament was overly complex and simplifying this would help remove barriers to engagement. The group believed that current communication between Parliament and the public was largely one-way, and some felt that introducing two-way interactivity would be a
good thing, though some noted that social media should only be used by Parliament if there is a will by parliamentarians to do so. They felt that Parliament should communicate its activities and how internal processes work, but in order for people to consume this information, it was important that the public first had a good understanding of how Parliament works. They believed that the parliamentary website was the primary resource for the public to obtain information about Parliament. However, at present they noted that the website was directed more to parliamentarians than the public, and balancing the needs of those in Parliament with the public was a serious challenge (we note that an updated website is due to be launched in April 2011).

With regard to education, participants felt that their role was supportive. They believed that staff and parliamentarians could go into schools to explain parliamentary process, and to ensure educators are not misinforming the public. They said that employing new methods of communication was largely dependent on parliamentarians, and that they were reluctant to use these technologies due to perceived risk. They made it clear that it was important that information provided by Parliament had to be non-partisan in nature. Participants believed that more research needed to be done in order to find out what the public is looking for, and how they want to access that information. They believed that Parliament should play a proactive role in informing the public (possibly through email notifications) when issues that are important to them are being debated or voted on.

Parliamentary staff noted that there were times when information was only produced in paper format, and times when information was only collected electronically. They believed it was important that all information should be produced both electronically and in paper format, allowing it to be disseminated quickly but to be accessible by those who are digitally excluded. They believed that care should be taken when disseminating information digitally to make sure that it is reliable. Participants also believed that reliable information about Parliament should generally be made available to counteract the large volumes of misinformation perceived by participants to currently exist.

Parliamentary staff felt that those in Parliament were proficient at using old methods to communicate with the public, and that they should be trained in using new methods as well to meet the demands of the new, fast paced communications environment. Staff believed that current processes should not be accelerated to enable quicker information delivery as they felt it was more important that information was reliable. They believed that Parliament did a good job of implementing new technologies generally, however there were times when it was overly slow and cautious, and that new technologies could be implemented further.

Parliamentary staff believed that all information should be provided in both official languages and other languages if demand existed. They felt that the language used by Parliament should be dependent on the issue being examined, with issues that are important to particular communities being described in ways that are accessible to them.
The group believed that the introduction of new technologies had the potential to increase transparency and accountability. For example, tagging content with keywords was seen as a way of making information more accessible. The group noted that in some instances it was the nature of politics to have some information privileged.

**MPs and Senators**

Thirty parliamentarians were interviewed, 60% were Members of Parliament and 40% were Members of the Senate. In terms of gender balance, two thirds of participants were male, whilst one third were female. Various regions within Canada were represented, with 40% from Ontario, 20% from Prairie provinces, 17% from Atlantic provinces, 10% from Quebec and the remaining 13% from British Columbia/Territories.

This group noted that MPs generally had far greater opportunity to communicate with the public and that they largely communicated with their constituents, whilst Senators communicated with specific groups from a range of different constituencies. Parliamentarians believed that partisanship was a problem and that more should be done to communicate in a non-partisan manner. The most valuable methods of communicating for MPs were the Canadian Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC), the parliamentary website and flyers. MPs highlighted the ability to send mailings to those outside of their constituencies (up to 10% of the population of their own constituency) as being one of the more effective methods of communicating with the public. However, they also believed that there was potential for this to be used in a partisan manner. Senators felt that CPAC, the parliamentary website and committees were the most effective ways of communicating with the public. Senators generally felt that their committee work did not receive enough media coverage and that this should be pursued to help connect them with the public.

Many parliamentarians felt that CPAC was an effective way of communicating their message to the public, but had mixed views about coverage of the House of Commons’ Question Period; some felt that it presented an unrepresentative picture of Parliament’s work and offered little context to the issues that were debated. The group generally believed that increased coverage of committees would help to educate the public about their work. They noted that a key problem with CPAC was that its viewers were likely to be those that were already engaged. The group felt that the parliamentary website was in need of improvements to make it more user friendly, and that it required more promotion to encourage more members of the public to use it. They felt that information on the website should be presented concisely, and should be grouped using tags allowing people to find content that was important to them. They believed that the website was too one-way in terms of interaction with the public, and that more interactive features should be added. Parliamentarians said that they thought the website should be part of a wider engagement strategy by Parliament, working to engage people with lower levels of political knowledge.

Parliamentarians felt that the curriculum in schools lacked a sustained approach for educating about Canadian politics, with teachers having little knowledge of politics. They
felt it was important to have strong levels of political education to increase citizen engagement and nurture democracy. The group believed that engagement should be part of a broader education process to inform the public on how Parliament works, as they felt that currently it was specific issues that drove the public. They suggested that committee proceedings be made available in a number of formats, that MPs and Senators visit schools to give interactive presentations, that members be more visible to the public and work to explain parliamentary process better. They wanted blogs and videos that showcase Parliament’s work, and felt that video technology should be employed to create a more personal relationship with the public.

Parliamentarians felt that the internet and mobile phones have increased participation, but were cautious in using them. They felt that the risks when using new technologies included: the dissemination of factually incorrect information, dumbing down of parliamentary language and the potential of fringe groups to dominate the conversation online. Some felt that viewing information through a phone might be less conducive to truly understanding its content.

The group believed that there was growing demand for parliamentarians to respond quickly to the public and as a result it was important that timely, readily accessible and accurate information was available. They felt that information had to be provided in easy to use formats and that it had to be concise to avoid information overload. It was argued that better information resources and technological support must exist with the example of wireless internet being made available in the Chambers. The group felt that their staff would need to be well equipped to deal with an increase in digital communications and that this should be taken into consideration when setting allowances for members.

Most parliamentarians felt that with the current level of resourcing available, it was unrealistic to reform current processes to reflect the public’s increasing expectations. They said that an increase in requests for information did not mean that rigorous study of issues should change, and that digital technology did not make everything less complicated. However some did feel that parliamentarians have the ability to inform the public faster than ever through technology, and that Parliament should provide a framework for engagement that takes digital technologies into account.

Some felt that Parliament was overly cautious of new technologies, and that the processes for adopting new technologies were slow and cumbersome. Some felt that Parliament was ready to implement change, but only after careful consideration. Some did not believe that new technologies would have major resource implications, whilst others felt that it was important to allocate new resources for the use of new technologies, particularly with regard to training staff.

Parliamentarians generally felt that it was important to interact through social media in both French and English, however some felt that this should be optional in some constituencies.
There was no agreement on whether to include languages besides French and English, with some saying that they already did at a cost to themselves, and some arguing that including more languages would be more inclusive for those who might not normally participate. Parliamentarians did not necessarily believe that technology was the most important way of making Parliament more transparent and accountable, and that it was more important that Parliament had the will to become more open.

**Key Themes**

These focus groups and interviews resulted in a number of themes emerging with varying levels of importance for each group of stakeholders. The table below shows how the different stakeholders prioritised the emerging themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>MPs and Senators</th>
<th>Parliamentary staff</th>
<th>First time voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater use of new technologies</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernising procedures</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive communication</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of representatives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the public and outreach</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive engagement</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandable language</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency and accountability</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:

- ★★★ ★★★ ★★ - Crucial
- ★★★ ★★ - Important
- ★ - Unimportant/low priority
- - Not mentioned

All groups placed a high degree of emphasis on a number of thematic areas. In particular, education played an important role in how all three groups of stakeholders believed that Parliament could increase levels of transparency and accountability, and improve engagement with the public. All groups supported the idea of parliamentarians going to schools to talk about the work of Parliament, and to solicit feedback from younger people. All groups felt that it was important that Parliament produce information in formats that are relevant to the public and that their work is more transparent. In particular, it was thought that information should be produced in both French and English, and that in a number of
instances the language used in Parliament should be made less complicated to make it more accessible to a wider range of audiences.

Largely, there was broad support for implementing new technologies in Parliament, although some groups did have reservations about its use. In particular, participants favoured the use of social media and updates on relevant business for the public, but parliamentarians felt that they should not dumb down their work in order to produce information online quickly. All groups emphasised the importance of increasing two-way interactivity.

First time voters were the only group that felt it was important that Parliament was made up of representatives from a diverse range of backgrounds. Whilst parliamentarians and parliamentary staff both felt that reform of Parliamentary procedures was of lesser importance.

Chile

The Chilean National Congress is made up of two houses: the Chamber of Deputies (Cámara de Diputados; the lower house) and the Senate (Senado; the upper house). Both houses use a multi-member proportional electoral system with two seats in each district. Parties and coalitions present lists of candidates to elect members in each district, the party or coalition with a plurality of votes gains the first seat and then must have more than two-thirds of all votes in order to win the second seat, otherwise the party with the second highest number of votes takes the second seat.

The third phase of the Parliament 2020 project was conducted in Chile. As was the case with Canada, the methods employed differed to some extent from that in the UK. Focus groups were conducted with younger citizens aged 24 to 29, parliamentary officials and parliamentarians. In addition to this, two interviews were conducted with parliamentarians in order to supplement the data gathered through the focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted with younger citizens, with the first being a traditional, open-ended focus group.
The other involved participants being asked to envision what they thought a future parliament should look like using ‘Animal Crossing: City Folk’, a life-simulation video game for the Nintendo Wii. The purpose of using two different kinds of focus group was to allow participants to express their thoughts verbally and visually. Two focus groups were conducted with parliamentary officials, again with one being a traditional semi-structured group and the other employing the use of ‘Animal Crossing: City Folk’. In the case of parliamentarians, traditional focus groups were employed without the use of visual tools.

Focus Group and Interview Results

Because of the way the Chilean phase of the project was conducted, the results of the focus groups and interviews have been grouped thematically rather than by the stakeholder groups shown in the previous two phases.

Greater use of Digital Technologies

Generally, it was felt that ICTs were not being employed in a way that would bring about more transparency and trust within the Chilean political system. Officials felt that whilst most representatives were using social media, it was largely for campaigning purposes, and that they were mostly abandoned when they were no longer in campaigning mode.

At the same time, parliamentarians generally felt that attitudes towards social media were changing, and that more representatives were willing to use new technologies for communicating with citizens. Some parliamentarians argued that this was a consequence of the decreasing age of representatives in the Chilean National Congress, however both parliamentary officials and younger citizens disagreed with this, and felt that online technologies were largely used for campaigning and that parliamentarians were generally risk adverse in this area.

All groups of participants felt that there were benefits when using the internet to facilitate engagement between representatives and citizens. Some believed that using online technologies would create closer ties between those in the Chilean National Congress and the public. All groups generally felt that using the internet solved part of the problem of connecting with the geographically dispersed. Parliamentarians did have some reservations about using the internet to connect with citizens, saying that they were concerned they would become broadcasters, as opposed to legislators, through persistent use of social media.

Educating the Public/Outreach

The younger participants generally felt distrustful of those within the Chilean National Congress (officials as well as parliamentarians) and felt that they were distant and not in touch with the public. At the same time, parliamentarians felt that they were unfairly represented by the public, and that there was a great deal of misunderstanding about their work. All groups of participants agreed that the quality of political information was poor, with parliamentarians suggesting that civic education in schools was limited and that this
resulted in a poor understanding of the political system in Chile. One parliamentarian argued that young people were poorly equipped in terms of political knowledge when they came to voting age.

Parliamentarians felt that a growing individualistic culture in Chile meant that there was less collective interest than before, and that people were only interested in issues that directly impact upon them, arguing that the nation state was becoming fragmented.

The younger participants felt that procedures within the Chilean National Congress were inaccessible and confusing, and that members of the public were alienated from politics and the political process in Chile. It was possible that this was actually due to poor levels of education about the political process in Chile.

Participants felt that it was important that new technologies were fully integrated into political institutions in Chile, and that they must be employed to bring about greater levels of engagement between the representative and the citizen. It was argued that simply the presence of ICTs alone was not enough to improve the state of politics in Chile.

It was felt that parliamentarians should act as educators of the public and should go out and inform them of how parliamentary processes work, instead of being, as one Senator said, a “law-making factory”. During one of the visualisation exercises, participants saw the Chilean National Congress as being a museum where people could go to visit, when instead it should be something that reaches out to the people to provide information on its work.

**Understandable Language**

Those in the younger focus groups saw language as important. They felt that at present the Chilean National Congress uses language that is unattractive to a younger audience and the population as a whole. They believed that, in order to engage the public the National Congress needed to use simple, yet attractive language in order to encourage people to read about its work or watch proceedings on television. It was argued that parliamentarians are citizens like everyone else, and that this should be reflected in the way business is presented.

**Increasing Levels of Transparency**

As mentioned earlier, ICTs were viewed as being important in bringing about increased levels of trust and transparency, however it was generally thought that they were not being used to their full potential with parliamentary officials feeling that they were largely campaigning tools. However, there was a perceived increase in the willingness to implement ICTs more widely to bring about more effective engagement between citizen and representative.

At present there is a feeling that parliamentarians are only interested in representing themselves or groups that are convenient for them to be representative of. It was argued (particularly by the public) that having more easily accessible information on the work of
elected representatives, would result in them working harder to represent a wider range of citizens. It was felt that citizens displayed a lack of understanding and awareness of parliamentarians’ work, whilst it was felt that parliamentarians had difficulty in conveying their work to the mainstream media. Parliamentary officials and the younger focus group members believed that, in future online technologies could enable people to better scrutinise their representatives directly.

Participants felt that digital media should help mimic face-to-face interaction as much as possible, but acknowledged that an over reliance on email and social networking could de-personalise the relationship between representative and citizen. Parliamentary officials believed that a personalised relationship is what builds level of trust amongst the public and increases commitment to engagement amongst representatives. Using current methods, representatives largely felt that interacting with a large proportion of constituents was impossible and that using new technologies would help to bring about greater levels of dialogue with the public.

**Removing Barriers to Information**

Focus group participants felt that social and political issues were important to them and that they did feel motivated to act on them, however they believed that intermediaries such as the bureaucracy within the Chilean National Congress and the mainstream media have a high degree of control over the flow of information. The presence of these intermediaries was perceived to be a de-motivating factor in terms of participation and trust.

The mass media was seen as the primary method of communication between citizens and representatives in all focus groups and interviews, and parliamentarians believed that significant barriers between themselves and the public existed as a result of this. They believed that the media focused too much on scandal and negative information, increasing levels of distrust and dissatisfaction with elected representatives. They believed that the highly localised nature of the media meant that their reach was limited, and that the Chilean National Congress’ own television services had limited reach and were not well publicised.

During the visioning exercise, younger focus group participants created a wall outside of the Chilean National Congress where legislative documents were posted for all to see, with full and open access. They removed potential intermediaries between themselves and elected representatives, creating a direct line of communication between the two groups. The same group of participants felt that procedures seemed confusing and inaccessible, highlighting this as a potential barrier between themselves and the people that they had elected. Participants believed that both online and offline forms of communication should be employed, so that those who do not have access to the internet are still able to consume information coming from the Chilean National Congress. It was felt that email and blogs were the best methods for disseminating information to the public online, whilst information needed to be targeted towards both a general public audience and distinct interest group audiences.
It was felt, especially amongst younger participants, that transparency was vital, and that elected representative’s positions on different issues and their use of financial resources should be freely available. At the same time it was felt that the views of citizens should also be available for all to see. Some felt that technology could be employed to track what an elected representative was doing at any time, helping to remove the intermediaries that were so unpopular.

Parliamentarians believed that the presidential nature of the political system in Chile put them at a disadvantage in terms of how the public perceives their work. They felt that their processes were seen by the public as adversarial and confrontational and that the outcome of their work only received positive media coverage through the President signing legislation, in other words, the real work of Parliament was largely hidden. Along with parliamentary officials, they felt that they are not recognised for the work they do and that the public’s negative perception of them was largely unwarranted.

**Increasing Interactivity**

Two-way interactivity was highlighted as being important throughout all focus groups and interviews. It was argued that representatives should be using the internet as more than just a campaigning tool or to broadcast messages, and that feedback from the public should be taken on board. In the longer term, parliamentary officials felt that technology could be used to build consensus rather than relying on a simple majority.

Parliamentarians acknowledged that current ways of communicating with the public were ineffective, and that only a small number of people have any contact with their representatives. It was felt that this was due to a lack of time and resources, and that online social media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter had a role to play in reaching a wider audience. At the same time it was felt that a large proportion of the electorate was older and therefore less likely to use social media, so it was important to use more traditional channels as well (although it is noted that the adoption of platforms such as Facebook is gaining pace amongst older age groups).

Participants aged between 25 and 29 envisaged a system where wikis could be employed to enable citizens and other stakeholders to contribute to the development of legislation; with knowledge that was currently unused being employed more through interactive tools. Video conferencing and online referenda were seen as potentially beneficial ways of allowing more people to contribute to the political process. During a visioning exercise, this group suggested that items (representing policy ideas) could be passed from citizen to representative allowing more input into the process of legislating.

Whilst enthusiastic about the potential of ICTs to improve levels of participation and the relationship between representatives and the public, parliamentarians were concerned that they risked becoming communicators instead of legislators. They were concerned that an
expectation might develop that they should solve everyone’s individual problems, which they were not capable of. They felt that in addition to new technologies, there must be a higher level of civic education in Chile to enable more people to participate.

**Key Themes**

As with the previous two phases of this study, a number of themes emerged and these are shown in the table below with varying levels of emphasis placed amongst each different group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Parliamentarians</th>
<th>Parliamentary officials</th>
<th>Citizens (24-29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater use of new technologies</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the public/outreach</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandable language</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing transparency</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removing barriers to information</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing interactivity</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
<td>★☆☆☆</td>
<td>★★★☆☆</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two areas that seemed to be most important amongst all the Chilean groups were the desire to introduce new technologies into the process of interaction between the representative and the citizen, and the removal of barriers between the two. In particular, the participants aged between 25 and 29 felt that new technologies should be used to monitor their representatives’ work, their positions on different policies and their uses of financial resources, whilst at the same time allowing them to feed into the law-making process through new technologies such as wikis.

Parliamentary officials felt that new technologies should be used in more innovate and interactive ways instead of just being used for campaigning and broadcasting of messages. A number of unhelpful barriers between representatives and the public were identified, including the media and the bureaucracy, along with geographical barriers. It was felt that removing these barriers would help to increase levels of trust and reduce apathy amongst citizens, whilst at the same time allowing for an effective dialogue between the public and it’s representatives.
Parliamentarians and parliamentary officials both placed a degree of emphasis on the importance of educating the public and outreach. It was felt that in order for meaningful interaction and input into the law-making process to occur, citizens needed to have full understanding of how parliamentary processes worked. At the same time the younger participants felt that current processes were too complicated and needed to be reformed in order to make the Chilean National Congress more approachable and to reduce apathy among the public. Transparency was seen as important by all stakeholder groups and by parliamentary officials in particular. It was felt that by being transparent about the work that representatives do, their position on issues, and also showing citizens’ views for all to see, levels of trust would increase accordingly. It was felt that an increase in transparency would result in an increase in commitment by parliamentarians through increased levels of scrutiny.

**Australia**

A fourth phase of Parliament 2020 took place in Australia. Because the Australian Parliament was developing a new web presence, this phase was narrower than the previous three phases, focusing specifically on the provision of information and internet services to members and the public. The study was however informed by the Parliament 2020 methodology and the research being undertaken elsewhere. Given that Australia is seen as a leading exponent of ‘Government 2.0’ and a leading user of social media tools it is useful and appropriate to include reference to the research here.

The Federal (or Commonwealth) Parliament is bicameral and largely based on the Westminster model but with more recent influences from the US Congressional system. There are two houses, the House of Representatives (lower house) and Senate (upper house). It uses a system of preferential voting (also known as instant-runoff voting) for the lower house and a choice of preferential or proportional voting for the Senate. Australia is unusual in that it has compulsory voting.

The Australian phase undertook a public survey seeking the views on the Parliament of Australia website, conducted interviews with six Senators and Members to seek views on what a Parliamentary website should offer to meet their needs and interviewed parliamentary staff drawn from the Presiding Officers Information Technology Advisory Group and the Chairs of the Joint Standing Advisory Committee on the Parliamentary Library.

The overall response shows that the Australian public is passionate about their Parliament and access to the Parliamentary process and information. Parliament is seen as a vital democratic tool and the public wanted information to be clear, simple, easy to use and up to date. However, as we have seen in the other focus groups, the public also felt that Parliament and the information it provides is confusing and complex. The research shows

---

3 ‘Government 2.0’ refers to the use of digital tools to be more open, accessible and engaging, including user generated content and open data standards. See: gov2.net.au/about.
that differences between the way information from the House of Representatives and the Senate was provided adds to the confusion. Those who work in the Parliament were less confused about the website as they understood the structure of Parliament.

Public attitudes to the availability of information are changing, the Australian public felt strongly that information must be available quickly and be more comprehensive, they particularly want to see more supporting detail around real time live broadcasts of chambers and committees. They want it to be easy to the information that they are looking for.

There was an overwhelming need for quick and effective ways to navigate the Parliamentary maze so that citizens can easily access members of Parliament and participate in democratic processes.

Reflected in the findings of the other focus groups, there was also a call for members of Parliament to ‘keep in touch with the people in their electorates’ and the public wanted to know how to find out about issues before Parliament and to be able to participate more effectively with committees and their representatives through the internet. The public felt that members of Parliament needed to have more of an online ‘presence’ and that this in turn would motivate the public to participate, leading to a revitalized Parliament.

The Australian public was dissatisfied with their level of access and involvement in Parliament; this research shows clearly that revitalising parliamentary democracy requires a transformation of the processes to ensure that participation is at the heart of Parliament. The way Parliament works needs to enable and empower citizens and communities to take part and be heard.

Members felt the need to be better supported online, recognising that digital engagement is becoming commonplace and expected. Members differentiated between their role communicating with constituents and with the wider world. They also see opportunities to provide information digitally and for digital media to be used more effectively in supporting the work of members, particularly around interaction with committees.

Members of Parliament want to see a website that opens up access to Parliament and its processes. It was seen as important though that this take into consideration their Parliamentary role as representatives and that it reflected the dignity of the institution. Members and Senators perceived three roles, including two that were outside the space of the Parliamentary website:

- as a member of parliament they had a parliamentary role which should be digitally supported in a way that reflected the nature and status of parliament;
- as politician, they used their own blogs, websites, Twitter, Facebook and other online spaces to communicate and to engage; and
as a party member they would also have a presence through their party’s online services.

Members of Parliament reflected on a number of significant challenges that they face in their jobs:

- information overload;
- information of variable reliability and quality;
- managing differing roles, responsibilities and, therefore, online personas simultaneously;
- having to engage with more new technologies (such as Twitter and Facebook) with limited resources; and
- gaining a proper understanding of how to become effective users of different media channels (both traditional and new media).

Senators and Members express a strong desire to be accessible and feel strongly that they must have easy access to accurate and current information. They would like to see more of the work done by committees and debates in the chambers available more widely in real time to Australians.

**Key Themes**

Although the Australian phase of the project is a sub-set of the wider Parliament 2020 research agenda it reflects many of the same issues; the public feels itself distanced from Parliament, making it hard to engage and to get involved in democratic issues. Members face the same challenges of information overload, limited resources and the frustration of feeling that Parliament isn’t fairly represented.

All see that the internet and digital services offers an opportunity to open up access to Parliament through the timely provision of information, the explanation of processes and the simplification of those processes where possible. The internet is also seen as being a powerful tool to bring citizens closer to Parliament and parliamentarians clearly remain a strong bridge between Parliament and the public.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>crucial</th>
<th>important</th>
<th>unimportant/lowl priority</th>
<th>not mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to information</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandable language</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency and accountability</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
- ★★★★: Crucial
- ★★★: Important
- ★★: Unimportant/lowl priority
- ★: Not mentioned
RECURRING THEMES THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT

As the project progressed a number of common themes have emerged showing how new technologies can work to transform processes within different legislatures and how these legislatures can work to improve their relationships with the public. As the information from this study has been disseminated in international fora, it has confirmed that these themes are, if not universal, at least relevant to a number of legislatures. The section below describes the main themes that have emerged in all three phases of Parliament 2020.

Greater Use of New Technologies

In each phase of Parliament 2020, elected representatives, parliamentary officials and members of the public all felt that new technologies had an increasingly pivotal part to play in their respective legislatures. Many felt that elected representatives and the legislatures in which they serve were not making the most effective use of digital media, and were using the internet largely as a way of broadcasting their messages. This offered little opportunity for two-way interactivity and, therefore, for engagement.

Members of the public in particular made a number of suggestions about how new technologies should be used to facilitate increased interactivity between themselves and those in the legislature, including encouraging parliamentarians to use blogs, social networks, wikis and email. It was felt by a number of participants throughout the study that the information provided online should be relevant to people, and that using new technologies would make it more possible to target different groups based on their interests in different policy areas, rather than simply provide a single version of information (which is often in parliamentary or technical language and therefore difficult for the average citizen to understand).
There was a general feeling across each phase that, on the whole, it seemed that elected representatives and legislative staff were resistant to adopting new technologies. A number of participants throughout the study believed that the internet had potential to allow representatives to reach and interact with a significantly higher proportion of their constituents. However, it was acknowledged by a number of different groups that whilst more information should be provided and exchanged online, this must be done in such a way that does not exclude those who do not have access to the internet.

**Increasing Transparency and Access to Information**

Increasing levels of transparency and removing barriers to information seemed to be a recurring theme throughout all stages of Parliament 2020. A large number of participants felt that it was important for citizens’ feedback to be handled in an open way, with clear processes in place to show how people’s requests and comments are taken on board.

Many respondents believed that it was important that information on legislatures’ work should be openly available and disseminated in formats that are relevant to a wide range of different stakeholders. Further to this, for some participants language was of high importance, with internal and external communication coming from legislatures needing to be accessible to all groups in society. It was felt that all information that legislatures produce should be made available and easily accessible through data organisation methods such as adding keywords, and that this data is available in standardised formats.

**Language as a Barrier**

Transparency – and the public’s understanding of parliament – is hampered by the use of complicated and archaic language. All three phases highlight the use of impenetrable language as a problem for the public trying to engage with parliament. Whilst it is important to recognise that some aspects of a parliament’s work will necessarily use precise, technical and legalistic language, the issues highlighted here are around the language used to describe the procedural side of parliament, which can be simplified.

Archaic language is not just a problem for the public either, some legislators indicated that it is a barrier to their own understanding of what is going on and therefore potentially hampers their effectiveness in parliament.

**More Education and Outreach**

It was felt by a large number of participants throughout the study that education plays a key role in helping to bridge the gap between elected representatives and the public. A recurring theme throughout each phase was the idea of parliamentarians going into schools to help educate younger people about how their legislature works, increasing their visibility amongst younger people and soliciting feedback from them.
A large number of participants felt that school curriculums should have a detailed compulsory portion dedicated to learning about their legislature and the wider political process. This focus on effective political literacy underpins many of the findings in this research and it was noted a number of times that it is important for people to feel confident in their knowledge of how the political system works in order to be able to engage effectively in the process.

Within this thematic area, outreach was popular throughout Parliament 2020, with younger members of the public in particular arguing that legislatures should be coming out to the public to communicate their work, to gather feedback and to educate about political processes.

**Increased Interactivity between Representatives and the Public**

In all phases of Parliament 2020, it was clear that all stakeholder groups (and especially members of the public) felt that there should be more opportunities for both representatives and the public to communicate their views to each other. On a number of occasions, elected representatives said that they felt misrepresented by the mainstream media, and that communicating their work to their constituents is a near-impossible feat, with so few resources to reach so many people. At the same time, both members of the public and parliamentary officials have said that they felt that representatives should be doing more than simply broadcasting their messages out to the public, and that they should be inviting the public to give their views on current parliamentary business. It was seen to be important that the processes of collecting this information should be transparent, so that people can understand how their submissions are dealt with.

In the Chilean phase in particular (but highlighted in the other two phases too), it was felt that there were significant barriers between elected representatives and members of the public. Different stakeholders believed that in order to improve transparency and accountability as well as trust between the two groups, these had to be removed. In particular, it was stated that intermediaries such as bureaucracies and the mainstream media filter information being transmitted between representatives and the public, and that in order to have an effective dialogue between the two, a direct channel of communication must be created.

Further to this, younger participants in both the United Kingdom and Canada in particular felt that the diversity of representatives was important and, more widely, it was felt that representatives should be portrayed as the ‘normal people’ that they are. It was believed that this would make representatives seem more credible to the public, and strengthen levels of trust and facilitate engagement between the two groups.

**Increased Accountability**

Amongst members of the public in particular, there was a desire that elected representatives were more accountable to their constituents. It was felt that representatives
must be more effective at communicating their day-to-day work and that this information should be publicly available. In addition, a number of participants felt that it would be useful to be able to see how their local representative voted and what their positions were on key issues. Again, it was felt that new technologies have a significant role to play in facilitating increased levels of accountability amongst representatives and their publics.

**Adequate Resources for Engagement**

Amongst elected representatives in particular, it was felt that current levels of resources allocated (particularly staff) were not sufficient in order to effectively communicate with constituents as the demands of new media in particular increased the workload substantially. It particular, it was felt that the emergence of new tools such as social media have meant that in order to communicate effectively more resources are needed (this is particularly seen as a problem in terms of personal and staff time for legislators). On a number of occasions, it was suggested that new budgets be made available for elected representatives in order to effectively harness the potential of new media, and to have valuable conversations with members of the public.

**Maintaining the Role of Legislatures**

Whilst there was a strong desire for change in a number of areas, both parliamentary officials and elected representatives in particular highlighted some of the risks associated with adopting new methods of communication. In particular, a number of different participants believed that the parliamentary processes in each country should not be ‘dumbed down’ in order to facilitate new media and the use of technologies. During the Australian phase in particular, members stressed the importance of maintaining the dignity of the role of representative and of properly reflecting the importance and stature of parliament.

A large number of participants saw the potential of new technologies to improve the internal processes within their legislatures and to improve the relationship between representatives and the public. It was also felt that new methods of communicating should not distract representatives and their staff from the legislative and scrutiny work done in legislatures.

Further to this, it was noted by some participants that whilst new media can be useful, the legislative function of representatives should not be changed as a result of integrating ICTs into their workflows. It was felt that there was a risk of parliamentarians simply becoming communicators instead of focusing on their day-to-day work on legislative business.

**Summary**

The relative emphasis placed on the different thematic areas described above by the different stakeholder groups across the three legislatures was as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Parliamentarians</th>
<th>Parliamentary officials</th>
<th>Citizens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater use of new technologies</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing transparency and access to information</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language as a Barrier</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating the public/outreach</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased interactivity between representative and the public</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased accountability</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate resources for engagement</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining the role of legislatures</td>
<td>★★★</td>
<td>★★</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
- ★★★★  Crucial
- ★★★   Important
- ★★   Unimportant/low priority
- ★- Not mentioned
RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst all legislatures are different and there can be no one-size-fits all set of recommendations for improving internal processes and increasing transparency and accountability, it is the case that some broad similarities have emerged throughout Parliament 2020. As a result, some wider recommendations for improving legislatures' relationships with the public can be given. These focus on four main areas:

Modernising Processes

1. Whilst parliaments must necessarily use formal technical and legal language, the unnecessarily archaic language used within legislatures should be dropped in favour of clear, understandable and engaging language to assist members to better understand the process and to increase awareness and understanding amongst the public;
2. All documentation relating to legislation should be made available online, not simply to download but presented in the context of the legislative cycle; and
3. All legislation should be accompanied by easy-to-understand, plain language explanatory notes for public consumption;

Improving Access to Information

4. Elected representatives and parliaments should use the types of media that are popular amongst the public and not expect the public to find them;
5. When using social media, blogs and other new media, the language and tone of publication needs to match the audience, which often means it must be more informal and engaging but at the same time, particularly when referring to proposed legislation, it must maintain a balance reflecting the gravitas of parliament and
6. Information should be collected and disseminated in formats that are readable and re-useable by others (including machine readable), preferably allowing open access to all parliamentary documents and data;

Enhancing Engagement

7. National curricula needs to place a strong emphasis on political literacy education;
8. Representatives should be encouraged to go into schools to communicate how their legislature works and solicit feedback from younger people;
9. Mainstream media and social networking channels should be harnessed to grasp opportunities to engage and educate the wider public; and
10. A transparent process should be in place showing how the public’s feedback and input is taken on board by their legislature;
11. Members can help promote the primacy of parliament by using public engagement opportunities and social media to highlight the work that is done in the legislature and to contrast this to the overly-political and combative image that is presented in the mainstream media.

Effectively Using New Technology

12. Internal IT strategies must take into account that parliament is not a closed-box but that it must engage with external digital platforms, not necessarily controlled by parliament and that digital content must be available to members and the public. Such strategies should include the use of social networking, open publishing and open access, including application programming interfaces (APIs).
13. The use of workflow and web publishing systems will improve the accessibility and tracking of legislation as it passes through parliament;
14. Provision of wireless networks throughout the legislature;
15. Resources within legislatures should be available in both paper and digital formats;
16. Resources should be appropriately allocated in order to enable representatives to use new technologies to their full potential; and
17. Legislatures should aim to allow more people to feed into the legislative process through the use of online engagement and discursive technologies, by using third-party social media and blog platforms to solicit input and considering the acceptance of ePetitions from third party sites.
VISION FOR THE FUTURE PARLIAMENT

In this report we have discussed the findings from the research and presented some recommendations for ways that parliaments can become more open and engaging, showing how digital media can support this move. In this section we present a more idealised model based on our own thinking as a result of the research. This short section describes what we feel are the key characteristics of an ideal parliament in the early 21st century.

This parliament is open and exudes an air of transparency from its physical building; we note the modern trend to build new legislative buildings so that the public can see into them. This openness must be imbued throughout the culture of the institution too so that wherever possible information is made available in a range of formats, including machine readable ones, and is free from restrictive licensing – there is no need for copyright; Creative Commons is already used in Australia and New Zealand goes further suggesting that, whenever possible, material should be published with a clear statement that no rights exist. Parliaments need to become porous, providing the public with access both physically and virtually to members, information and the legislative process.

Engagement in the parliament of the future is not an after-thought, it is engrained as a core-principle in everything that is done.

We have heard how digital media and social networks are key tools for connecting the public with parliament and its members (and vice versa) and the future parliament will be a seamless user of these technologies; parliament must use the tools the public uses, not select the ones it prefers. Members too must be encouraged to be transparent and accessible but to do this they must be properly supported and resourced so that digital media becomes a 'business as usual' sub-set of the parliamentary process. The public wants members to be like them, to appear as ‘normal’ members of society who are trusted to represent the wider public. To do this they need a range of skills including political, managerial and community engagement. It also remains important that the respect and prestige of parliament is maintained.

Parliamentary language remains a barrier. If the parliament of the future really wants to engage the public, it must learn to use plain language wherever possible and provide information that helps the public understand the legislature and its processes. Members too are hampered by tradition and archaic language as well as the necessary complexity of legislation. We note that Scotland has developed an effective model for producing explanatory notes (as well as memoranda on policy objectives, estimates of expected cost and delegation of powers to unelected officials) to accompany material through parliament and recommend this as beneficial to both members and an interested public.
This brings us on to education. Parliaments suffer greatly because they are seen as distant, there is a strong need for citizen education that helps people to understand and explore the parliamentary process in a way that makes sense to them. There is surprisingly strong support for mandatory political literacy education amongst the young, perhaps reflecting how limited current curricula are. Going beyond formal learning, parliament has a role to play in providing up to date information when people need it and where they need it; so that at that point where they take an interest in parliament or feel the need to take action about an issue they are not impeded in their enthusiasm by the barriers of access that we often see today.

There is a key role for media (both old and new) in connecting people to parliament and it is hoped that the overly negative representation of politicians in the media can be mitigated as public knowledge increases. The graphic below represents the key attributes of a future parliament.
CONCLUSION

This four-country study has looked at the attitudes of parliamentarians, parliamentary officials and the public with a view to understanding how new technologies are changing the external communication of legislatures and their internal processes. The study has looked at opportunities to improve the way that both members and institutions communicate and how new digital media tools can be used to increase accountability and transparency. Whilst the parliaments in this study have many similarities they are equally unique and individual, shaped by their own histories and culture. Despite this, there are a number of key findings that resonate across all four legislatures and which, we feel, can be promoted as examples of good practice for any legislature that is serious in becoming more modern, engaged and engaging. Digital media offers a unique opportunity to open up the work of parliament, to increase the level of public scrutiny and, one hopes, build interest in the democratic processes that affects us all. Accountability and transparency, along with a public perception that the institution of parliament is relevant and listening, are important factors in rebuilding public trust in politics and political institutions.

What we have found is that digital media is seen as presenting an opportunity to escape from traditional practices, allowing the language of parliament, which can be both archaic and necessarily legalistic, to be supplemented with easy to understand annotations and summaries to make information accessible. Information technology too, through workflow management tools, can provide members with far better tools for following the legislative process and to understand what is happening to a bill as it progresses through the house. On the outside, the same technology allows this information to be published more easily and there is a strong argument here for open publishing allowing others to re-post and circulate parliamentary material far more widely. This, the use of social networking tools and a parliament's willingness to go out to engage with the public in the places where they already congregate, rather than expecting the citizens to come to parliament (both physically and virtually) are all ways of improving accessibility and transparency and for engaging a wider public. But such engagement still requires awareness and a level of knowledge about the process and it is clear that effective political literacy education is needed and in fact demanded by all stakeholder groups in this study. A wide-spread lack of understanding about the workings of your parliament is a significant impediment to accessibility and transparency, and in turn impedes trust in the system and political representatives.

So far we have talked about access to the ‘institution’ of parliament, it is a vital part of these representative democracies that the public is able to access those who represent them – the members. There is a clear expectation here that more is needed from elected members in terms of how they engage with the public and that digital media (and social media in particular) is a pivotal tool in bridging the gap that exists. Politicians are all too often seen to be in broadcast mode but what is wanted is dialogue and engagement. Members need
to become effective users of social media, not simply using the internet as a tool for delivering press releases or bypassing the mainstream media but as a way of gauging interest and support and as a tool to engage directly with their electorates. The old media model was, by necessity, limited to broadcasting but in this new landscape one must not only publish but also engage – talking and listening. The traditional media understands this – it uses user generated content to enhance reports and in turn this further engages the audience.

What this study has shown is that the public expects far more engagement and transparency from their parliament. There is a window of opportunity for parliaments to grasp this chance to more fully engage, to become true agents of representative democracy and to rebuild public faith in them. If, however, they fail to grasp this opportunity and maintain an elitist and inaccessible position, making it difficult for people to engage with them then their relevance can only diminish. The young people who took part in this study, regardless of whether they are British, Canadian or Chilean, reject the status quo – they are digital citizens, they want to be engaged but on their terms; and it is the equal responsibility of parliaments and their members to make this happen.