

A CONSIDERED PUBLIC VOICE ON BREXIT:

# THE REPORT OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT

# CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT



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ISBN: 978-1-903903-78-0

Published by the Constitution Unit  
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First published December 2017

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# INTRODUCTION FROM THE DIRECTOR

The idea of organising a Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was first floated in November 2016. The UK electorate had voted to leave the European Union, but the formal withdrawal process set out in Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty had not yet been triggered. Big questions remained about the form that Brexit might take. Few people, whatever their view of Brexit, had been impressed by the quality of debate during the referendum campaign, and there was a strong desire to find a way of fostering more informed and considered decision-making in the next phase of the Brexit process.

A little over a year later, much has changed in UK politics, and yet much has stayed the same. Article 50 has been triggered and the Brexit negotiations have begun, yet what form the UK's future relationship with the EU might take remains utterly unclear. A general election has been held, but it sparked remarkably little serious debate about the Brexit options. The government has lost its Commons majority, but it battles on, insisting that it has the Brexit process under control.

The need for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit remains just as great as it was a year ago. Brexit is the biggest set of decisions to face the UK political system since the 1940s. Quality, informed debate about the kind of Brexit that people want is vitally important, but it is not happening on anything like the scale it should. The Citizens' Assembly therefore provides that debate in microcosm: it shows us what a diverse sample of the UK electorate concluded about the Brexit options when they had had the chance to learn about them, listen to the arguments, and reflect on their own preferences and those of their fellow members. It provides a unique insight into public priorities for Brexit.

This report sets out the Assembly processes and its conclusions in detail. I will not rehearse the findings here. I simply encourage readers to engage seriously with the Assembly's work, whichever part of the political spectrum they personally come from. The Members of the Citizens' Assembly worked hard over two intense weekends to grapple with complex issues and difficult trade-offs. They looked past their own viewpoints to engage in constructive discussion and decision-making. As one Member put it to me, they worked in service of the country as a whole, seizing an opportunity to engage in deep and reflective deliberation. We owe it to them to attend to what they said.

Running the Citizens' Assembly has very much been a team effort. In addition to the gratitude that my co-authors and I all express in the acknowledgements section of this report, I should like to offer my personal thanks to my fellow members of the core project team. The co-investigators, Meg Russell and Graham Smith, have been founts of valuable advice throughout and have worked tremendously hard on all aspects of the project. Will Jennings – co-investigator in all but name – has done great work on member recruitment, survey design and results analysis. Rebecca McKee has been a dedicated, insightful, and multitalented Research Associate, who did great work to prepare the data presented in these pages. Sarah Allan has been inspirational in leading the design and delivery of the Assembly weekends and organising the facilitators.

As the following pages show, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit has been a great success. Its conclusions should be carefully considered by those involved in shaping the Brexit process. And it should serve as a powerful example of how processes of democratic decision-making could be strengthened on this and many other issues in the future.

**Alan Renwick**  
**December 2017**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit gathered fifty randomly selected members of the UK electorate over two weekends in Manchester in autumn 2017. It asked what kind of Brexit the UK government should seek, focusing on options for trade and migration. Assembly Members reflected on their own views, learnt about the options and arguments from experts and each other, discussed the issues in depth, and reached recommendations.
- The Assembly built on experience from earlier citizens' assemblies in Canada, the Netherlands, and Ireland, as well as pilot citizens' assemblies in parts of the UK.
- The project had two overarching aims: first, to contribute to the ongoing Brexit debate by providing evidence on informed, considered public opinion on the options for trade and migration; second, to provide evidence on the value of deliberative exercises such as citizens' assemblies for enhancing democratic engagement on key issues of public policy.

## 2. MEMBERSHIP: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- We sought to recruit a group of around forty-five Assembly Members who reflected so far as feasible the diversity of the wider population. Specifically, we sought to ensure that the Assembly membership reflected the electorate in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social class, place of residence, and vote in the 2016 Brexit referendum. Starting with a nationwide survey with 5000 respondents, and using stratified random sampling, we recruited from those who expressed interest in taking part in the Assembly until our targets had been met. Ultimately, fifty members took part.
- To encourage participation of a diverse group of people, we offered potential Members the opportunity to engage in the Assembly itself; coverage of hotel and travel expenses; a £200 gift per weekend; and support for those with special needs. We designed communications and the Assembly weekends to motivate Members to engage throughout the whole process.
- We succeeded in recruiting an Assembly membership that closely reflected the diverse composition of the UK electorate. Indeed, the final membership of fifty exceeded our expectations, and the Assembly was more representative than any previous exercise of this kind. Only referendum non-voters were underrepresented – a group that is particularly challenging to engage in any political process.
- Our approach to recruitment was unusual in that we stratified not only on demographics, but also on attitudes – specifically, referendum vote. This was important to the credibility of the Assembly, and the recruitment results suggest that it was the right decision. Indeed, future assemblies should consider extending such attitudinal stratification further, particularly where it is salient to the issue under consideration.

## 3. ASSEMBLY DESIGN AND PROCESSES

- The Assembly was tasked with considering the form that Brexit should take. It thus did not reopen the referendum question. The Assembly examined, specifically, options for future UK/EU relations, focusing on trade and migration.
- The Assembly was designed with five key principles in mind: fostering inclusion of all Members, from all parts of society; enabling the development of deep understanding of the issues in hand; maintaining balance among competing perspectives on Brexit; encouraging open-minded deliberation; and helping all members to engage in personal reflection.



- These principles were captured in a series of basic features of Assembly design, including: the use of small-group discussions, varied discussion formats, and professional facilitators; the development of conversation guidelines; the engagement of expert speakers and provision of briefing papers; close consultations with a carefully selected Advisory Board; and the structuring of the time available into phases for 'learning' and 'discussion and decision'.
- The learning phase enabled Members to reflect on their own and each other's values, discuss Brexit issues related to trade and migration with input from experts, and explore their ideas on all that they heard.
- The discussion and decision phase allowed Members to reflect again on their values, consider the guidelines that they thought should shape policy-making, and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of different Brexit options. The Assembly considered options for three issues: how the UK trades with the EU after Brexit; how it trades with countries beyond the EU; and migration policy between the UK and the EU. It finally came to judgements on overall Brexit packages.

#### **4. BREXIT: THE ASSEMBLY'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The Assembly's first decisions were on those things that Members wanted to be able to value about their country. It prioritised seven themes, with 'quality of public services' topping the list.
- The Assembly then considered guidelines for trade policy and for migration policy. Members recommended that trade policy, above all, should 'minimise harm to the economy' and 'protect the NHS and public services'. Their top priorities for migration policy were that the government should 'invest in training for UK nationals' and 'keep better data on migrants'.
- On trade with the EU, Members' first preferences spread across several options. A limited trade deal covering only tariffs received most first votes, but a majority of Members preferred a closer relationship with the EU, through either a comprehensive trade deal or ongoing membership of the Single Market. If a bespoke trade deal proves impossible, Members would prefer the UK to stay in the Single Market rather than to leave the EU with no deal.
- On trade beyond the EU, most Members preferred an arrangement allowing the UK to conduct its own international trade policy while also maintaining a frictionless UK/EU border. Should this prove unattainable, Members would prefer the UK to stay in the Customs Union rather than to leave the EU with no deal.

- On migration, most Members wanted the UK to maintain free movement of labour with the EU, but to make greater use of controls that are available within the Single Market. In particular, they mentioned greater restrictions on immigrants who cannot support themselves financially, improved training for UK citizens to reduce the need for immigration, possible reforms to the benefits system, and greater investment in ensuring that public services can cope in areas of high immigration.
- On overall Brexit options, Members were consistent with their earlier preferences, favouring a comprehensive trade deal tied and special arrangements for UK–EU migration, followed by continued Single Market membership subject to greater use of immigration controls.

## 5. ASSESSING THE ASSEMBLY

- The Assembly performed very well against all our evaluation criteria.
- First, its membership closely mirrored the diverse composition of the UK electorate. Our approach to recruitment and stratification worked well, and we encourage future assemblies to consider the application of attitudinal stratification.
- Second, the Assembly fulfilled our five design principles – inclusion, understanding, balance, deliberation, and personal reflection – to an impressively high level given the contentious nature of the topic.
- Third, the conclusions reached by the Assembly were clear and consistent.
- In addition, we examine how attitudes towards Brexit and Brexit-related issues changed over the course of the Assembly. There were some small shifts in opinions, but these were not dramatic. Given the relatively low numbers involved, they should not be over-interpreted.

## 6. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- Most Members of the Citizens' Assembly wanted to see a close bespoke relationship between the UK and the EU after Brexit. Should such an arrangement prove impossible, they preferred the UK to remain in the Single Market and Customs Union than to leave the EU with no deal.
- These conclusions contrast with talk among some politicians of the merits of a 'no deal' Brexit.
- Rather, Members would prefer a pragmatic approach to Brexit that focuses on protecting and further strengthening the economy, public services, jobs, and living standards across all parts of the UK. If these views reflect those of the broader population once familiarised with the details as the negotiations proceed, they suggest that pursuit of 'no deal' risks jeopardising public support.
- The Assembly offers a model for how high-quality democratic discussion might be fostered on a wide range of issues in the future. It shows that the deliberative approach can be employed with great success even on a contentious and polarising issue such as Brexit.
- The Assembly Members put great energy into fulfilling their tasks. They deserve to be listened to – both by those who want to shape Brexit and by those who want to strengthen democratic practice in the future.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Running a citizens' assembly – particularly on a tight budget – means that one inevitably incurs a large number of debts.

We are first grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council, who funded the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit through the UK in a Changing Europe initiative based at King's College London. This initiative, led by Professor Anand Menon, brought the highest quality research into the public domain during the referendum campaign in 2016 and continues today to fund vital research into Brexit and to aid the dissemination of that research. We have received great support and assistance throughout the project from Anand Menon, for which we are deeply thankful. We have also been ably helped by his team, including Phoebe Couzens, Navjyot Lehl, and Ben Miller.

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit would not have happened without the support of Professor Matthew Flinders. Most members of the organising team first came together under his leadership in 2015 for the Democracy Matters project, which ran two small pilot citizens' assemblies in the north and south of England (Flinders et al. 2016). The lessons we learnt from running these events were central to how we approached our work this time. Though Matt could not participate in running the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, his encouragement was vital to our decision to pursue the project.

We are deeply grateful to the many people who assisted in the Assembly's work: the members of the Advisory Board (listed in Appendix 2), who give invaluable feedback on our plans and briefing papers; the expert speakers (listed on p. 44), who gave up considerable time to speak with the Assembly Members, and who all performed their roles with great skill and enthusiasm; the table facilitators at the Assembly weekends (listed in Appendix 1), who enabled Assembly Members to have such rich and productive discussions; and the team of weekend helpers (also listed in Appendix 1), who oiled the organisational wheels, kept notes, and attended to Assembly Members' needs.

Within the core project team, Edd Rowe has been a brilliant Project Administrator. Sarah Allan was given invaluable assistance in designing and delivering the Assembly programme by her Involve colleagues Tim Hughes and Kaela Scott. Our partners at the Electoral Reform Society – led initially by Katie Ghose and later by Darren Hughes, coordinated by Eddie Molloy, and with contributions from Doug Cowan, Charley Jarrett, and Josiah Mortimer – have led our external engagement activities with considerable skill. We have also been greatly aided by Constitution Unit volunteers – Brad Albrow, Jessica Bryant, Hannah Dowling, Kasim Khorasane, Aleksei Opacic, and Kelly Shuttleworth – and by the Unit's past administrator, Bernadette Ross, and current manager, Rachel Cronkshaw.

Finally, our greatest thanks go to the Members of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit themselves. They gave up two weekends of their lives to discuss complex and contentious issues. They did so with good humour and commitment. It was humbling to see them working together, amicably discussing issues even when they disagreed, grappling with new concepts and ideas, and focusing over many hours of hard graft. It was also a pleasure to get to know every one of them. They are the Citizens' Assembly. It is their work that we report in these pages. They deserve to be listened to and respected by anyone with an interest in Brexit and by anyone who wants to think about how our democratic system could be further strengthened.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was held in autumn 2017. It brought together fifty randomly selected citizens who reflected the diversity of the UK electorate. They met over two intense weekends in Manchester to learn about the options for Brexit – focusing specifically on trade and migration – reflect on their own views and priorities, hear the perspectives of others, and discuss and then agree recommendations. These recommendations relate to the kind of Brexit that Assembly Members want the UK government and others to pursue.

The Assembly provides unique insights into informed and considered public opinion on the form that Brexit should take. No other exercise has allowed members of the public to engage with the arguments around the Brexit options as deeply or express such thought-through views. If the Brexit process is to remain democratic, it is vital that policy-makers listen to the results of such exercises.

The Assembly also demonstrates the value of in-depth public engagement on controversial areas of public policy. As the following pages show, the Assembly worked remarkably well, delivering on all our evaluation criteria. The development of similar exercises for enriching discussion of other complex policy questions could greatly strengthen our democracy.

This report sets out in detail how the Assembly was constituted, what it did, what conclusions it reached, how it should be evaluated, and what lessons can be drawn from its work. This introductory chapter begins with two preliminary questions: What is a citizens' assembly? And what was the thinking behind the creation of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit? The chapter ends by setting out the purposes and plan of the report as a whole.

**Readers who are mainly interested in Brexit** may wish to focus particularly on Chapter 4, on the Assembly's recommendations, and the final section of Chapter 5, on opinion change within the Assembly.

**Readers who are mainly interested in the Assembly's lessons for how we run our democracy** may choose to concentrate on Chapters 2, 3, and 5, relating, respectively, to the recruitment of Assembly Members, the operation of the Assembly, and our analysis of how well the Assembly worked.

For readers who want a shorter introduction to the Assembly and outline of its conclusions, we have produced a **Summary Report**, which is available both on the [project website](#) and on the website of the [Constitution Unit](#).

## 1.1. WHAT IS A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY?

A citizens' assembly is **a body of randomly selected citizens who meet to learn about, discuss and make recommendations on an issue through a process of structured deliberation**. Past citizens' assemblies have comprised anything between 30 and 160 members, who are chosen through random selection with stratification, so that they reflect the diversity of the general population. They typically meet at weekends so that their members can get on with their regular work and other business during the week, and they can meet for anything from two weekends to ten or more. The members learn about the issues at stake, hear from and question experts, campaigners, and others with relevant insights, and reflect on their own views and those of their fellow members. They then deliberate in depth before reaching conclusions. They are supported throughout by trained facilitators, who ensure that everyone's voice is heard and the discussions remain on track.

### Box 1.1. Defining deliberation

Leading democratic theorist James Fishkin offers the following definition of deliberation:

By deliberation we mean the process by which individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussions together. We can talk about the quality of a deliberative process in terms of five conditions:

- a. Information: The extent to which participants are given access to reasonably accurate information that they believe to be relevant to the issue
- b. Substantive balance: The extent to which arguments offered by one side or from one perspective are answered by considerations offered by those who hold other perspectives
- c. Diversity: The extent to which the major positions in the public are represented by participants in the discussion
- d. Conscientiousness: The extent to which participants sincerely weigh the merits of the arguments
- e. Equal consideration: The extent to which arguments offered by all participants are considered on the merits regardless of which participants offer them

Source: James S. Fishkin, *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 33–4.

Though superficially similar, **the purposes and processes of citizens' assemblies are very different from those of focus groups.** A focus group is designed to elicit information on how people react immediately to particular ideas, slogans, or proposals. By contrast, a citizens' assembly is designed to elicit information on what people think on a topic once they have had a chance to learn about and consider it in depth. Thus, a focus group gathers evidence on what opinion is at any particular point in time, whereas a citizens' assembly gathers evidence on what opinion becomes in a context of rich information and discussion.



**A citizens' assembly is thus similar to a citizens' jury in its aims.** Both are examples of what are sometimes called 'deliberative mini-publics'. Citizens' assemblies differ from citizens' juries simply in that they are larger and typically last for longer. The design of such bodies reflects a view that democracy is at its best when people are able to take part equally and in a way that is informed, considered, and open-minded. This approach to democracy is known as 'deliberative democracy'. One influential definition of what is meant by deliberation is provided in Box 1.1.

Citizens' assemblies have been used principally in three other democracies: Canada, the Netherlands, and Ireland. Table 1.1 provides brief details of these past examples. It also includes two 'mixed' assemblies, comprising both ordinary citizens and elected politicians. These are not pure citizens' assemblies, but they share many of the same characteristics.

**Table 1.1. Previous citizens' assemblies**

	Dates	Membership	Focus
British Columbia Citizens' Assembly	2004	160 randomly selected citizens + appointed Chair	electoral reform
Dutch Civic Forum	2006	140 randomly selected citizens + appointed Chair	electoral reform
Ontario Citizens' Assembly	2006-7	104 randomly selected citizens + appointed Chair	electoral reform
Irish Constitutional Convention	2012-14	66 randomly selected citizens + 33 politicians + appointed Chair	specified list of constitutional reform proposals
Assembly North (Sheffield)	2015	32 randomly selected citizens + appointed Chair	English devolution
Assembly South (Southampton)	2015	23 randomly selected citizens + 6 politicians + appointed Chair	English devolution
Irish Citizens' Assembly	2016-18	99 randomly selected citizens + appointed Chair	abortion law and other constitutional reform proposals

## 1.2. THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit had fifty Members. These Members were selected randomly through a process of stratified sampling described in Chapter 2 to reflect as closely as possible the make-up of the UK electorate in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, social class, where they lived, and how they voted in the referendum on Brexit in 2016. They met over two weekends, first learning about the Brexit issues from experts and each other, then deliberating on the options before reaching conclusions.

The Assembly was run as part of an academic research project led by the Constitution Unit at University College London. Full details of the project team are given in Appendix 1. The project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through its UK in a Changing Europe initiative.

## The project had two principal aims:

- to contribute to the ongoing Brexit debate by providing evidence on informed, considered public opinion on the options;
- to provide evidence on the value of deliberative exercises such as citizens' assemblies for enhancing democratic engagement on key issues of public policy.

In pursuit of the first aim, the Assembly was designed to contribute to the current negotiations over Brexit between the UK and the EU, specifically focusing on the issues of trade and migration. It thus looked at **what kind of Brexit people would like to see**; it did not reopen the 2016 referendum question about whether or not Brexit should take place.

In regard to the second aim, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit is, to our knowledge, the most developed experiment in operating a citizens' assembly ever undertaken in the UK. It thus provides valuable information about how this model of democratic discussion and decision-making works in the UK context. In addition, it is almost unique in being a deliberative mini-public focused on a high-profile topic around which opinions are already strongly polarised. Most citizens' assemblies have been held on topics – notably, electoral reform – on which fewer people have strong prior views, where we might expect open-minded deliberation to be easier. Examining whether a citizens' assembly can also work in conditions where many people have more entrenched views that they may be less willing to revisit is therefore an important addition to our understanding of deliberative democracy.

## 1.3. PURPOSES AND PLAN OF THIS REPORT

This report offers a detailed account of how the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was planned, what it did during its period of operation, and what recommendations it reached. It is written for those who want a full understanding of the Assembly's processes and what we can learn from these processes. As noted above, a **Summary Report** is also available.

At the time of writing, our research into the dynamics underpinning the Assembly's deliberations is ongoing. We will continue to publish findings in the coming months, which will be disseminated through blogposts and other outlets as well as through academic articles.

Beyond this introduction, this report has five further chapters. Chapter 2 outlines the processes through which the Members of the Citizens' Assembly were selected and describes the characteristics of Members. Chapter 3 sets out how the work programme of the Citizens' Assembly was designed and delivered. Chapter 4 summarises the Assembly's key findings and recommendations. Chapter 5 assesses the operation of the Assembly in terms of its composition, processes, and results. It also includes analysis of how Members' views changed over the course of the Assembly. Chapter 6 concludes by drawing out lessons and offering reflections in relation to our two core themes: the ongoing process of negotiating the form of Brexit; and the role that citizens' assemblies might play in future UK politics.

As the following chapters will show, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was a great success. Its Members came from all parts of UK society. They engaged with great energy and dedication, and they were willing to listen and learn across the Brexit divide. They heard from many of the country's leading experts on Brexit-related issues, who, between them, presented balanced, reasoned information and arguments about the Brexit choices facing the UK. They learnt a great deal and reflected in great depth, and the conclusions they reached were consistent and meaningful. They deserve to be listened to by policy-makers involved in the Brexit process. Their work also provides valuable evidence on how we could enrich our democracy in the years to come.

## 2. MEMBERSHIP: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

A citizens' assembly cannot exist without members. For an assembly to work well, its membership should reflect as closely as possible the make-up of the wider population that it is intended to represent. That can be achieved only through a careful process of initial recruitment and subsequent retention.

This chapter begins by setting out our goals for the process of recruiting and retaining Assembly Members. Then we explain our approach to recruiting Members and encouraging their ongoing participation. Finally, we describe our recruitment and retention results.

The Citizens' Assembly was remarkably successful in these respects. The Members closely mirrored the composition of the wider electorate in terms of the characteristics we sought to control. And, once they had been recruited, Members' commitment to the project was exceptionally high. There are also some respects in which we think it would be possible to do even better. We thus draw out a range of lessons for designers of similar deliberative exercises in the future.

### 2.1. GOALS FOR THE PROCESSES OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Our primary goal in developing our strategy for recruitment and retention was to secure an appropriate Assembly membership. In addition, we wanted a process that would enable us to research who accepts and who declines the invitation to participate. In the following paragraphs, we explain the basic aims underlying our approach and then set out certain features in further detail.

#### Basic aims

We had three basic aims:

1. to recruit a group of around forty-five Assembly Members who reflected (so far as is feasible within a group of this size) the diversity of the wider population;
2. to ensure that the Members whom we recruited felt positively about the project and wanted to participate throughout the project's duration;
3. to enable research into the dynamics of recruitment: specifically, into the kinds of people who are more or less willing to accept an invitation to participate in a citizens' assembly.

#### Target population

Saying that we wanted to recruit Members who would reflect the diversity of the wider population leads immediately to two important questions. First, what is the 'population' that we are seeking to represent? Second, what is required in order to reflect the diversity of that population?

We decided that our target population should be the eligible electorate for UK parliamentary elections.

Our rationale was simple: this was the population who were entitled to vote in the 2016 referendum on EU membership. The referendum answered the question of whether the UK public wanted the country to remain in the EU or to leave. The Citizens' Assembly was designed to elicit evidence on the preferences of the UK public regarding the next step: the form that Brexit should take. Retaining the same population as for the referendum was therefore important.

Our decision to mirror the referendum franchise has been criticised in certain quarters. Some argued during the referendum campaign – and have continued to argue subsequently – that this franchise unjustly excluded many people whose lives would be deeply affected by the outcome of the vote: notably, citizens of other EU countries living in the UK. It was suggested to us by some individuals that we were compounding this injustice by replicating the referendum franchise in the Citizens' Assembly. But it was not our place to second guess parliament's decision regarding the franchise – particularly as there were good arguments for that decision as well as against it.



### **Stratification criteria**

The next question concerns how we seek to represent the population. Perfect representation of an electorate of approaching 47 million people is clearly not possible in an assembly of forty-five or so people. A deliberative mini-public such as the Citizens' Assembly does not claim to capture the views of a nationally representative sample in the way that an opinion survey does. Rather, it seeks deep insights into the considered thinking of a broad cross-section of society. Nevertheless, the more accurately a citizens' assembly can reflect the composition of the wider population the better. That can best be achieved through stratification where targets are set for the number of members belong to specific groups.

Past citizens' assemblies have all sought to stratify their memberships in terms of demographics. All have sought gender balance and a spread of members living in different places. Some have also taken account of other characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, and social class.

Table 2.1 shows the stratification criteria used by past citizens' assemblies and compares them to the criteria adopted for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit. Two features of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit stand out. First, we were more ambitious than many assemblies in the range and prescriptiveness of the demographic criteria that we sought to control for. The Canadian and Dutch assemblies sought to control for fewer characteristics and sometimes allowed targets only to intermediate stages of the recruitment process, not to the final assembly membership. Only the two Irish bodies have been similar to the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit in seeking to control a wide range of characteristics in the final membership. Second, we were unique in choosing to stratify not only on demographics, but also on attitudes: specifically, on how people voted in the 2016 referendum.

**Table 2.1. Stratification criteria in citizens' assemblies**

	British Columbia CA (2003)	Dutch Civic Forum (2006)	Ontario CA (2006)	Irish Const. Convention (2012)	Democracy Matters (2015)	Irish CA (2016)	Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (2017)
<b>Gender</b>	Stage 1 Stage 2 Final	Final	Stage 1 Stage 2 Final	Final	Final	Final	Final
<b>Age</b>	Stage 1 Stage 2	**	Stage 1	Final	Final	Final	Final
<b>Ethnicity</b>	*		***				Final
<b>Social class</b>				Final		Final	Final
<b>Work status</b>				Final			
<b>Location</b>	Stage 1 Stage 2 Final	Stage 1 Final	Stage 1 Stage 2 Final	Final		Final	Final
<b>Attitudes</b>							Final

**Key:** 'Stage 1/2' indicates that stratification was applied to the people initially invited to express an interest in taking part (Stage 1) or to those, from among the people who had expressed an interest, who were invited to the next stage of the selection process (Stage 2). See section 2.2 for details of these processes. 'Final' means that stratification was applied to the final membership of the assembly itself.

\* No quotas for ethnic groups were applied. When it was found, however, that no one had been selected with strong ties to the First Nations, two additional members from these communities were added.

\*\* No age quotas were applied, but a check was conducted after the first stage of the recruitment process to ensure that those who had responded positively to the invitation to participate reflected the age distribution of the population.

\*\*\* There were no ethnic quotas, but there was a requirement that at least one member should be from the First Nations.

**Sources:** British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2004); Dutch Electoral System Civic Forum (2006); Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2007); Behaviour & Attitudes (2012); Flinders et al. (2016); Red C (2016).

We included this range of demographic criteria because the inclusiveness of discussions and the Assembly's credibility would have been undermined had major demographic groups been absent or severely underrepresented. In addition, factors such as age and social class were among the key divisions in the Brexit referendum, reflecting important social and political cleavages in the UK today. It was essential that people from across these divides should be present.

Our inclusion of an attitudinal variable – Brexit vote – may be more controversial. There is debate amongst organisers of deliberative mini-publics and deliberative democrats on this point, and our approach deviates from traditional practice: even deliberative exercises that have made the inclusion of diverse views an explicit part of their recruitment strategies have tended to use demographic variables as proxies for such views (e.g., Longstaff and Burgess 2010: 219; Molster et al. 2011: 213).

In light of the polarisation around the Brexit referendum, however, the Assembly would have lacked credibility had it contained a majority of Remain supporters or an excessive preponderance of Leave supporters. Avoiding such outcomes could not have been guaranteed through sampling on demographics alone, so inclusion of the vote criterion was essential. We consider that the recruitment results reported below strongly vindicate this decision. Indeed, we suggest that further attitudinal stratification would be desirable in any future exercise of this kind.

### **Control group**

To ensure that we could be confident that any changes in attitudes among Assembly Members were caused by participation rather than external events (such as media reporting of Brexit issues) we recruited a control group alongside the Assembly Members themselves. We thought this particularly important given the high-profile and fast-moving nature of the Brexit negotiations. High levels of interest in taking part in the Assembly meant that we could construct both a carefully stratified sample and a matching control group.

We constituted the control group using the principle of 'matched pairs'. Each matched pair comprised two people who had said they were willing to attend the Assembly and who shared the same six characteristics as another respondent (age, gender, social class, ethnicity, region, and vote in the EU referendum). A pair might, for example, have consisted of two people who were white, Leave-voting men from the North West who were aged between 25 and 34 and worked in an occupation classified as C1 social class. We describe the process of recruiting the control group in section 2.2, below. Crucially, we designed that process so that everyone had an equal chance of being recruited to the Assembly or to the control group.

Control groups have been recruited by some other randomised mini-publics, but they remain relatively rare. Furthermore, as far as we are aware, no other mini-public has used the matched pairs approach, instead drawing a control group that has similar aggregate characteristics of the participants. Our use of matched pairs enhances the potential explanatory power of our design. We do not present detailed research using the control group in this report, but we will conduct such research over the coming months and include it in later publications.



## **2.2. METHODS FOR INITIAL CONTACT AND RECRUITMENT**

Having established our recruitment goals, we then turned to considering how to achieve them. This section focuses on the methods through which we made initial contact with potential Members and sought their agreement to participating in the Assembly. Section 2.3 then focuses on the offer that we made to potential Members, on the basis of which they decided whether to accept our invitation and, subsequently, whether to attend each weekend. We first set out the options and explain why we chose the approach we did. Then we describe the implementation of this approach.



## Recruitment options

Four principal methods for recruiting members to citizens' assemblies have been employed in the past or were proposed to us for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit:

- **Letters of invitation and selection meetings.** The first approach, employed by the citizens' assemblies in Canada and the Netherlands begins by randomly selecting people from the electoral register and sending them a letter that explains what the assembly is and invites recipients to indicate whether they would like to take part. A stratified sample of those who respond positively are then invited to attend a local selection meeting, where they hear more about the assembly. If they still want to go forward, they put their names in a hat and, from these, the members are finally selected. This approach has the **advantages** that everyone in the population has an equal opportunity to take part, and prospective members can learn a lot about the assembly before deciding whether to participate. The requirement to attend a selection meeting makes it likely that they are genuinely committed and builds a sense of attachment to the project. It has the **disadvantages** that it is very expensive and time-consuming. The requirement to attend a meeting may be prohibitive for people with limited time, even if attendance is compensated, and may skew the sample towards people who are very interested in politics. Furthermore, it does not involve a survey of all invited participants in which questions could be asked to provide a basis for detailed stratification or for tracking of views across the project's lifetime. And it makes it harder to recruit a control group.
- **Letters of invitation without selection meetings.** The second approach, which was proposed to us by one of the companies that tendered for our recruitment contract, also begins with invitations mailed to randomly selected individuals. In this case, invitees are asked to fill in a short survey when replying, which forms the basis for subsequent stratified sampling. A stratified sample is selected from those who reply, and these people are asked to confirm their participation. This again has the **advantage** that everyone has a chance of being recruited. It is also a relatively low-cost approach. It has the **disadvantage** that, because only limited stratification is possible at the invitation stage, a relatively large number of invitations have to be sent to maximise the chances that a broadly representative sample can be recruited. In addition, the questionnaire sent to invitees has to be short, so only limited information can be gathered, and it is difficult to recruit a satisfactory control group.

- **Free-find survey.** A free-find survey seeks respondents from the general population, without any prior contact. This can be done through face-to-face interviewing or telephone interviewing. The former approach was employed to recruit both the Irish Constitutional Convention of 2012–14 and the Irish Citizens' Assembly of 2016–18, while the latter approach was proposed by one of the companies that tendered for our recruitment contract. Survey respondents are asked a series of questions. The citizens' assembly is then explained to them and they are asked whether they would like to take part. These approaches have the **advantages** that anyone has a chance to be recruited, and the survey can be used to ask them a range of questions. The latter point is particularly valuable for a research project such as the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit. The primary **disadvantage** of such approaches is that they are expensive; indeed, face-to-face interviewing is extremely expensive.
- **Online panel-based survey.** Finally, members can be recruited through a survey as above, but in this case one that is administered to an online panel. Most opinion polls are now conducted through panels of this kind. In the UK, polling companies typically have panels of several hundred thousand people, and a stratified sample of these people is invited to complete the recruitment survey. Those who express an interest in the assembly are invited to give a telephone number on which they can be contacted. Willing participants are called until a stratification grid of confirmed members has been filled. This approach has the **advantages** that costs are much lower than for traditional surveys and detailed information about respondents can be gathered. It has the **disadvantage** that the opportunity to take part in the assembly is limited only to the members of the survey company's panel.

Being an academic research project rather than an official body, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit had only a limited budget. We invited tenders for our recruitment contract using a variety of methods, but only those proposing the second or fourth method proved to be feasible within the funds available to us. Because we wanted (and were required by our funders, the ESRC) not only to hold the Assembly, but also to conduct research into its dynamics, it was important to us that we could administer a detailed recruitment survey and be confident of constituting a high-quality control group. Neither of these requisites could be assured within our budget using the second method, and we therefore opted for the fourth. We recognise the disadvantages of recruitment from an online panel. Given the particular nature of our project, however, we consider that these are outweighed by the advantages – and it did enable us to select a highly diverse Assembly.

We now outline how we implemented this approach.



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## Implementing our chosen approach

The recruitment survey was administered by ICM to a UK-wide representative sample of 5000 respondents. It was in the field between 11 and 17 July 2017. It included 39 questions, covering demographics, general political attitudes, and specific attitudes on Brexit, trade, and immigration. Towards the end of the survey, respondents received a description of a citizens' assembly and were asked whether they would be interested in attending such a body:

A citizens' assembly is an opportunity for a group of people to get together to discuss issues. The people are randomly selected to represent all members of a wider society – for example, the UK population. This means the group has the correct balance of men and women, older people and younger people and so on.

These people meet together over several weekends to learn about an important issue, discuss it with one another and come up with some recommendations. For example, they might discuss broad issues such as the economy and NHS or more specific issues such as what kind of Brexit the UK should be aiming for.

People are paid for taking part in the citizens' assembly, for example £200 for each weekend they attend. They are put up in a hotel which is paid for, and also have all their travel expenses paid.

How interested would you be in attending a citizen's assembly on the kind of Brexit the UK should be aiming for?

Respondents who said they would be 'very interested' or 'fairly interested' in attending were then asked specifically about the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit:

ICM is working with University College London to organise a Citizens' Assembly on Brexit in Manchester.

This will take place over two weekends in September: 8th to 10th September and 29th September to 1st October.

Each weekend you would be needed to be there from 6pm on Friday until lunchtime on Sunday. The people who take part will be put up in a hotel for both weekends, will have all their travel expenses paid, and will be paid £200 for each weekend they attend (£400 in total, plus hotel and travel expenses paid for).

The Assembly will look into what kind of Brexit people want. It will produce a report that politicians are likely to pay attention to.

Would you like to attend this Citizens' Assembly in Manchester on the weekends of 8–10th September and 29th September–1st October? If you answer 'yes' to this question, you will not be committing to attend, but registering your interest. You can withdraw at a later stage if you wish.

Those answering 'yes' to this question were then asked 'Do you give your consent for ICM to pass your name and contact details, together with your responses to this survey, to the team organising the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit?'

We took this multi-stage approach so that respondents could think about the idea of taking part in a citizens' assembly in principle before considering whether they would want, and be able, to take part in this specific assembly. We felt this would be a better way to introduce what, for almost all respondents, would be a new concept. In addition, for our research purposes, we wanted to be able to differentiate between those who were not interested in participating at all and those who would be interested in principle, but would not be available for the weekends when the Assembly was held.

We report the responses to the survey in section 2.4, below.

Having received the survey responses from ICM, our in-house team had three key tasks before follow-up contacts could begin:

- decide how many Assembly Members we wanted to recruit
- use census data and other sources to establish the target number of Assembly Members in each stratification category
- locate each survey respondent who wanted to take part in the Assembly in terms of the stratification categories.

As noted above, our target was a final Assembly membership of forty-five. We expected that some of those recruited would fail to attend on the day, and so we intentionally over-recruited. We received widely varying advice during the recruitment tendering process as to the level of non-attendance that we should expect: anything from 5 per cent to 40 per cent. Our experience in the 2015 Democracy Matters project suggested non-attendance of around 25–30 per cent. Nevertheless, we saw a figure towards the upper end of these ranges as unlikely: we were confident that our retention strategy (see section 2.3) would deliver a better result. Given these considerations – and also given what we would be able to accommodate within our budget if attendance proved higher than expected – we decided to recruit 53 Members, thus over-recruiting by eight people.

Figure 2.1 shows our targets for 53 Members across the categories of the six stratification criteria. As can be seen, the categories were broad: for example, we split all ages into only three categories and all social classes and ethnicities into only two. We did this on advice from ICM, in order to keep the recruitment process manageable. In order to maximise the chances that the final Assembly membership would reflect the composition of the wider population, we focused our over-recruitment in groups that past experiences suggests are less likely to attend on the day, such as young people and those from C2DE social groups.

**Figure 2.1. Target stratification grid**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	White, 43				Non-White, 10			
<b>Social class</b>	ABC1, 28				C2DE, 25			
<b>Age</b>	18-34, 19		35-54, 17		55+, 17			
<b>Region</b>	North, 12	Midlands, 7	East, 4	London, 6	South, 12	Wales, 4	Scotland, 5	NI, 3
<b>Gender</b>	Male, 26				Female, 27			
<b>Brexit vote</b>	Leave, 25			Remain, 22			Did not vote, 6	

We then began contacting prospective Members. We randomly selected individuals from the various stratification categories. In the first instance, we emailed them (recruitment from an online panel meant that all did have an email address), asking them to let us know when would be a good time for us to call. If they responded, we called them, explaining what the Assembly would involve and asking whether they would like to take part. If they did not respond after two or three days, we called them up to three times. If they still did not respond – or if they responded indicating they did not want to or could not take part – we replaced them with another person. We continued randomly selecting potential Members from the larger pool until we had filled the stratification grid.

### **Recruiting the control group**

As explained in section 2.1, above, we recruited a control group alongside the Assembly itself. We identified ‘matched pairs’ of individuals who shared exactly the same features on our six stratification criteria. Then we randomly designated one of these people as a prospective Assembly Member and the other as a potential control group member.

Using the experimental techniques employed, for example, for trials of new medicines, we had to keep any individual’s chances of being recruited to the Assembly and their chances of being recruited to the control group the same. This meant that, if someone we invited to join the Assembly did not accept that invitation, we could not seek to recruit their ‘pair’. Such an approach would often be hampered by a lack of prospective participants. As we set out in section 2.4, below, however, high interest in taking part in the Assembly allowed us to recruit both the Assembly Members and the control group while hitting our demographic targets.

## **2.3. WHAT WE OFFERED MEMBERS**

The preceding section set out our recruitment processes. These processes can work, clearly, only if people accept the invitation to attend and subsequently do in fact attend. Successful recruitment therefore requires that careful consideration be given to the offer made to potential Members. Successful retention requires consideration of how Members are treated once they have signed up.

This section begins by setting out our initial offer to potential Assembly Members. Then we outline the ways in which we communicated with Members once they had signed up, before and between the Assembly weekends. Finally, we look at the design of the weekends themselves.

### **Our offer to potential Members**

During our recruitment discussions with potential Assembly Members, we discussed in detail what taking part in the Assembly would involve and answered questions that potential Members had. Our offer had three basic elements:

- **what membership of the Assembly would involve**, in terms of what Members would be asked to do and what the impact of their work would be
- **how we would treat Members** and the compensation we would provide for their participation
- **how we would maximise accessibility** to the Assembly for people with diverse needs and means.

We set out **what membership would involve** during our recruitment conversations:

- We explained that Assembly Members would participate in two weekends of detailed learning about and discussion of the options for Brexit. They would have the chance to express their own views, hear from others, listen to and question experts, and come to their own conclusions.
- We indicated who was running the project and how it was funded. We were sometimes asked about whether the project was biased towards any particular view on Brexit; in response, we outlined what we were doing to ensure it was not.

- We explained who the other Members would be and how the weekends would be conducted. We offered reassurances where appropriate that expertise was not required and that the discussions would be carefully facilitated to help everyone take part on equal terms.

It was clear from our conversations with Members that many of them were excited by the opportunity to take part in the Assembly and by the chance to influence decision-makers. Many saw Brexit as the major decision of our times and wanted to have their voice heard in the debate.

Beyond these intrinsic features of participation in the Assembly, it was also important that potential Members should know that we would treat them well. All Members deserved to be treated well for giving up two weekends to Assembly business. In addition, we wanted to recruit not just people who enjoy discussing politics, but also a full spectrum of the electorate. Both in the initial recruitment survey (see section 2.2, above) and during our subsequent recruitment conversations, we therefore also explained **how we would treat Members:**

- We would cover Members' two nights in a quality hotel (the four-star Manchester Airport Marriott) each weekend, including all meals and refreshments. Partners and other family members were also able to stay (but not attend the Assembly's meetings), subject to a small hotel charge paid by Members.
- We would also cover Members' travel expenses associated with attendance (though not the expenses of partners or family members).
- We give each Member a gift of £200 per weekend in recognition of their commitment to taking part.

We were also able to explain the features of our venue. We chose a hotel in Manchester in part because it was readily accessible from all parts of the UK, thereby minimising the requirements on Members to travel. Our chosen venue had good meeting facilities and bedrooms. It had a bar, leisure centre and swimming pool, which Members were able to use during times when the Assembly was not in session and which their family members could use at any time.

Overwhelming evidence suggests that, without incentives such as these, the membership of an assembly would be heavily skewed towards people who are politically very engaged. Giving monetary incentives to attract people who are less enthused by the prospect of spending several weekends discussing politics is essential, and such remuneration may also signal the importance attached to participation (see, e.g., NHS Citizen, n.d.; Fishkin 2009: 114).

Finally, we worked hard to ensure that participation in the Assembly would be **accessible to all**, and we made special accommodations where people indicated during our recruitment conversations that, without them, their participation would be difficult or impossible:

- While most Assembly Members paid for their travel and then claimed expenses after each weekend, we paid upfront for those who indicated that they would otherwise be unable to come.
- We explained that the venue was fully accessible for wheelchair users and that we would provide a hearing loop in the meeting room. We asked the hotel to allocate bedrooms near the meeting room to people with limited mobility. We made special provisions for people with dyslexia or impaired vision.
- We asked Members about their dietary requirements and communicated with the hotel about these in advance of each weekend.

No one who accepted the invitation to participate had additional access needs, so it was not necessary to provide, for example, sign language interpreters or resources in Braille. In any official citizens' assembly, it would clearly be necessary to budget for these.

## **Communications with Members**

Recruitment phone calls and all subsequent contacts were made by our in-house team. We felt this was important so that prospective Assembly Members would feel a connection to the project and so that they could easily receive answers to any questions they might have.

Once Members had been recruited, we sent them a welcome pack including an introduction to the Assembly, an overview of the issues it would discuss, and logistical information about how to reach the venue and claim expenses. We consciously chose not to send more detailed briefing materials on the subjects to be addressed by the Assembly. We did not want to put people off by making them feel they would be unable to cope with the Assembly's content (particularly those less comfortable with reading or who might find the subject matter intimidating). Nor did we want to put people off by implying that a large amount of preparation was required. While we suggested to Members that we thought the materials in the welcome pack would be useful to them, we also said that reading them was not required.

We also sent regular update emails with information on how the project was progressing and who had endorsed its work, and we asked Members to give us various pieces of information so that we could see they were still engaged and planning to attend. In particular, we asked Members to let us know what they hoped to get out of taking part in the Assembly, which was a useful way of encouraging them to think about their membership. We also asked them to let us know when they expected to arrive at the venue and by what mode of transport in order to ensure they had planned their journey: we knew that once people have 'made a plan' they are much more likely to stick to it.

Through all these routes, we hoped both to give Members a sense that they were valued participants in an important exercise and to encourage them to prepare for their participation.

Between the weekends, we thanked Members for their hard work over the first weekend and provided answers to questions that had been raised but not addressed during that weekend (see Chapter 3 for further details on this). We considered creating a Facebook group so that Members could continue discussions with each other, but decided not to: it would create a divide between Members who used Facebook and those who did not; it might also have created a danger of discussions that did not meet high standards of deliberation, which we would not have been able to moderate properly. In response to Member suggestions, however, we did create a Facebook page on which we could post blogposts and other developments, which Members could readily share with their friends.

Besides these communications, we needed to show that we were delivering on the initial offer to Members that we had made. Our administrator and our colleagues in the UCL Finance Office worked very hard to ensure that expense claims and gifts were paid efficiently.

## **Design and delivery of the Assembly weekends**

We designed the two weekends when the Assembly met to (1) be accessible for all Members, (2) enable quality learning and deliberation amongst all Members, and (3) help maintain a positive environment. Success in these areas would in itself facilitate Member retention, by ensuring that:

- all Members felt included and able to participate
- the Assembly took place in a welcoming, friendly and respectful atmosphere
- all Members were able to engage with questions about Brexit (as seen above, this was one of the chief attractions for many Members in taking part)
- ultimately, Members enjoyed the experience.

We set out full details of the Assembly design in Chapter 3.

In addition, we worked to ensure that the package offered by our venue was delivered. We liaised closely with the hotel to provide food that was good and varied and that met all Members' needs. After concerns were expressed about some aspects of the meals at the first weekend, we made changes for the second weekend. We sought to make check-in and check-out processes as smooth as possible. The weekend schedules included short refreshment breaks, as well as relaxation time in the evenings with fellow Assembly Members.

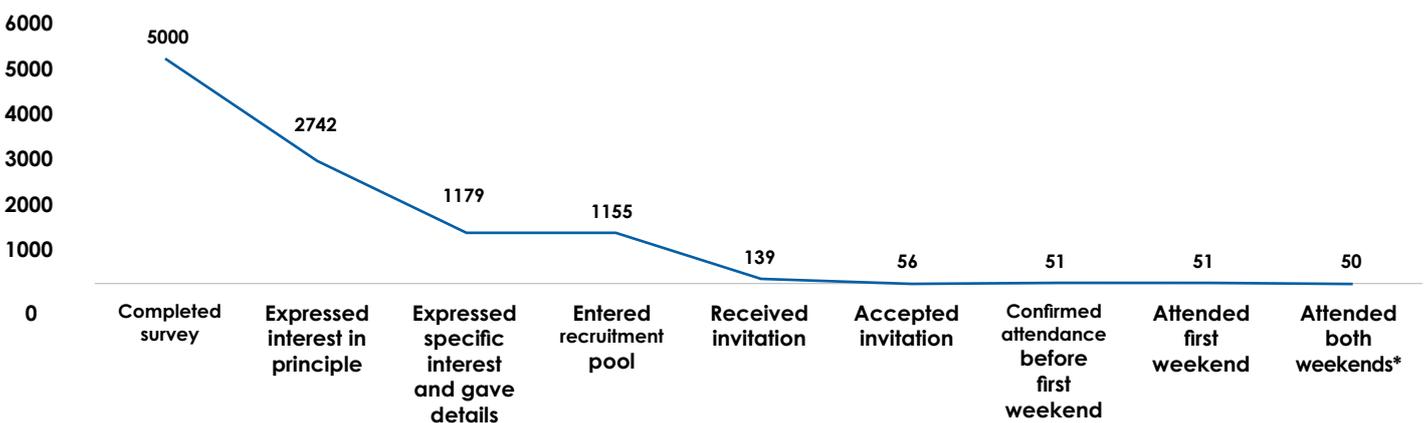
## 2.4. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION RESULTS

The preceding sections set out what we did. Now we turn to results. We begin with overall numbers at each stage of the recruitment process, then turn to performance in terms of our stratification targets, and finally offer some discussion of the degree to which the Assembly's membership reflected the wider population in terms of characteristics on which we did not stratify.

### Contact and recruitment numbers

Figure 2.2 sets out the numbers at each stage of our recruitment process. Of the 5000 people who completed the recruitment survey, 2742 expressed broad interest in attending an assembly of this kind, of whom 1179 expressed interest specifically in attending the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit on the two designated weekends and gave their contact details to the project team. We were very surprised by these numbers. In British Columbia, for example, of 23,034 people who received an invitation letter, 1715 replied positively – 7.4 per cent of the total (British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform 2004: 33–4). In Ontario, 123,489 people were initially invited, of whom 7,033 responded (5.7 per cent) (Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform 2007: 47). In the Netherlands, 50,000 invitations were sent and 4000 responded (8 per cent) (Dutch Electoral System Civic Forum 2006: 10). By contrast, our initial response rate was 23.6 per cent.

Figure 2.2. Contact and recruitment numbers



\*One person was unable to attend the second weekend due to illness.

We had to exclude a small number of the 1179 positive respondents because they were unique in terms of their combination of the six stratification criteria: our research design required that each Assembly Member have an exact pair in terms of these criteria in the control group. This meant that we recruited from a total of 1155 people. Through the subsequent recruitment process, we contacted or attempted to contact 139 of these people. From those who responded positively to the invitation, we reached our target recruitment figure of 53. During the final weeks before the Assembly's first meeting, however, five people had to drop out. We were able to replace three of these, meaning that, in total, 56 people accepted our invitation at some stage.

Replacements understandably became increasingly difficult to find the closer we came to the first weekend, and we therefore stopped our attempts at further recruitment three days in advance of the weekend with a list of 51 people who said they would attend. Remarkably, every single one of these 51 people did in fact attend the first weekend. 50 of them went on to attend the second weekend as well, with only one person forced to pull out due to illness.

This meant that the final Assembly membership – at 50 – was actually greater than we originally envisaged. Far from falling below our recruitment targets, as some of those whom we consulted during our early planning said was likely, we over-shot them. While the expanded membership caused us slight administrative difficulties, it was a sign of unexpectedly successful recruitment.

Of the 139 people we invited to attend the Assembly, 36.7 per cent actually attended the first weekend. Combining the acceptance rates at the two stages of the selection process, this means that 8.7 per cent of those given the opportunity to take part did so. Table 2.2 compares this with three of the earlier citizens' assemblies, in Canada and the Netherlands (comparable data from Ireland are not available). In each case, the recruitment process involved two stages at which people were invited to participate or to decline participation. The table shows acceptance rates at each of these stages and then an overall acceptance rate combining the two. In Canada and the Netherlands, unlike in the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, a further random selection occurred from those who accepted the invitation at stage 2, which is why the 'accepted' numbers at this stage in these cases are much higher.

As Table 2.2 shows, the differences between our selection process and that employed by the Canadian and Dutch citizens' assemblies meant that drop-off occurred at different rates at the different stages: accepting the initial invitation was easier in our case, so drop-off occurred less at this stage and more at stage 2. Nevertheless, what is most striking is that, when we take the two stages together, the overall acceptance rate for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was still about twice the rate seen in past official citizens' assemblies. This is important, as it diminishes the danger that, notwithstanding our stratification scheme, the people who accept the invitation to attend might be substantively different from those who decline.

**Table 2.2. Acceptance rates in citizens' assemblies**

	Stage 1			Stage 2			Overall Acceptance rate
	Invited	Accepted	Acceptance rate	Invited	Accepted	Acceptance rate	
British Columbia	23,034	1715	7.4%	1441	914	63.4%	4.7%
Ontario	123,489	7033	5.7%				
Netherlands	50,000	4000	8.0%	4000	2107	52.7%	4.2%
Citizens' Assembly on Brexit	5000	1179	23.6%	139	51	36.7%	8.7%

**Note:** Data for the second stage are not available for Ontario (but the overall acceptance rate must have been lower than the 5.7 per cent rate at stage 1). For the Netherlands, the stage 2 'accepted' shows all who attended a selection meeting, including any who subsequently decided not to put their names forward.

**Sources:** British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2004: 35); Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2007: 46); Dutch Electoral System Civic Forum (2006: 10).

We think that a large part of this success is attributable to the high level of public interest in Brexit: never before has a citizens' assembly been held on a topic so prominent on the political agenda. In addition, recruitment from an online panel is likely to help. We know from Members' feedback that the incentives we offered to Assembly Members made a difference, and that Members' high levels of satisfaction with the first weekend contributed to their decision to return for the second. We hope that our careful communications strategy made a difference too, though we did not collect data on this.

## Controlled characteristics

We now consider the degree to which the membership of the Assembly reflected the diverse composition of the wider population. Our unexpectedly high acceptance rate greatly assisted us in working towards our stratification targets: it meant that we rarely exhausted all of the potential Members in any given cell of the stratification grid. Table 2.3 shows how the composition of the Citizens' Assembly compared with the make-up of the UK population as a whole.

**Table 2.3. Composition of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, by stratification category**

Stratification criteria and categories		Attended the Assembly (%)	UK population (%)
Age (years)*	18-34	28	28.8
	35-54	38	34.4
	55+	34	36.7
Gender*	Female	48	50.7
	Male	52	49.3
Ethnicity**	White	86	86.0
	Non-white	14	14.0
Place of residence*	North	22	23.3
	Midlands	14	16.0
	East of England	8	9.3
	London	10	13.4
	South	22	22.2
	Wales	8	4.7
	Scotland	10	8.2
	Northern Ireland	6	2.8
Social Class †	ABC1	50	55
	C2DE	50	45
Referendum vote 2016 † †	Voted to remain	44	34.7
	Voted to leave	50	37.4
	Did not vote	6	27.8

Sources: Population statistics are taken from: \* ONS, Mid-year Population Estimates; \*\* Census 2011; † National Readership Survey, Jan-Dec 2016; † † Electoral Commission.

As is apparent, in almost all these respects the Citizens' Assembly mirrored the make-up of the wider population very closely – in fact, more closely than any has previous citizens' assembly. We deliberately included slight overrepresentation for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland so that voices from these parts of the UK would be properly heard. The only target that proved impossible to meet was that for non-voters in the 2016 referendum. Non-voters were already significantly underrepresented in the original ICM survey. They were less likely to express interest in participating in the Assembly and much less likely to accept our invitation when contacted at stage 2 than were voters. As a result, though we contacted every non-voter we could (twenty in total),\* only three Assembly Members (6 per cent of the total) were people who said they had not voted. There is, similarly, evidence that opinion polls tend to be answered by people who are on average more attentive to politics than the general population (Sturgis et al. 2016; 2017). Clearly, attracting people who do not engage with traditional politics is difficult, even where substantial incentives are in place.

Despite this constraint, we met our most important target: Leave voters slightly outnumbered Remain voters in the Assembly, as they did in the electorate as a whole during the EU referendum.

Table 2.4 gives further information on acceptance rates across the different stratification groups. Conventional wisdom has it that people from groups that are typically marginalised in mainstream politics – women, young people, members of ethnic minorities, and people from lower social classes – are less likely than others to accept an invitation to participate in an event such as a citizens' assembly. Our experience bears this out for young people – who were markedly less likely to accept the invitation to take part than older voters – and women, who were less likely to accept than men. Those from ethnic minorities and lower social classes were not less likely to accept than others. Numbers are small, however, so it would be wrong to draw the inference that stratification on these criteria is unnecessary. Similarly, the numbers are much too small to place any weight on the differences between different parts of the UK.

The final lines of Table 2.4 show a small but important difference in acceptance rates between those who voted Leave and those who voted Remain in the 2016 referendum, with Remain voters somewhat more likely to accept the invitation to participate. Given the need to reflect the voting result in the composition of the Assembly, this vindicates our decision to stratify on this criterion: without stratification, it is likely that the number of Remain voters in the Assembly would have exceeded the number of Leave voters. As expected, non-voters were much less likely to accept the invitation than either category of voters.



\* That is, we contacted half of all the survey respondents who had expressed an interest in attending. The other half were control group pairs. Once we had invited one person from a pair, our control group methodology meant that we could not invite the other person.

**Table 2.4. Acceptance rates for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, by stratification category**

Stratification criteria and categories		Stage 1			Stage 2			Overall acceptance rate
		Invited	Accepted	Acceptance rate	Invited	Accepted	Acceptance rate	
Age (years)*	18-34	1386	345	24.9%	61	14	23.0%	5.7%
	35-54	1812	465	25.7%	40	19	47.5%	12.2%
	55+	1802	369	20.5%	38	17	44.7%	9.2%
Gender*	Female	2690	527	19.6%	76	24	31.6%	6.2%
	Male	2310	652	28.2%	63	26	41.3%	11.6%
Ethnicity**	White	2582	1078	23.5%	120	43	35.8%	8.4%
	Non-white	368	14.0	25.3%	19	7	36.8%	9.3%
Place of residence*	North	1233	315	25.5%	43	11	25.6%	6.5%
	Midlands	818	190	23.2%	19	7	36.8%	8.5%
	East of England	472	100	21.2%	10	4	40.0%	8.5%
	London	604	168	27.8%	16	5	31.3%	8.7%
	South	1077	215	20.0%	25	11	44.0%	8.8%
	Wales	247	57	23.1%	7	4	57.1%	13.2%
	Scotland	416	97	23.3%	7	5	71.4%	16.6%
	Northern Ireland	133	37	27.8%	12	3	25.0%	7.0%
Social Class †	ABC1	3091	749	24.2%	81	25	30.9%	7.5%
	C2DE	1909	430	22.5%	58	25	43.1%	9.7%
Referendum vote 2016 ††	Voted to remain	2245	613	27.3%	55	22	40.0%	10.9%
	Votes to leave	2186	483	22.1%	64	25	39.1%	8.6%
	Did not vote	524	81	15.5%	20	3	15.0%	2.3%

### Uncontrolled characteristics

We stratified the membership of the Citizens' Assembly in terms of the six characteristics set out above. Clearly, there are many additional criteria that we might also have used. To have kept adding numerous further criteria would have made the stratification process unmanageable. Nevertheless, it is important to consider recruitment dynamics in terms of additional criteria – both to see how far the Citizens' Assembly reflected the population of the UK, and to consider whether a similar exercise in the future might be stratified differently (for general discussion of representativeness in deliberative bodies, see Fishkin 2009: 111–19).

Table 2.5 sets out evidence on recruitment in terms of a range of additional criteria, using data from the recruitment survey that we did not use in our stratification stream.

One obvious potential concern is that participation in deliberative mini-publics may be harder for parents of young children, for others with caring responsibilities, or for people in full-time work. Whether people with less education or living on lower incomes are less likely to engage with a citizens' assembly – as they are with conventional politics (e.g., Brady et al. 1995) – also deserves to be investigated. We might expect that those who accept invitations to deliberative mini-publics will be more engaged with politics generally than are the wider population. Finally, we might posit that the prospect of participating in a citizens' assembly may be more attractive to people of a liberal mindset – who might be expected to be more interested in hearing other views and talking issues through. We do not have evidence on liberal/authoritarian attitudes in general, but we do have evidence on attitudes towards immigration, which tend to correlate with the liberal/authoritarian dimension. Table 2.5 therefore provides evidence on all these factors.

The data in Table 2.5 largely bear out the expectations. Those with children aged under 5 years were markedly less likely to accept the invitation to attend than others. On the other hand, there was no substantial difference between those with caring responsibilities in general and those without such responsibilities. Those in full-time work (as well as students) were less likely to accept the invitation than those working part-time or not working. There was little difference between those with school-level qualifications and those with a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, but those with a higher degree were much more likely to accept. Income showed a U-shaped distribution, with the lowest acceptance rate among those with incomes below the average, but not the very lowest. People who already participated in politics in other ways were much more likely to accept the invitation than those who did not.

The last lines in Table 2.5 show a strong patterning in acceptance rates depending on attitudes to immigration. Respondents with permissive attitudes to immigration were more than twice as likely to accept the invitation to attend as were those with restrictive attitudes, while those with more mixed views had an intermediate acceptance rate. This chimes clearly with the hypothesis of a liberal/authoritarian division in acceptance rates for citizens' assemblies. Furthermore, stratification by socio-demographics and even by Brexit vote appears to have done little to counter the effect: within each group, it appears to have been those with more permissive attitudes who were more likely to accept our invitation. This suggests that there is a strong case for further stratification on attitudes where this division is likely to affect assembly conclusions.



**Table 2.5. Acceptance rates for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, by uncontrolled characteristics**

		Completed survey	Attended Assembly	UK population*	Overall acceptance rate
Childcare responsibilities	Under 5 years	61%	2.0%	6.2%	2.1%
	5-15 years	15.7%	14.0%	16.5%	9.3%
	16-18 years	3.9%	8.0%	4.2%	18.1%
	No children under 18	74.4%	76.0%	73.0%	8.5%
Childcare responsibilities at home	Yes	15.3%	16.0%	15.2%	8.0%
	No	84.7%	84.0%	84.8%	8.7%
Employment status	Working full-time	38.4%	32.0%	44.0%	7.6%
	Working part-time	14.1%	14.0%	12.0%	9.0%
	Seeking work/sick	6.0%	8.0%	5.3%	12.4%
	Not seeking work	12.4%	12.0%	10.9%	8.2%
	Retired	24.0%	26.0%	23.3%	10.5%
	Student	5.1%	8.0%	4.4%	5.2%
Highest educational attainment	Secondary School	44.7%	40.0%	46.6%	8.2%
	Degree or equiv.	37.4%	38.0%	36.8%	8.6%
	Higher degree or equiv.	14.0%	16.0%	13.1%	13.0%
	Still in full time ed.	3.3%	6.0%	2.8%	5.7%
	No formal ed.	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%
Income	< £14,000	18.5%	26.1%	17.6%	12.1%
	£14,001 - £28,000	29.4%	17.4%	30.5%	6.1%
	£28,001 - £55,000	37.8%	41.3%	38.3%	8.5%
	> £55,000	14.4%	15.2%	13.5%	12.0%
Political participation**	Participating	53.2%	76.0%	52.1%	11.3%
	Not participating	46.6%	24.0%	47.8%	5.2%
Attitudes to immigration***	Permissive	24.0%	38.8%	23.5%	5.8%
	Mixed	50.5%	44.9%	51.3%	8.2%
	Restrictive	25.5%	16.3%	25.2%	13.3%

**Note:** The first three columns show the percentage of each population belonging to the group indicated. Small numbers of Assembly Members declined to answer the questions on income and immigration; the percentages are based on the responses of those who did answer. The final column shows the proportion of people invited to attend the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit from each group who accepted that invitation.

\* The UK population is calculated from the weighted ICM survey sample collected July 2017

\*\* Participating: Respondents who say they have taken part in any of eight forms of formal and informal political participation over the past year. Not participating: Respondents who say they have taken part in none of these eight forms of participation over the past year.

\*\*\* Attitudes to immigration are measured by the question 'Is immigration good or bad for the UK economy', on a 7-point scale from 1 ('good for the economy') to 7 ('bad for the economy'). Responses 1-2 are coded 'Permissive', 3-5 'Mixed', and 6-7 'Restrictive'.



## 2.5. CONCLUSIONS

The membership of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit closely resembled the UK electorate in most respects. We hit the great majority of our recruitment targets with remarkable accuracy. This supports the approach that we took, with detailed stratification, substantive incentives to Assembly Members, extensive measures to promote accessibility, active personal communications with Members once they had signed up, and careful design of the Assembly meetings.

A key lesson to draw from the Citizens' Assembly is the value of stratifying the membership on the basis not just of socio-demographics, but also of attitudes. Our decision to stratify according to referendum vote was unusual, but it is vindicated by the differential acceptance rates across different groups. Indeed, the evidence that we have gathered suggests that some further attitudinal stratification may well be desirable in future citizens' assemblies or other deliberative mini-publics, particularly where they address controversial matters or matters where the divide between more liberal and more authoritarian perspectives may be salient. The issue of how exactly to stratify for attitudes in future mini-publics demands further consideration and research.

Having set out in this chapter how the Assembly was composed, we outline in the following chapter how it was designed and how it functioned.

## 3. ASSEMBLY DESIGN AND PROCESSES

This chapter sets out how the Assembly worked. It begins by explaining the topic that the Assembly examined. It then outlines the underlying principles upon which the design of the Assembly was built and the basic design features that followed from these principles. Finally, it describes the work of the Assembly across the two phases of its operation: the 'learning' phase and the 'discussion and decision' phase.

### 3.1. THE TOPIC OF THE ASSEMBLY

As explained in Chapter 1, the Assembly focused on the question of what kind of Brexit the Members wanted the UK to pursue. This focus has been criticised by some external observers, who would have liked the Assembly to have considered the question of whether Brexit should happen at all. We opted not to follow that approach for three reasons.

First, we wanted the Assembly to inform current policy-making in government and parliament. The government is not currently considering the question of whether Brexit should happen; rather, it is pursuing negotiations on the form that Brexit should take. Where the Citizens' Assembly could add most value, therefore, is on the question of what form people want Brexit to take assuming it is happening: this is a pressing current issue on which, to date, very little evidence has been available.

Second, adding continued EU membership to the list of options available to Assembly Members would have increased the complexity of the issues greatly, making it impossible to do justice to them within two weekends. Tailoring the scope of an assembly's agenda to the time available is fundamental to making an exercise such as this successful.

Third, a citizens' assembly can work effectively only if people on all sides of the debate agree to engage with it. As we discussed in Chapter 2, it was essential that we recruit a broad cross-section of the UK electorate as Members, including people from both sides of the Brexit referendum. As we discuss shortly below, it was equally important to engage experts and campaigners with widely differing views. Given the Assembly's unofficial status, such engagement would not have been attainable had the Assembly focused on a question that one side of the discussion regards as closed. Whatever the theoretical merits of exploring questions through a citizens' assembly, if balanced discussion is sought, then, in practice, an unofficial deliberative exercise of this kind simply cannot address a question that many people think should not be asked.

#### Speaking about migration

There are few controversies in the language used to describe trade policy. Migration policy is, however, trickier. One side of the debate talks almost exclusively of 'immigration' while the other is more likely to speak of 'free movement of labour'. So how should we describe it before the Citizens' Assembly?

We initially decided to use the term 'immigration'. We felt that this was widely used on both sides of the debate, whereas 'free movement' was clearly associated with only one side. Following the Assembly's first weekend, however, a number of those present expressed a concern that this was a loaded term and that it focused attention on only one half of a two-way flow of people into and out of the UK. We felt that this concern had merit. At the second weekend, we therefore used the umbrella term 'migration'. We have also opted to use that term throughout this report.

Having determined the broad topic of the Assembly, we then had to consider what specific issues to focus on. 'The form that Brexit should take' includes many matters, and – as noted above – we had to be realistic about how much it was possible to cover in the two weekends available. The Brexit negotiations themselves have two parts (see Institute for Government 2017):

- the so-called '**divorce deal**', on how the UK is to leave the EU and how each side's existing commitments to the other are to be disentangled;
- the '**future relationship**', relating to how the UK and the EU will work with each other after the 'divorce', including future trade arrangements and possible ongoing cooperation in matters such as security and research.

We decided early on that we should focus on the future relationship. This is where most of the substantive issues that will affect people's daily lives are to be found. Furthermore, we knew that the 'divorce deal' talks would be underway by the time the Assembly met, such that it might have been too late to influence them. By contrast, UK and EU authorities both hoped that the 'future relationship' negotiations would begin shortly after the Assembly's meetings, so the Assembly would be well placed to influence the emerging agenda.

Within the future relationship, the key, interlocking issues relate to trade and migration policy. These are the issues at the heart of whether the UK should seek to stay in the Single Market and/or Customs Union, pursue a 'comprehensive' deal that replicates aspects of Single Market/Customs Union membership while giving the UK greater autonomy, or opt for some form of looser relationship. They are the decisions that are likely to have the biggest effects on the issues that surveys suggest mattered most to voters in the referendum: sovereignty, immigration, the economy, public services, and personal well-being. They are clearly large issues in themselves, but we concluded they were indivisible: it is not possible to examine one aspect of trade or migration policy without considering knock-on effects on other aspects. Our conclusion was that there was enough time over two weekends to enable both learning and quality deliberation on these topics, leading to meaningful results.

## 3.2. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

We spent much of the summer of 2017 devising the detailed design of the Citizens' Assembly's work programme. This design was based on five key underlying principles: inclusion; understanding; balance; deliberation; and personal reflection. We derived these principles from existing work on deliberative democracy, according to which decision-making is at its most democratic when it follows informed and open-minded discussion among all affected people.

In this section, we briefly introduce these principles. In the following section, we set out the key Assembly design choices that they led to.

### **Inclusion**

Decision-making cannot be fully democratic if some parts of society are marginalised or excluded. The principle of seeking inclusion from across the electorate was at the heart of our recruitment strategy, set out in Chapter 2. It was also fundamental in our thinking about how to design the Assembly's programme and materials and how to run the weekends. We sought, for example, to ensure that materials and presentations were accessible to as many people as possible by avoiding jargon or complex language. We designed the Assembly weekends to help everyone take part fully, including those who were not used to speaking in public or who were of quieter disposition.

### **Understanding**

Just as we expect to have full information available to us before we make decisions like whether to buy a house, so, according to advocates of deliberative democracy, we should be able to become informed before coming to views on matters of public policy. As explained in Chapter 1,

a deliberative mini-public such as a citizens' assembly differs fundamentally from a focus group in that it is designed to allow members to learn in depth about the issues before drawing conclusions. It fosters greater depth of knowledge and understanding than is typically possible for us given our busy lives and the limitations of the news media. As set out in section 3.3, below, expert input is one of the key design features designed to deliver this.

## **Balance**

Deliberative democracy requires not just that those involved should have opportunities to learn about the issues, arguments, and evidence, but also that they should be able to do so in a way that is balanced across different perspectives. It is imperative that organisers should not push any particular agenda, but should ensure that a wide variety of voices are heard.

The principle of balance is familiar in the UK from broadcasting. Debates about balance in (particularly) BBC news coverage highlight what a contentious matter it is (Jones 2011). One view of balance says that each perspective should receive equal attention and credit. This is, broadly, the approach that the BBC takes to referendums: there are two sides of the debate, and equal prominence is given to each. Another view of balance says that each perspective should receive attention in proportion to the number and credibility of its adherents. This is the approach that the BBC now takes to discussions of climate change: it emphasises the near consensus among qualified scientists that manmade climate change is happening, but it does not entirely exclude the voices of those who disagree.

The approach to balance that we adopted within the Citizens' Assembly was close to the first of these options. We gave Assembly Members equal exposure to experts and politicians who emphasise the advantages of disentangling from EU structures or limiting immigration and those who emphasise the disadvantages of doing so. At the same time, we also indicated to Members where there was an imbalance in the numbers of adherents to different perspectives: specifically, we pointed out that most – but not all – economists think that staying in or close to the Single Market will be better for the economy than having a looser relationship.

## **Deliberation**

The deliberative ideal is not just that people should take part and that they should know things. In addition, they should have the opportunity genuinely to deliberate with each other, listening, discussing, and reflecting before reaching conclusions. In addition to the values of inclusiveness, understanding, and balance, deliberation is ideally also open-minded. Participants do not insist on their prior views or deny the validity of the alternative perspectives that they hear. Rather, they genuinely listen – to each other and to the views of expert speakers. And they reflect on what they hear and are willing to change their views if they feel that is where the balance of argument or evidence should lead them. As we explain in section 3.3, professional facilitators have a key role in promoting such deliberation.

## **Personal reflection**

Most deliberative democrats see discussion as the main channel through which learning and reflection take place. But it is also important that we know our own initial thoughts before the start of any such discussion: otherwise we will struggle to work out what to make of what others say. We need a sense of our own priorities, concerns, and questions, even while we are open to changing these. Similarly, it is important that we can reflect on the discussions that we have heard. Are we convinced by what others have said or not? Do we still have questions or doubts? Do we feel we have to change our prior views, or does the process of challenging these views actually confirm our sense that they are right? Building in opportunities for such personal reflection throughout the Assembly's work was thus a final key principle.

### 3.3. DESIGN BASICS

The principles set out above led us to certain key features of the Assembly design. Before we get to the details of the two weekends, we set these features out here.

#### **Small-group discussion**

Discussion lies at the heart of any deliberative process, but that discussion must be carefully structured to maximise the chances that it will fulfil the principles of inclusion and deliberativeness set out above. One aspect of structure is that most of the deliberations of citizens' assemblies take place in small groups. In the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, these were groups of seven or eight Members. Some people are comfortable speaking up in front of a large room full of people, while others are not, so properly inclusive discussion amongst fifty people is hard to achieve without splitting the group in this way.

The Assembly Members sat at round tables. While they faced the front of the room to hear plenary talks, they worked for most of the time with the people on their tables. We ensured that each table had a mix of people in terms of gender, age, and referendum vote. We had a new seating plan each day so that people heard the widest possible range of views, conversations did not get stuck in the same argument cycles, and personalities did not begin to grate on one another.

#### **Facilitated discussion**

A second aspect of structured discussion is that all assembly sessions should be carefully facilitated. The sessions of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit were directed by two professional lead facilitators, and the discussions on each table were supported by an experienced table facilitator. Table facilitators work to ensure that everyone in their group understands the task at hand and feels able to speak and contribute, and that all the perspectives around the table are genuinely considered. They also keep the discussions on topic and ensure so far as possible that each task is completed within the time available. Lead facilitators chair plenary sessions and give overall direction to the work of the Assembly. They also monitor the room during table discussions, where necessary allowing more or less time than planned to allow discussions to run their course and picking up on any problems that might need to be addressed. Crucially, neither lead nor table facilitators ever express any views on the matters under discussion. Nor do they operate as sources of knowledge. Their focus is entirely on the structure and process, not the content, of the discussions. These are vital functions and their skilful execution is of the highest importance for the success of any citizens' assembly.

The chairs of past citizens' assemblies have not been professional facilitators. Rather, they have had a variety of backgrounds, including as judges, academics, media personalities, and, in one case, a prominent leader from the charitable sector. Table facilitators in those assemblies have often been graduate students and others with experience in chairing discussions, who have been trained in advance of the assemblies but have often not had specific prior experience of facilitating discussions of this kind.

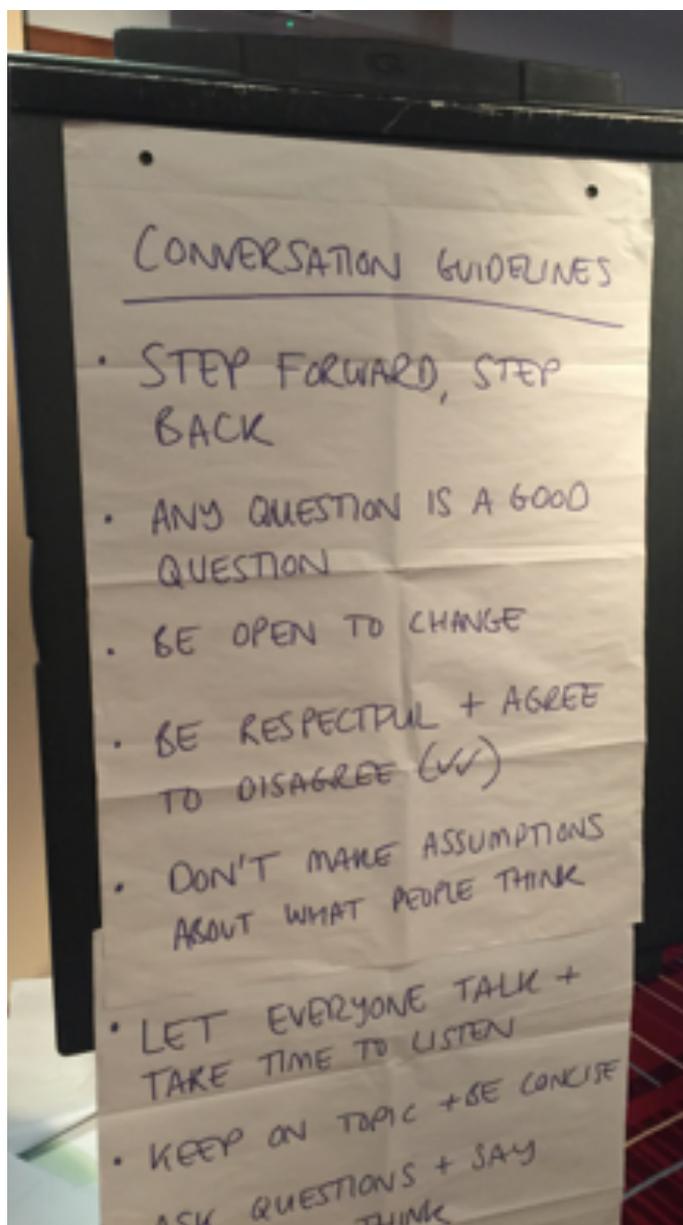
Given the importance of quality facilitation and the great sensitivity of the Brexit debate, we decided that we should engage professional facilitators with the greatest possible experience in guiding deliberative discussions neutrally. Though Alan Renwick, as Assembly director, performed the chairing function of welcoming Members at the start of each day and introducing other team members, he then handed over to our professional lead facilitators, who led the Assembly's sessions. They were able to do so with great understanding of the needs both of Members and of the deliberative process. In addition, while the roles of designing and delivering Assembly meetings do not need to be performed by the same people, in our case, the lead facilitators did design the sessions as well, meaning that they had an organic sense of how the programme was intended to operate. Our experienced table facilitators, similarly, brought their great experience to bear on how they worked with their groups.

Our facilitation partner was Involve, a charity devoted to building a more participatory and deliberative democracy. Assembly design and facilitation were led by Sarah Allan, Involve's Head of Engagement, assisted by Tim Hughes and Kaela Scott. Involve recruited the team of experienced table facilitators, who are listed in Appendix 1. As we explain below, our experience in the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit leads us to the strong recommendation that future deliberative exercises of this kind should also engage professional facilitators.

### Conversation guidelines

A third feature of structured discussion is that it should be based on clear, agreed 'conversation guidelines'. Our lead facilitators suggested several such guidelines to Assembly Members at the start of the first weekend as examples for them to consider. They proposed that Members should see any question as a good question – they should not feel that any question they might have in mind was too dumb to ask. They should be open to change. And they should be willing to 'step forward or step back': if they tend to be reticent in discussions, they should try to push themselves to saying more; if they tend to dominate, they should make sure they stepped back and let others speak too.

The lead facilitators then opened discussion up to Assembly Members to accept or reject these examples (they were all accepted) and complete the guidelines list themselves. Assembly Members added five further principles: to be respectful and agree to disagree; not to make assumptions about what other people think; to let everyone talk and take time to listen; to keep on topic and be concise; and to be present in the conversations and not use mobile phones. These guidelines were referred to throughout the Assembly's meetings.



### Variety and breaks

Beyond the three general features of structured discussion just described, we also sought to maintain energy levels and promote inclusion by varying the Assembly's work and by including breaks in the Assembly programme.

For example, we mixed up plenary and small-group sessions. We occasionally also adopted other formats, splitting the Assembly into two or three groups for specific tasks, rather than the usual seven. While Members performed most tasks sitting down, there was some sessions where we asked them to walk to another part of the room and stand around a display board to discuss the results of an earlier exercise. We ensured, of course, that Members with restricted mobility and Members who would be uncomfortable standing were accommodated.

We introduced variety in other ways too. Members performed tasks individually, in pairs, and in their groups of seven or eight. Sometimes the task was simply to discuss different ideas and get a sense of the variety of views on the table. At other times, the discussion was structured with the goal of reaching agreement across the table. Sometimes Members worked without external input, while at others they had an expert with them, and at others still they could call in expert advice during their discussions if they found this necessary. As we explain in section 3.4, Q&A sessions with speakers sometimes took place at the small-group tables, sometimes with the Assembly divided in half, and sometimes in plenary.

A final source of variety was that, as we explained above, we changed the seating plan each day, so that Members worked with different people and experienced different facilitation styles.

No matter how much variety we introduced, Members would clearly eventually get tired. We therefore incorporated breaks into the Assembly schedules: one short refreshment break each morning and afternoon, plus an hour-long break for lunch. We also emphasised to Members that they did not need to wait for a break if they wanted to use the toilets or get a cup of tea or coffee. We outline other principles underlying the scheduling of the weekends in the subsection on 'Time' below.

## Expertise

As stated in our principles, we sought discussion that was not just inclusive and open-minded, but also informed. Much important knowledge comes from the members of any assembly themselves: they bring their varied lived experiences and aspirations to the table and they learn a great deal about their fellow members' perspectives. The kind of discussion we have described above is designed in part to enable such exchange.

In addition, we sought to supplement this internal knowledge with the expertise of people who have examined the questions on our agenda in great depth. We did so in two main ways.

**First, we invited experts to speak with the Assembly Members.** As set out in detail below, eight highly respected experts addressed the Assembly during the first weekend and answered Members' questions. In addition, two politicians who have thought deeply about and campaigned on Brexit spoke to the Assembly and answered questions at the start of the second weekend. In pursuit of the principle of balance, the experts reflected a range of perspectives. Of the two politicians, one advocated staying in the Single Market and Customs Union, while the other spoke in favour of leaving these structures and doing a bespoke deal with the EU.

**Second, we prepared detailed briefing papers,** outlining the issues on our agenda. As mentioned in Chapter 2, we sent all Assembly Members a brief **introductory paper** ahead of the first weekend that outlined the topics to be discussed. During the first weekend, we provided three sets of papers: (1) **background papers** explaining the EU, the Brexit process, and the concept of a citizens' assembly; (2) papers on **trade**; and (3) papers on **immigration**. Each set explained basic concepts, how arrangements work today, what the main options for the future are, and what issues might be considered in evaluating these options; they also provided key data on current (and sometimes expected future) patterns. All the briefing papers are listed in Appendix 4 and are available on the **Citizens' Assembly's website**. As explained below, the papers were written in close consultation with our Advisory Board in order to minimise the danger that they might contain any errors, misleading statements, or unintended biases.

We sent Members only the introductory briefing paper ahead of the first weekend because we did not want to overwhelm them or make them feel that they were expected to do large amounts of 'homework'. We gave out the remaining briefing papers in the course of the first weekend, so that Members could draw on them if they wished in the period between the two weekends. We also provided Members with copies of the speakers' slides and handouts to use during the first weekend and refer back to between weekends. These again, are available on the **project website**.

## Journey through the Assembly

The features that we have set out so far underpinned all aspects of Assembly design. In addition to these, it was important for us to think about how Members experienced the 'journey' through the Assembly: from recruitment to arrival at the start of the first weekend, and then through each weekend. We outlined our approach to the period between recruitment and arrival in Chapter 2. Here we concentrate on the design of the Assembly weekends and associated learning materials.

Throughout the design process, we assumed no prior knowledge of the issues in hand on the part of Assembly Members. We recognised that some would have considerable prior knowledge. Equally, we knew that others would not, and also that even those who did would benefit from refreshing key points. We therefore started in the introductory welcome pack sent to Members in advance of the first weekend with **basic information** about the EU, trade, and migration. We reiterated this information on the first morning of the first weekend, before progressing to more complex material presented by experts in the afternoon.

We always sought to start where Members were in terms of their knowledge and concerns. For example, we were careful to avoid jargon wherever possible in briefing materials and in presentations given by team members; where we felt that some jargon was necessary, we took time to explain it and relate it to ideas that Members would find familiar. We asked expert speakers to take the same approach; we briefed them in advance on their task and the nature of their audience; where possible, Alan Renwick talked with them in advance about the material they would present in order to highlight any potential difficulties. We gave Assembly Members orange and yellow cards, which they could hold up during presentations if the speaker had lost them (orange) or if they just wanted the speaker to slow down (yellow). We intended these cards partly as a mechanism for instant feedback during the presentations. In addition (and perhaps more importantly), by warning speakers of the card system in advance, we hoped to concentrate their minds on the need to maintain accessibility.

During the recruitment process, at the start of the first weekend, and again at the start of the second weekend, we emphasised to Members that they did not need to be experts. They were recruited in order to be themselves and to give their own considered answers to the questions in hand. This was important for reassuring Members who might have felt they were not 'qualified' to take part.

We also took time at the start of each weekend to explain the roles of the various project team members: Alan Renwick as director; Sarah Allan and colleagues as lead and table facilitators; Graham Smith and Meg Russell as academics performing a variety of functions; support staff led by Edd Rowe and Rebecca McKee as notetakers and general helpers; and Eddie Molloy and colleagues from the Electoral Reform Society in charge of external relations. Explaining these roles helped Members understand why everyone was in the room and what they would be doing.

As we outline in further detail in sections 3.4 and 3.5 below, we planned each weekend to ease Assembly Members into the discussions. Icebreakers allowed Members to speak just to one other person before speaking with their whole table, and to speak on easy topics: introducing themselves; discussing their hopes and fears for the weekend; saying why they had decided to participate in the Assembly. Other early tasks – such as discussing what they would like to value about the country in which they live – also allowed Members to get used to speaking in this context and to learn about other Members without any sense that they ought to have prior knowledge. Only after these exercises did we focus specifically on Brexit, trade, and migration.

Finally, we also took care to gather Members' thoughts together at the end of each day by recapping what had been done. We were able genuinely to thank them for their hard work and to congratulate them on all that they had achieved.

## **Advisory Board**

We pursued a balanced treatment of the issues within the Assembly through a variety of avenues: by recruiting a sample of Assembly Members who reflected the balance of opinion in the electorate on Brexit; by engaging experts in deliberative design and professional facilitators with expertise in enabling balanced discussion; by inviting a balanced roster of expert speakers; by providing balanced briefing papers.

All of these measures were underpinned by an Advisory Board, which included Leave supporters, Remain supporters, and experts in neutral communication about Brexit (see Appendix 2 for a full list). The Advisory Board was invited to a meeting in July where we presented our plans for the Assembly: the topic; broad schedules for the weekends; lists of expert speakers whom we were seeking to invite; approach to facilitation; and so on. We received useful and positive feedback at this stage.

Thereafter, we communicated with the Board via email. Board members were sent drafts of all briefing papers and invited to comment upon them, and we also kept them updated on the progress of our planning more broadly. Not all Board members were able to give detailed feedback, but some did at every stage. Crucially, we received extensive feedback from both Leave and Remain supporters, as well as from neutral professionals. Many of the expert speakers also provided valuable feedback, again coming from a variety of perspectives.

## **Phases: Learning, Discussion, and Decision**

The work of the citizens' assemblies in Canada and the Netherlands was, in each case, structured around three phases, called 'learning' or 'training', 'consultation' or 'public hearings', and 'deliberation' or 'decision-making'. The functions of these phases differed somewhat from case to case. In essence, however, the first phase gave information about the options and the arguments for and against them, the second allowed Members to hear diverse perspectives on the options, and the third was a time for detailed discussion and the development of final recommendations.

Given the nature of Brexit as a topic, we decided that separating learning and consultation phases would not be desirable. While it is possible to give some information about the Brexit options before entering territory that is contested, it is not possible to go far: this is a policy area where disagreements start at an early stage. In addition, the amount of time available to the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit – two weekends, compared with ten or more weekends in Canada and the Netherlands – meant that we required a very focused programme.

We therefore organised the Assembly's work around two phases, which we labelled 'Learning' and 'Discussion and Decision-Making' (we did not use the term 'deliberation', as it may have been unfamiliar to Assembly Members). To a large degree, these phases mapped on to the Assembly's two weekends, but the match was not complete: deliberation was a feature of the Assembly's work from the very beginning; and, while we designed most learning to occur during the first weekend and the period between the weekends, there was a small element of fresh learning in the second weekend too.

We set out the two phases in detail in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

## **Time**

As just indicated, effective use of the time available to the Citizens' Assembly was essential: a lot of information, discussion and decision-making had to be packed into a limited amount of time. Equally, we had to ensure that participating in the Assembly did not take Members away from their other responsibilities for too long and that Members had opportunities to relax and rest during the weekends.

Each weekend started around 6pm on the Friday and ran until lunchtime on the Sunday. Friday evening activities were kept relatively light, while the Assembly's main business was conducted between 9am and around 5.30pm each Saturday and between 9am and around 1.30pm each Sunday. Any Assembly business was kept to a minimum on the Saturday evenings, so that Members could relax and get to know each other better over dinner.

The Assembly's working sessions were carefully scheduled in advance to ensure that it would be possible to get through the necessary business in the time available. At the same time, the lead facilitators requested and were granted flexibility to vary the schedule during the weekends, if the need arose. In the event, no significant changes were required during either weekend – a testament to the quality of the original design. Assembly Members completed some tasks slightly faster than planned, while other sessions were allowed or needed a small amount of additional time. Overall, we were able to start each day as scheduled, have lunch when planned, and end each day at more or less the time we had envisaged.

The schedules for each weekend are provided in Appendix 3.

The two weekends were scheduled three weeks apart. We wanted a gap that was long enough to allow Members to catch up with their own lives and to reflect on what they had heard, but not so long that they would forget too much. We also wanted a gap that would give the organising team time to adapt our plans for the second weekend in light of what had happened at the first. Past citizens' assemblies have typically spaced their meetings at intervals of three weeks to a month, and we followed this pattern.

### **Private ballots**

As the paragraphs above make clear, the great bulk of the work of a citizens' assembly takes place through discussion. But the purpose of this discussion – at least in the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit – was not that Members should come to a shared collective judgement. Rather, the purpose was that, through such discussion, Members would be able to engage with a wide variety of views and arguments, consider a great deal of information, and thereby come to their own informed and considered judgements on the matters in hand.

To allow Members to express these judgements, all of the votes that are reported in Chapter 4 below were taken by secret ballot. Some of these – on values and guidelines – were taken using an online voting tool called Mentimeter. Others – all of the votes on options for the form that Brexit might take – were taken using paper ballots.

## **3.4. LEARNING PHASE**

The Assembly's learning phase was designed to help Members learn about and reflect on several key things: the processes of the Assembly itself; key terms, concepts, and institutions; the issues under discussion; arguments relating to these issues; and a broad range of viewpoints – those of experts, campaigners, and their fellow Assembly Members, as well as their own perspectives.

### **Learning about the Assembly, other Members, and oneself**

The Assembly began on the Friday evening of the first weekend. Alan Renwick welcomed Assembly Members and introduced the team. (For a full list of project team members and their roles during the Assembly, see Appendix 1.) Graham Smith introduced a Member survey (see Chapter 5). Then Sarah Allan introduced two brief exercises, the first of which was completed before dinner, the second during dinner:

- The first explored Assembly Members' hopes and fears for the weekend ahead. Its aim was both to break the ice between Members, and to provide the facilitation and wider Assembly team with useful information about Members' aspirations and concerns in advance of the start of the main Assembly business.
- The second discussed and provisionally agreed the Assembly's conversation guidelines – the set of rules aimed at ensuring that taking part in the Assembly would be a good experience for everyone. This discussion aimed to help set Assembly Members' expectations for how the Assembly would work and how they would contribute over the weekends, and to achieve their buy-in to this arrangement.

Both of these discussions were structured by our facilitators, so Members had a taste of what the Assembly's core sessions would feel like.

The Saturday morning began with quick introductions and a new icebreaker, as Members were now sitting on different tables. We then recapped the conversation guidelines that had emerged from the previous evening. Assembly Members discussed these briefly to confirm that they were happy with them.

The Assembly's first substantive session followed: a discussion of what Assembly Members valued, and would like to be able to value in the future, about the country in which they lived. Questions about the shape that Brexit should take are, at their heart, questions about what type of country we want to live in and how best to get there. The purpose of this exercise was to give Assembly Members a prism through which to view, and take in, the rest of the weekend's proceedings. We began by asking Members to reflect individually for a few minutes and write down, first, what they value most about their country today and, second, what they would change to make it better in the future. This was important, as set out in section 3.2 above, because we wanted Members to reflect on their own values and priorities before engaging with those of others. Discussion then took place at each roundtable, as Members explained what they had written and listened to and reflected on the choices of others. Here, therefore, Members could begin learning about their colleagues. At the end of this discussion, Assembly Members could each vote for four ideas from their table to be taken forward for later discussion. Any idea receiving at least one vote was collected in and saved for later.

### **Basics of the EU, trade and migration**

In advance of the first weekend, we sent Members a ten-page briefing paper called '**What Will the Assembly Discuss? A Very Quick Introduction**'. This set out basic information about the EU, current arrangements for trade and migration, options for future arrangements, and some of the arguments that are made for and against these. It introduced key concepts, such as tariff and non-tariff barriers, the Single Market and the Customs Union, and immigration and emigration. We emphasised that Members were not required to read this, but that that they might find it useful for preparing their thinking.

Following the discussion of what people value about their country, as described above, we moved to our first panel session, when three members of our team – Professor Anand Menon (Director of the UK in a Changing Europe initiative), Professor Meg Russell, and Professor Graham Smith – gave brief presentations running through and in places slightly elaborating on the information in the briefing paper, focusing respectively on the EU, trade, and migration. The purpose, as in the introductory briefing paper, was to give only basic information. The slides are available [on our website](#).

After these presentations, Assembly Members reflected individually, writing down questions that they would like to put to the speakers, and then discussed these questions and how they would prioritise them in their groups. It was made clear to Assembly Members that these questions needed to be clarification questions about key concepts or factual points. They were not allowed to ask these speakers for their own views or opinions.

After a break, Assembly Members put their priority questions to the speakers. The Assembly split into two groups at this point:

- One group asked the speakers questions, with Anand Menon acting as the main source of expertise. This Q&A session, following on from the presentations, served as a basic introduction to the themes to follow. All questions that had not been answered were collected in to be answered later.
- Meanwhile, the other group reviewed the values that had emerged from the table discussions in the previous sessions, which were now presented in themed groups on the wall. They then wrote a postcard to themselves of 'the five things that you most want to be able to value about the country in which you live'. This was the first of several postcards that Members wrote over the course of the first weekend. These served three purposes: they aimed to help Members process and digest what they had heard; they encouraged Members to reflect on their own views; and they provided an aide memoire that Members would be able to consult during the second weekend.

### **Engagement with experts**

Following these various introductory sessions on the Friday evening and Saturday morning, the remainder of the first weekend was devoted to engaging with experts and reflecting on what they said. Saturday afternoon focused on trade, and Sunday morning on migration. Each session followed the same pattern:

- Expert speakers gave presentations of up to ten minutes each.
- Assembly Members reflected individually on what they had heard and wrote down questions they would like to ask.
- Each table discussed these questions and prioritised them.
- Members put their questions to the experts. We had six experts on trade on the Saturday, which allowed us to rotate them around the tables: each expert spent ten minutes at each table (while the seventh table heard answers to questions from the morning that there had not previously been time to address). On the Sunday, we had four experts on migration, so we split the Assembly into two groups, with each half of the Assembly putting questions to two of the experts and then swapping over.
- Members then wrote themselves another postcard, on what they felt were the most important issues and arguments that they had heard. This served the same three functions as the postcard on values.
- Finally, Members discussed at their tables the issues and arguments they had chosen as most important, and identified their table's overall top eight: the arguments that collectively reflected the diversity of views around the table. Here, we wanted to begin deliberative discussions, to serve as a foundation for the more extended deliberations during the second weekend.

The expert speakers are listed in Table 3.1. As explained above, we worked hard to ensure that they presented a balanced range of perspectives. Each of the presenters spoke for ten minutes. During each session, Anand Menon offered a brief reflection on the presentations, picking up particularly important questions that had been raised and highlighting matters that might deserve further attention. Catherine Barnard's arrival on the Saturday was delayed, but she was able to join the roundtable Q&As on trade and to present the following day on migration. Slides or handouts for the presentations are available [on our website](#).

**Table 3.1. Expert speakers at weekend 1.**

	Trade	Migration
Presenters	Angus Armstrong David Paton Thomas Sampson Shanker Singham	Catherine Barnard David Coleman Jonathan Portes
Discussants	Anand Menon Catherine Barnard	Anand Menon

### **Concluding the first weekend**

Following the Sunday morning discussion of migration, we concluded the Assembly's first weekend with two short final exercises. First, Assembly Members completed another research survey and a questionnaire evaluating how the weekend had gone. Second, Sarah Allan and Alan Renwick thanked Members for all their hard work over the weekend, explained what would be coming next, and invited Members to give themselves a round of applause.

### **Using the period between the weekends**

As indicated above, we spaced the two weekends three weeks apart in part to give Assembly Members time to reflect on what they had heard. We provided four further resources to facilitate this:

- Immediately before each presentation, Members received hard copies of the slides and handouts prepared by the experts.
- Members received the detailed briefing papers on trade at the end of the Saturday session and on migration at the end of the Sunday session. As explained in section 3.3, these were designed to provide balanced information on the issues and were developed in consultation with the Advisory Board and the expert speakers.
- We catalogued all questions that Members had wanted to put to the expert speakers but that there was insufficient time to answer during the weekend. We then sent these to the speakers and asked for any written responses that they were able to provide. Other commitments meant that some of the speakers could not respond further, but most could. We compiled these (editing them where necessary to explain jargon, avoid overlaps, and maintain balance) and emailed them to Members. In the same email, we also drew Members' attention to some points in the briefing papers that had not been raised during the weekend.
- We created a Facebook page through which we disseminated information about the Assembly and the briefing papers. As explained in Chapter 2 (p. 24), we did not create an online discussion group for Assembly Members. But the Facebook page, building on Member suggestions, was designed so that Members who wished could share information with their friends as a stimulant to further discussions.

## Q&A with politicians

We concluded the learning phase on the Friday evening of the second weekend with two further short sessions. First, before dinner (and following another research survey), Alan Renwick ran through some of the answers to previously unanswered questions that had been circulated between the weekends. This was intended both as a general warm-up session, reminding Members of some of the key themes that had been raised three weeks earlier, and as an opportunity to ensure that important matters that had been on Members' minds were addressed.

Then, over dinner, Meg Russell chaired a Q&A session with two MPs: the Conservative MP for Altrincham and Sale West (the constituency in which the Assembly met), Graham Brady, and the Labour MP for the neighbouring constituency of Stretford and Urmston, Kate Green. Graham Brady supported Leave in the 2016 referendum and continues to advocate a clean break with the Single Market and Customs Union. Kate Green supported Remain and argues for staying in the Single Market and Customs Union.

Each of the MPs spoke for around ten minutes. Members then considered questions at their tables and put their prioritised questions to the MPs in a plenary Q&A. This session allowed Members to further refresh their minds on the issues: the MPs' presentations and the subsequent questions and answers touched on many of the topics that had been raised during the first weekend. In addition, the session was an opportunity for Members to hear a more political perspective on the issues and the process of Brexit.



## 3.5. DISCUSSION AND DECISION PHASE

Deliberation is at the core of a citizens' assembly, and we therefore designed the weekends so that opportunities for deliberation would emerge from the beginning. We begin this section by briefly recapping how we built deliberation into the first weekend. We then run in detail through the Assembly's second weekend, where deliberation and decision-making dominated.

Whereas most of the first weekend was spent listening to and putting questions to expert speakers, after the Friday evening of the second weekend there were no additional external speakers. Rather, Members discussed the issues among themselves. We did ensure that expertise was available in the room when questions arose: tables could call on Professor Anand Menon or on project team members – Alan Renwick and Graham Smith – if they wanted clarification on an issue, a facility that was often used and proved valuable in ensuring that discussions did not get bogged down in disagreements over facts. But this was the only additional input at this stage.

### **Early reflection and deliberation**

As explained in section 3.4, there were multiple points throughout the first weekend when we asked Assembly Members to reflect on their personal views and priorities: during the opening session on what Members valued about the country they live in; after each set of presentations, when Members considered what questions they wanted to ask the speakers; and after the Q&A with each set of speakers, when Members wrote postcards to themselves about the key arguments they had heard. Each of these moments of individual reflection was followed by deliberative group discussion, when Members could say what they had written, listen to the thoughts of others, discuss their reactions, and finally make prioritisation decisions as a table.

Including these reflective and deliberative elements in the first weekend ensured that Members could begin to clarify their own ideas, understand the diversity of views and experiences within the Assembly, and think about whether anything they had heard might change or expand their thinking.

### **Warming up again: what Members value**

One of the purposes of the sessions with Alan Renwick and the MPs on the Friday evening of the second weekend was, as noted above, to bring Members' minds back to the topics under discussion. We continued that process on the Saturday morning. After introductions and icebreakers, Members' first task was to review the things they most wanted to be able to value about the country in which they live. We gave Members long lists that collated the aspects that they had prioritised during the first weekend, and we also returned the postcard to them that they had written for themselves on the same subject. Members discussed these and then voted, by secret ballot, on the values that were most important to them. They had four votes each. This refocused Members on what, fundamentally, they wanted for their country. The seven ideas that received most votes were displayed around the room for the remainder of the weekend, so that Assembly Members could refer back to them at all times.

We report the results of this vote – and of all the other votes during the second weekend – in Chapter 4.



## Guidelines

Thereafter, the remainder of the second weekend was spent working through five stages that would generate the Assembly's recommendations. The first of those focused on policy 'guidelines', then three looked at specific key policy areas, and the last brought the various elements together in policy packages.

The policy guidelines provided a way for Members to indicate the principal criteria that they felt should be used when evaluating the policy options. They were intended both to assist the Assembly's subsequent discussions and to provide recommendations as to the considerations that should guide UK government policy. We discussed, first, guidelines relating to trade policy and, second, guidelines for migration policy.

Beginning with trade, Assembly Members reviewed the postcards that they had written to themselves at the end of the Saturday afternoon of the first weekend. They also received a compilation of the top eight trade considerations that each table had put forward at that time, trimmed down to avoid duplicates. Members then worked at their tables to decide their five to six priority endings to the sentence, 'The UK's trade policy after Brexit should....'. We encouraged them to take the compilation of considerations from the first weekend as a starting point, though we said they could add further points as well if they felt this was necessary.

The purpose here was not to seek agreement among the Members on each table as to their priorities. Rather, the goal was that the five or six statements chosen should represent the diversity of views on that table.

The statements from the tables were collected and used to create a list of options to vote upon through the online voting platform Mentimeter. All Assembly Members then voted on these together by secret online ballot. We then repeated the same process for migration policy.

The top six ideas from each vote were, again, displayed around the room for the rest of the weekend so that Members could refer back to them. As with the values, the results are set out in Chapter 4.



### Three key issues

In three sessions spanning the Saturday afternoon and first part of the Sunday morning, we then focused attention on three key policy decisions, relating to future arrangements in the UK for:

- trade with the EU
- trade with countries outside the EU
- migration between the UK and the EU.

For each of these decisions, we followed the same procedure:

- Alan Renwick gave an introductory presentation in which he explained what the options were and what their implications might be on a range of dimensions. The dimensions highlighted were those that had been emphasised by expert speakers at the first weekend and mentioned in the briefing papers. Great attention was paid to maintaining the balance of views in these presentations. Account was also taken of the priorities that emerged from the tables at the first weekend. It was not possible when planning the presentations to take account of the votes on guidelines at the second weekend, but in fact there was very substantial overlap. The slides from these presentations – **on trade with the EU**, **trade beyond the EU**, and **migration** – are available on our website.
- Assembly Members then discussed the options at their tables. We encouraged them to think about what their own favoured option would be, without considering its feasibility or whether they thought the electorate as a whole would support it. We also asked them to think about their second and lower preferences. Each table strove to develop an agreed ranking of the options. Our intention was not that they would necessarily achieve this goal, but that the process of pursuing it would enable the Members to explore the options and the arguments for and against them.
- Finally, the Members voted individually on the options in a secret vote using paper ballots. They ranked the options in order of preference on a paper ballot and placed these in a ballot box ready for counting. We encouraged them to think of their lower preferences as a way of saying what they would want to happen if their higher preferences turned out not to be available.

We describe the options as well as the voting results in Chapter 4. We announced the voting results for all three sessions only at the end of the third, in order that Members could consider each policy area independently. After the results had been announced, we allowed a short period for Members to reflect on them at their tables.

### Brexit packages

Until this point, Members had discussed trade and migration separately. But they had heard at various points throughout the weekends that the two areas are related: it may be that the UK will have to make concessions in one area in order to secure what it wants in another. In advance of the weekend, reflecting on general evidence on public opinion, we thought it likely that Members' first preferences would be for a set of policies that could turn out to be compatible. The Assembly's final task, therefore, was to consider and choose among overall Brexit packages.

As before, Alan Renwick gave a brief presentation on the options: six combined packages for trade/migration policy, representing the main alternatives currently being advocated by UK political parties. Assembly Members discussed the pros and cons of each of these and ranked them at their tables. Members then made their last decision of the Assembly through a final secret paper ballot.

## **Final wrap-up**

The votes from the final session were quickly counted while discussion took place of the ways in which Members could stay in touch with the Citizens' Assembly project and the organisations that had run it. The results of the voting on Brexit packages were announced, and Members had a short time to reflect on them at their tables. Then Members completed a final research survey and evaluation questionnaire.

Finally, Sarah Allan concluded the Assembly on behalf of the facilitation team, running through all that had been done and thanking the Assembly Members and the facilitators for all their hard work. Then Alan Renwick declared the Assembly closed and added his thanks to all Assembly Members and members of the project team. As a token of gratitude – and of the Assembly's shared spirit of hard work and respect – everyone present received a Citizens' Assembly on Brexit mug.

## **3.6. CONCLUSIONS**

Quality deliberation does not happen automatically when a group of people gather in a room together. Rather, it emerges through careful attention to design and delivery. In this chapter, we have set out five key principles that we sought to advance through the work of the Assembly: inclusion; understanding; balance; deliberation; and personal reflection. We pursued these through a wide variety of design elements: the structuring of discussions within the Assembly; the use of experienced facilitators; the scheduling of all aspects of the Assembly's work; the engagement of a diverse Advisory Board and of expert speakers; the selection of a suitable venue and maintenance of regular communications with the venue managers; and so on. In these many ways, we designed a process that took Members through a series of tasks that allowed them to reflect, learn, deliberate, and come to considered recommendations on their own values, on policy guidelines, and on substantive policy options.

We set those recommendations out in the following chapter. Then, in Chapter 5, we evaluate the operation of the processes within the Assembly itself.

## 4. BREXIT: THE ASSEMBLY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on the kind of Brexit that the UK should seek. As set out in Chapter 3, these recommendations focus on policies towards trade and migration. They were developed through six steps. First, Members discussed and voted on the things they most wanted to be able to value about the country in which they live. Second, they did the same in relation to the main guidelines that they believed should shape policy-making on trade and on migration. Then they considered in turn the concrete options for three distinct policy areas: trade with the EU; trade with countries outside the EU; and migration. Finally, they looked at overall Brexit packages. This chapter runs through the results of these six steps in turn.

This chapter covers the Assembly's formal recommendations. Some readers may also be interested in how Members' views changed over the course of the Assembly's meetings. We address this question in the final section of Chapter 5.

### 4.1. WHAT MEMBERS VALUE

The Assembly's first formal vote addressed the question of what things they most wanted to be able to value about the country in which they live. From lists of options that derived from table discussions, each Member was able to vote for up to four. The results – as displayed for the rest of the weekend on flipchart paper in the Assembly meeting room – are shown in the picture on the right.

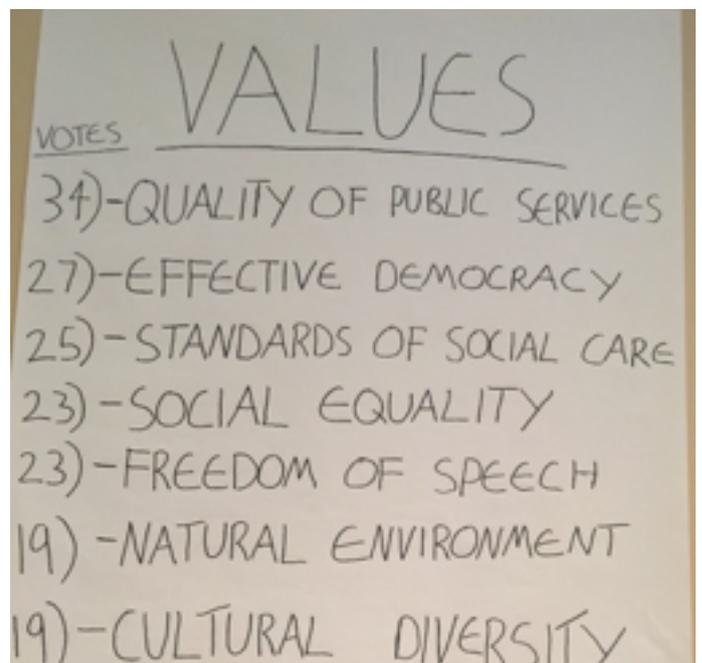
It should be recalled that Members were not asked to think specifically about Brexit for this exercise. Rather, the question was a general one about the things that they value – though it would be surprising if the fact that the vote took place in the context of an assembly focused on Brexit did not colour the answers. The thing that

people most wanted to be able to value was the quality of public services. Effective democracy came second, closely followed by standards of social care, social equality, and freedom of speech. The natural environment and cultural diversity came not far behind.

This list is unlikely to cause many surprises: many of these items would probably appear on an equivalent list produced by any diverse sample of the UK electorate. This reflects the fact that the Assembly membership did closely mirror the character of the wider UK population in many ways.

### 4.2. GUIDELINES FOR POLICY-MAKING

The processes of discussion and reflection that we outlined in Chapter 3 produced long lists of potential policy guidelines that Members could choose among. The vote among these was conducted electronically using Mentimeter (see p. 41). Members could vote for up to six guidelines relating to trade and six relating to migration. The guidelines that came top are listed (in order of the number of votes they received) in Table 4.1.



**Table 4.1. Guidelines for policy-making**

Guidelines for trade policy	Guidelines for migration policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimise harm to the economy</li><li>• Protect the NHS and public services</li><li>• Maintain living standards</li><li>• Take account of impacts on all parts of the UK</li><li>• Protect workers' rights</li><li>• Avoid a hard border with Ireland</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Invest in training for UK nationals</li><li>• Keep better data on migrants</li><li>• Enable us to sustain public services</li><li>• Benefit our economy</li><li>• Be responsive to regional need</li><li>• Include better planning of public services</li></ul>

As is apparent, Members' concerns on trade policy were wide-ranging and included some items – notably the desire to avoid a hard border with Ireland – that general opinion polling tends not to identify as mattering to many people. This may give some indication that priorities evolve through the process of learning and deliberation – a theme that we examine further in Chapter 5.

On migration, meanwhile, Members were clearly concerned that policy-makers should not focus just on the rules about who can or cannot stay in the UK. They also wanted the government to attend to domestic policies that might affect migration patterns – such as training for UK nationals – and to outcomes that are affected by migration – such as the quality of public services.

### 4.3. TRADE WITH THE EU

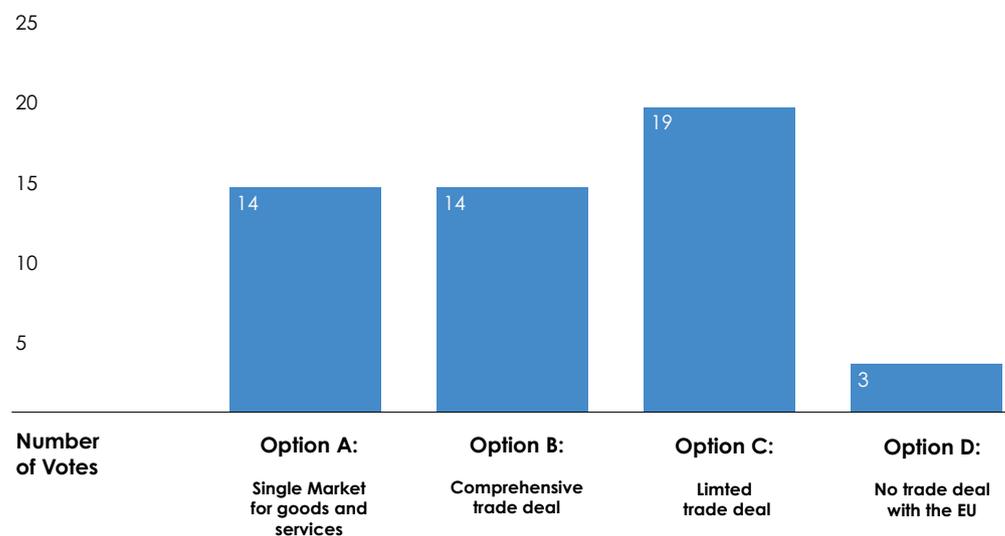
Having discussed policy guidelines, Members moved on to consider concrete policy options. They began by considering options for how UK trade with the EU could be organised after Brexit. At present, trade with the EU is governed primarily by the UK's membership of the Single Market. The Assembly considered four possible approaches to trade in the future:

- **Option A:** Stay in the Single Market, at least as it relates to goods and services.
- **Option B:** Leave the Single Market, and seek a comprehensive trade deal. This would keep trade with the EU as open as possible by maintaining zero tariffs and minimising non-tariff barriers through harmonisation or mutual recognition.
- **Option C:** Leave the Single Market and seek a limited trade deal that would maintain zero tariffs but not address non-tariff barriers.
- **Option D:** Do no trade deal with the EU.

The **introductory presentation** drew on the briefing papers and the presentations from the first weekend to set out the implications of these options (in so far as they are knowable) in relation to the economy, public services, the degree to which the UK can set its own rules, contributions to the EU budget, and the regulation of matters such as workers' rights and environmental standards. As explained in Chapter 4, after further detailed discussion, Members voted by ranking the options that had been presented in order of preference.

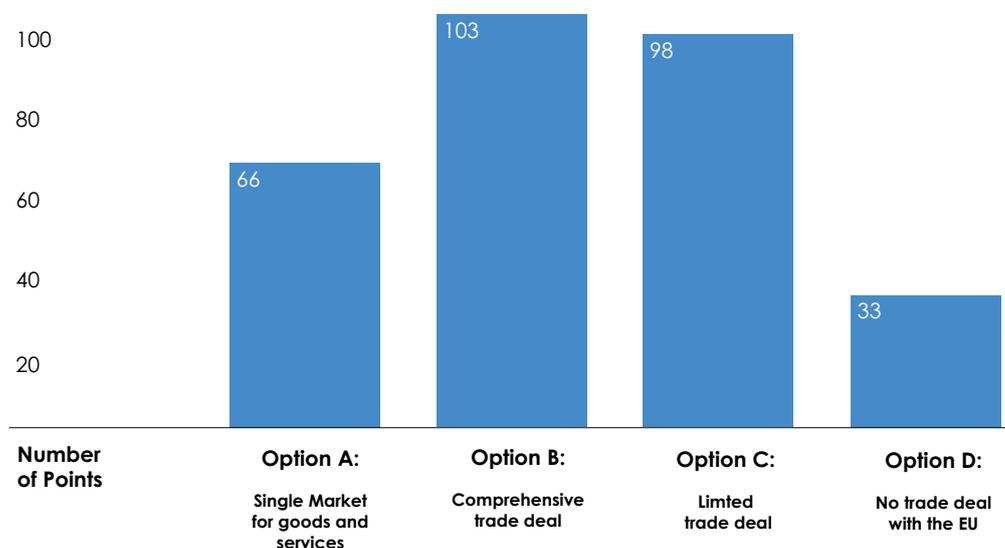
As Figure 4.1 shows, Members' first preferences spread widely across the first three options. Few went for the fourth, 'no deal' option. This was hardly a surprise: though the government and some prominent commentators argue that it is important to keep this option on the table, the great majority explicitly see it as a fall-back if the Brexit talks fail; very few suggest it should be the UK's first preference. The plurality option was a limited trade deal (option C); but a majority of Members (twenty-eight out of fifty) preferred some kind of closer relationship with the EU (option A or B).

**Figure 4.1. Trade with the EU: first preferences**



As no single option gained a majority of first preferences, Figure 4.2 takes account not just of first preferences, but also of Members' second, third and fourth preferences. It assigns three points to a first preference, two to a second preference, one to a third preference, and none to a fourth preference. Using this approach, the option of a comprehensive trade deal came marginally ahead, as it received many second preferences. The same result is achieved if the preferences are counted using the Alternative Vote method.\*

**Figure 4.2. Trade with the EU: points for preferences**

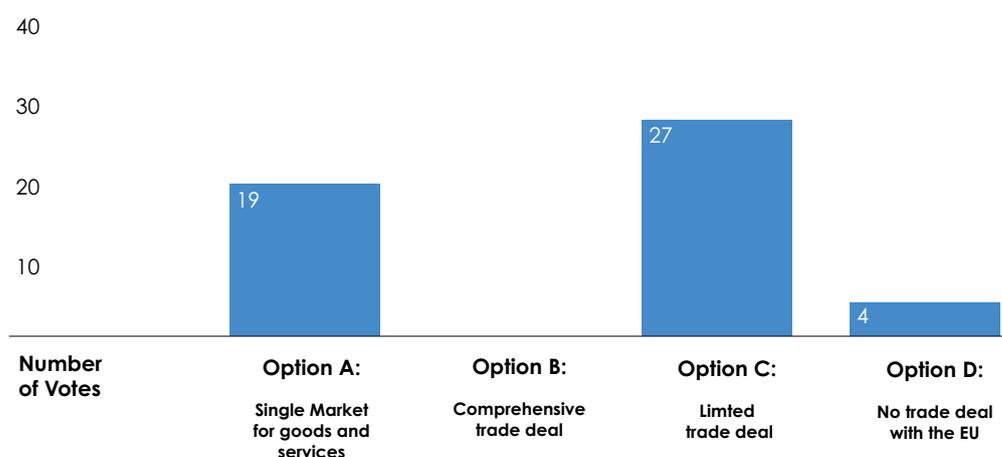


\* Under this method, first preferences are counted. Where none has an absolute majority of the votes, the option with fewest votes is eliminated and the second preferences on these ballot papers are treated as first preferences. This process continues until there is a majority winner.

We asked Assembly Members to rank the options primarily because it may be that the UK cannot get everything that it wants. In particular, while the UK government has said that it wants a comprehensive trade deal that gives as easy access for UK goods and services to the Single Market as at present, the heads of the remaining countries of the EU have collectively said that they will not allow this. The voting also allows us to see Assembly Members' preferences if a bespoke deal indeed turns out to be unavailable.

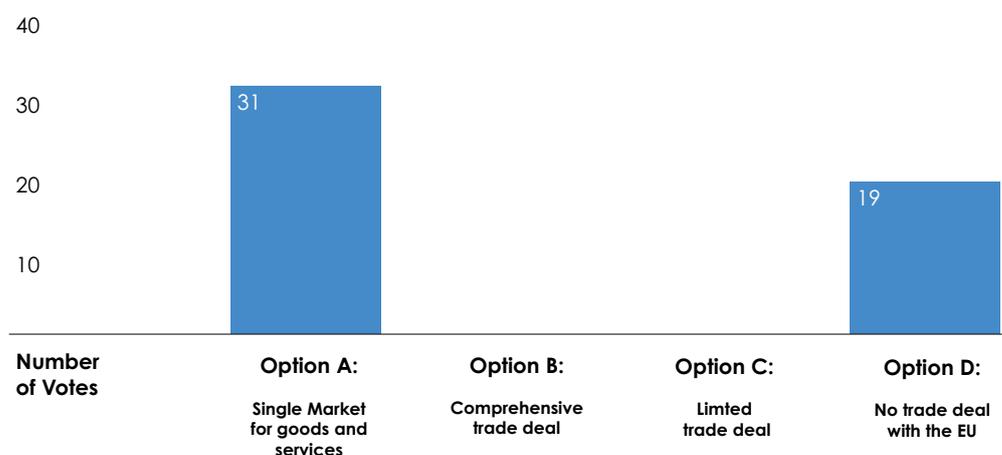
Figure 4.3 shows Members' first preferences if a comprehensive trade deal indeed proves impossible to negotiate. In this scenario, most Assembly Members preferred the UK to do a limited trade deal rather than either take the off-the-peg option (should the EU allow it) of continuing Single Market membership or the option of no deal. Figure 4.4, meanwhile, shows preferences if no bespoke trade deal at all can be done. If the choice comes down to one between Single Market membership and no deal at all, the majority of Members preferred the UK to stay in the Single Market.

**Figure 4.3. Trade with the EU: if a comprehensive deal is unavailable**



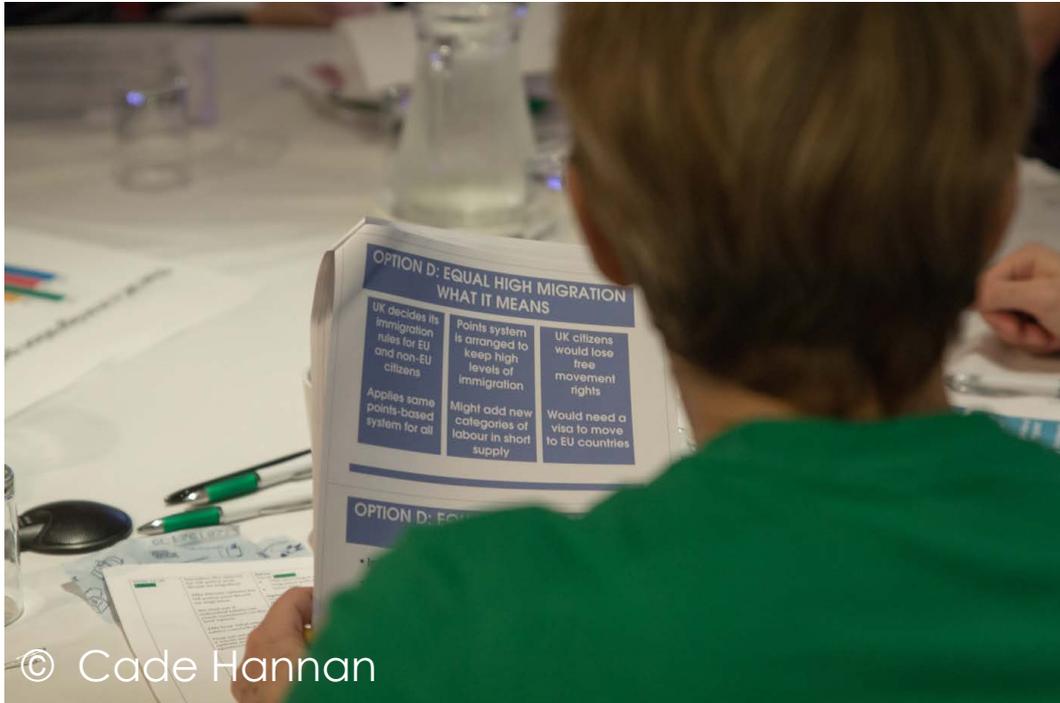
**Note:** In order to calculate these figures, we eliminated option B from the count and redistributed the votes it had received according to second preferences.

**Figure 4.4. Trade with the EU: if no bespoke deal can be done**



**Note:** In order to calculate these figures, we eliminated options B and C from the count and redistributed the votes they had received according to second and, where necessary, third preferences.

Since the time of the Assembly's second weekend, the 'no deal' option has been much discussed in the media. It is striking, therefore, that a decisive majority of the Citizens' Assembly rejected it. Of course, that is not a comment on whether keeping this option on the table is a good negotiating strategy. But it does raise some doubt about the credibility with which the government can maintain a no-deal Brexit as an option: if, in late 2018 or 2019, general public opinion is similarly hostile to leaving the EU with no deal, it would likely become very difficult (particularly given the current parliamentary arithmetic) for any government to push this kind of Brexit through.



#### 4.4. TRADE BEYOND THE EU

How the UK trades with countries outside the EU is at present structured by our membership of the EU Customs Union. Membership of the Customs Union means that the EU's tariffs are imposed on imports from outside the EU into the UK. The UK cannot negotiate its own trade deals with countries outside the EU, but it participates in deals done by the EU. Customs Union membership also means that there is no need for customs checks on the border between the UK and the rest of the EU.

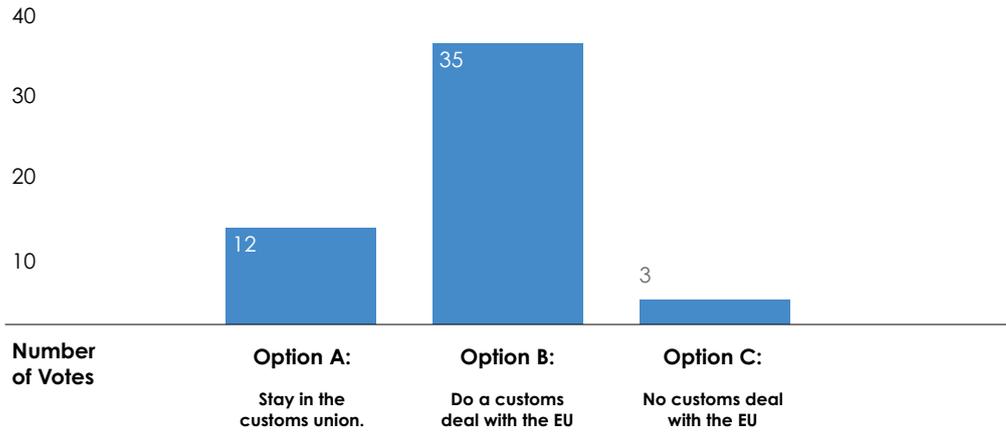
The Assembly considered three possible options for how it would like post-Brexit UK trade beyond the EU to be governed:

- **Option A:** Stay in the Customs Union, so that the UK applies EU external tariffs and joins (but does not take part in negotiating) EU trade deals.
- **Option B:** Do a bespoke customs deal with the EU allowing the UK to conduct its own international trade policy while maintaining a frictionless UK/EU border.
- **Option C:** Do no customs deal, so that the UK can conduct its own trade policy, but physical customs controls on the UK/EU border are needed.

The introductory presentation again laid out the options and their implications in terms of a range of considerations: the quality (from a UK perspective) and speed of trade deals that are likely to be done under each option with countries outside the EU; the appropriateness of tariffs to the needs of the UK economy; the degree of control that the UK has over trade policies; and the level of customs controls on the UK/EU border, with its potential effects both on trade and on community relations in Northern Ireland.

As shown in Figure 4.5, Members, by a substantial majority, saw a bespoke deal as the best option.

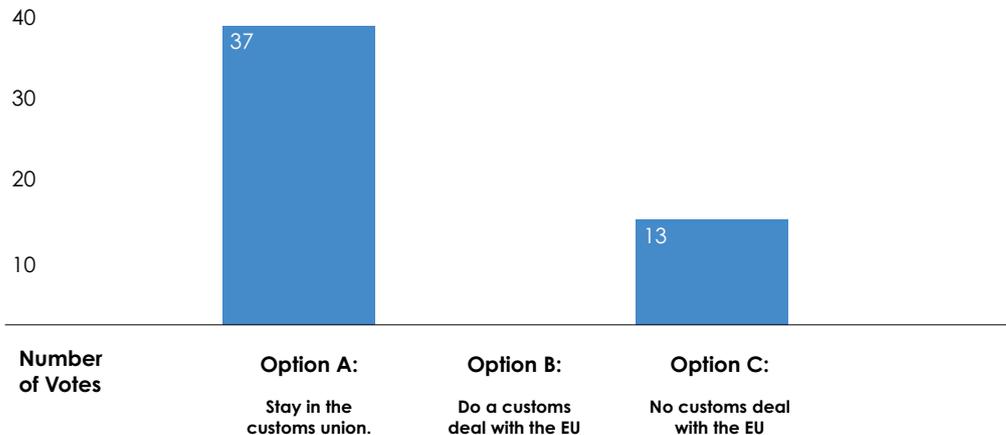
**Figure 4.5. Trade beyond the EU: first preferences**



Whether a bespoke deal of this kind is feasible, however, remains in doubt. The government has tentatively suggested two forms that such a deal might take. One is that the UK could leave 'the' Customs Union, but enter 'a' customs union with the EU: one that delivers on all of the UK government's objectives. How this could be done and whether the EU would agree to it is, however, very unclear. The other possibility is close cooperation on customs checks so that traffic can flow across the border without being stopped. The example of the border between Norway and Sweden is often cited as a model for how this might work. The UK government has said, however, that there should be no checks on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which goes well beyond the current Norway/Sweden arrangement. Again, it is currently unclear how this could be made to work.

As Figure 4.6 shows, if a bespoke deal of the type favoured by Assembly Members proves not to be possible, a substantial majority of Members said that the UK should stay in the Customs Union rather than leave the EU with no customs deal in place.

**Figure 4.6. Trade beyond the EU: if a bespoke customs deal is unavailable**



**Note:** In order to calculate these figures, we eliminated option B from the count and redistributed the votes it had received according to second preferences.

## 4.5. MIGRATION BETWEEN THE UK AND THE EU

Migration between the UK and the EU is currently governed by the EU principle of free movement – which applies to people in employment or self-employment, as well as to students and anyone who is able to sustain themselves financially.

The Assembly considered five options for post-Brexit policy on migration between the UK and the EU:

- **Option A:** Maintain free movement of labour and continue to operate it in the same way as today.
- **Option B:** Maintain free movement of labour, but make full use of available controls to prevent abuse of the system.
- **Option C:** End free movement and reduce immigration overall, but continue giving EU citizens favourable access compared with people from outside the EU.
- **Option D:** Remove any preference for EU over non-EU citizens, while maintaining current immigration levels.
- **Option E:** Remove any preference for EU over non-EU citizens, and reduce immigration overall.

These options are more complex than in the previous issue areas, as there are two major dimensions of debate: the degree of preference that should be given to EU over non-EU migration; and the overall level of immigration that people want to see into the UK. Opinion polls show a very widespread preference in the UK for cutting immigration overall. But some of those who want to end free movement between the UK and the EU do not want to cut immigration: rather, they want the UK to 'fish in a global pool of talent'. Conversely, not all of those who want to maintain favourable access for EU nationals to the UK want also to maintain current levels of immigration: they may prefer EU over non-EU immigration for economic or cultural reasons.

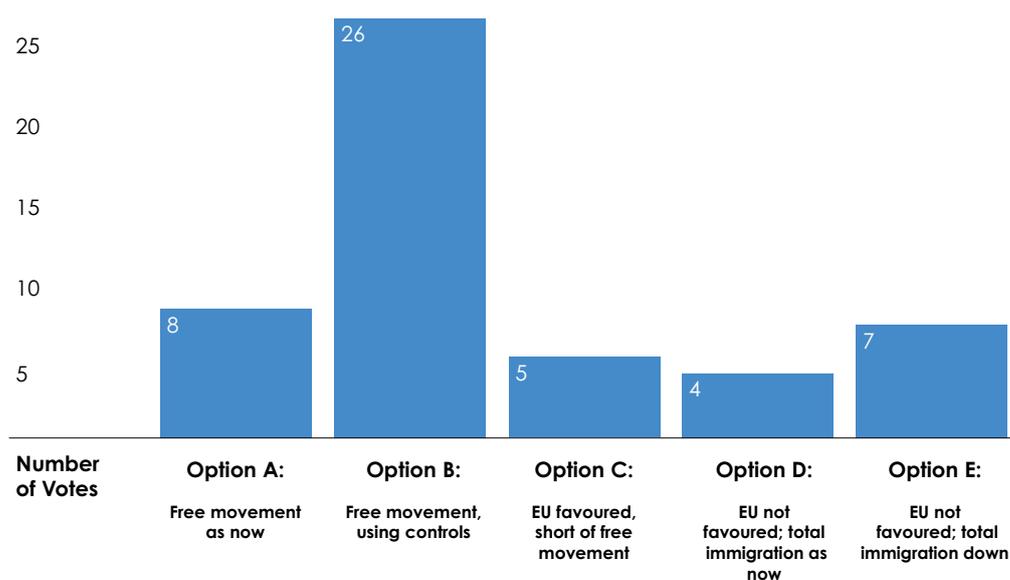


We presented more options at this stage than we originally envisaged. We added option B after the Assembly's first weekend to reflect feedback from Members, who had been interested to learn from the expert speakers that Single Market rules do not confer an unconditional right on all EU citizens to reside in the UK, but that the UK makes little attempt to remove those who do not have a right to remain.

We presented the implications of each option in relation to the economy, jobs and wages, public services, population, housing, culture, and the ease with which UK citizens could move to EU countries.

As shown in Figure 4.7, an absolute majority (but a bare absolute majority) of Assembly Members preferred option B over all alternatives. This was despite the fact that we presented evidence indicating that the impact of exercising the available controls on total immigrant numbers would be small: likely in the low thousands. Strikingly, only seven Members chose option E as their first preference, which we clearly presented as the option that would reduce total immigration most significantly. This presumably reflects in part the slight skew in the Assembly membership towards people with more permissive attitudes towards immigration. The numbers suggest, however, that, even if there had been no such skew in the membership, no more than twelve of the fifty Assembly Members would have selected option E. It appears this is not the majority preference that it is often assumed to be.

**Figure 4.7. Migration between the UK and the EU: first preferences**



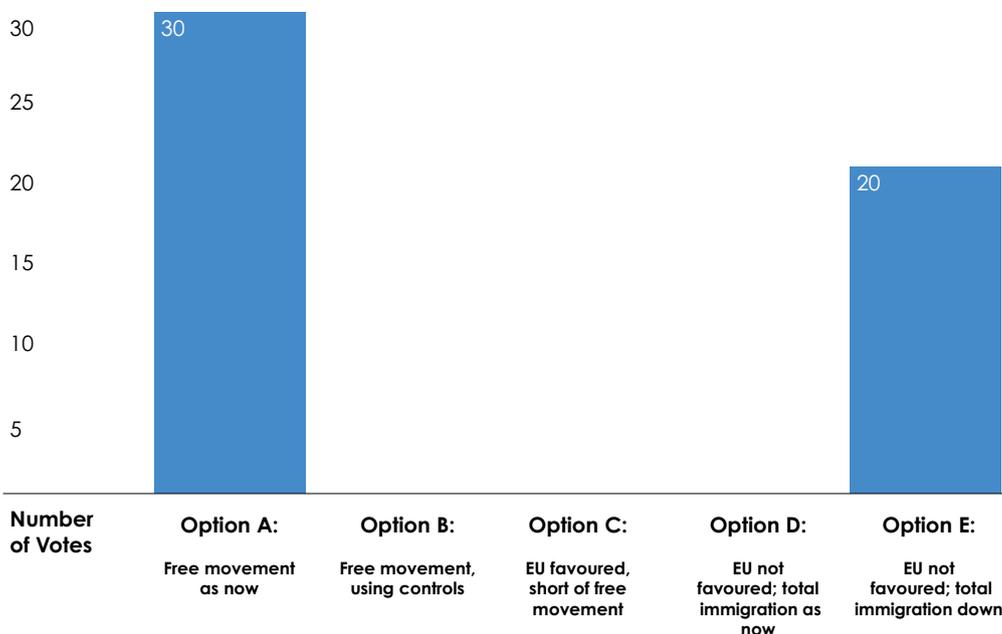
The decision to support a more permissive attitude to immigration seems to have been driven by a desire to maintain the benefits of immigration while also minimising the costs. This was already apparent from the policy guidelines reported in section 4.1, above: Members had already identified specific concerns that they considered important. Beyond measures to remove migrants who cannot support themselves financially and prevent benefits fraud, the guidelines vote and feedback from the tables suggested that Members also wanted better training for UK citizens so that the need for immigration is reduced. They wanted more effort to relieve pressure on public services in parts of the country where immigration is particularly high. And some at least were also open to the idea of reforming the benefits system so that recent immigrants would not have access so quickly – even if that might mean excluding some UK nationals as well.

Thus, the Members' support for option B does not mean that most opposed a reduction in overall immigration numbers: most clearly would like to see total immigration fall. But they wanted this to be done in a targeted and fair way that would minimise harm to the UK economy.



Figure 4.8 shows what happens if we force a choice between maintaining free movement as it is operated today (option A) and ending any preference for EU citizens while cutting overall immigration numbers (option E). In this circumstance, a substantial number of Assembly Members opt for option E, suggesting that their greatest priority is a reduction in the overall level of immigration. Nevertheless, a clear majority of Members settle on option A. Again, this partly reflects the skew in the membership of the Assembly in favour of more permissive attitudes to immigration. If we compensate for this skew, the Assembly would likely be more or less evenly divided. Thus, while political commentary tends to assume an overriding public preference for reducing immigration, our evidence suggests that, when faced with concrete options involving real-world trade-offs, people who have considered the issues in depth take a much more measured view.

**Figure 4.8. Migration between the UK and the EU: excluding intermediate options**



## 4.6. BREXIT PACKAGES

The final vote taken by the Assembly offered a choice among six possible Brexit packages, focusing particularly on the relationship between decisions about trade with the EU and decisions about migration. As the purpose of this exercise was to consider possible trade-offs between different policy areas, we excluded policy combinations that are most likely to prove unattainable, such as staying in the Single Market as it affects goods and services while ending free movement of labour. We did, however, include some options that are feasible but have few vocal advocates, such as leaving without an EU trade deal while maintaining free movement of labour.

The options were:

- **Option A:** Stay in the Single Market, with free movement of labour as now.
- **Option B:** Stay in the Single Market, with free movement subject to all available controls.
- **Option C:** Do a comprehensive trade deal and allow favourable access for EU citizens short of free movement.
- **Option D:** Do a limited trade deal with the EU, without giving favourable access for EU citizens.
- **Option E:** Do no trade deal with the EU, and allow EU citizens favourable access or free movement.
- **Option F:** Do no trade deal with the EU, and allow EU citizens no favourable access.

As it turned out, the recommendations that the Assembly had reached on specific policy areas were not as potentially incompatible as they might have been, and the results of this exercise simply reiterated those of previous sessions. As Figure 4.9 shows, the options receiving most first preferences were those combining Single Market membership with the use of available controls on immigration (option B) and a comprehensive trade deal with continued favourable access for EU citizens (option C). (We had not allowed for the option of a comprehensive trade deal and ongoing free movement of labour, as this has not, to our knowledge, previously received any significant attention.)

**Figure 4.9. Brexit packages: first preferences**

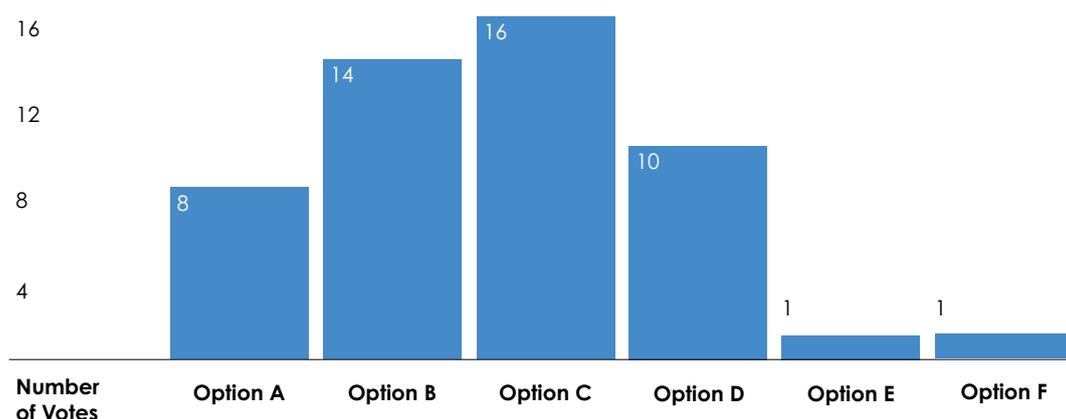
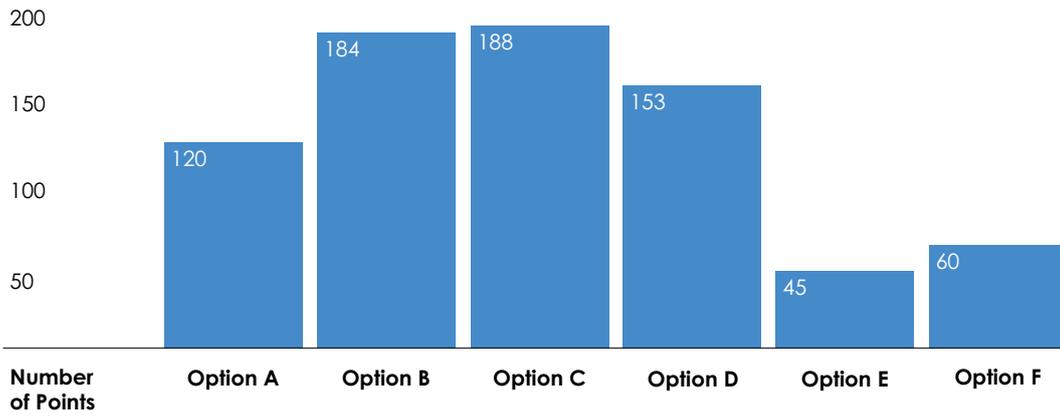


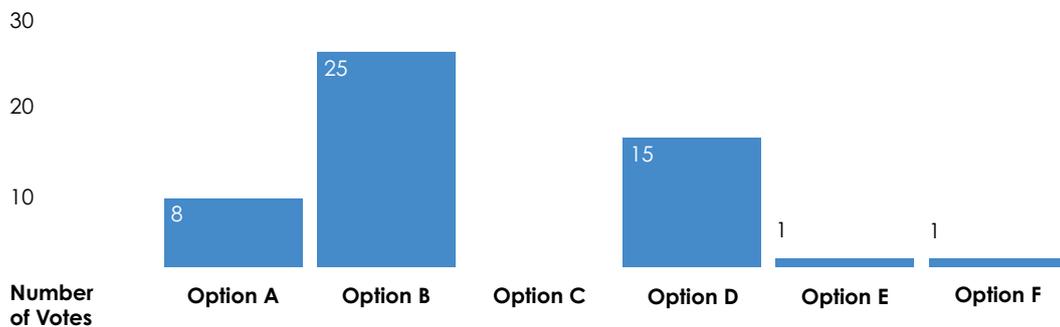
Figure 4.10 shows the distribution of support when points are assigned for preferences. Options B and C again come very close to each other and ahead of other options. If we conduct the count by the Alternative Vote, these two options end up tying on 25 votes each.

**Figure 4.10. Brexit packages: points for preferences**

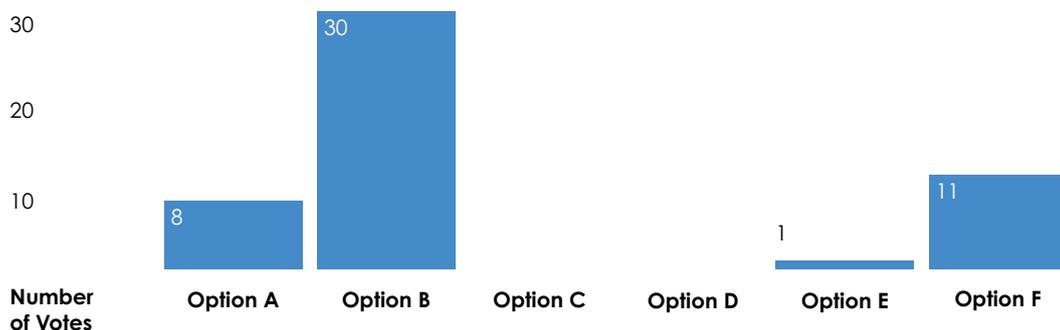


As Figure 4.11 shows, if a comprehensive trade deal between the UK and the EU proves impossible (and option C is thus eliminated), a majority of Members prefer some kind of ongoing membership of the Single Market. If it proves impossible to do any kind of bespoke trade deal – as in Figure 4.12, where options C and D are excluded – most of those who had previously supported a limited trade deal would favour the ‘no deal’ option. But some would go the opposite way, with the result that a large majority in favour of Single Market membership emerges.

**Figure 4.11. Brexit packages: if a comprehensive deal is unavailable**



**Figure 4.12. Brexit packages: if no bespoke deal is available**



## 4.7. CONCLUSIONS

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit offers unique insights into informed and considered public opinion on the form of Brexit that the UK government should seek. It did not consider the question of whether Brexit should happen or not: as we explained in Chapter 3, we decided for several reasons to keep this option off the agenda. It focused, instead, on the arrangements for trade and migration that the UK government should seek post-Brexit.

As this chapter has set out:

- The Members of the Citizens' Assembly wanted policy on Brexit to **protect or enhance living standards, public services, the economy, jobs, and workers' rights**. They wanted policy to take full account of **impacts on all parts of the UK**.
- The recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly show **very little public appetite for the 'no deal' Brexit** that some politicians have talked up in recent months.
- Rather, **most Members' first preference was for a close relationship between the UK and the EU**. This would involve a bespoke UK/EU trade deal. It would free the UK to conduct its own international trade policy while maintaining frictionless movement of goods and services across the UK/EU border. It would also maintain the free movement of labour, subject to a variety of controls and other policy innovations.
- Should a bespoke deal prove impossible to negotiate, **most Members preferred strong alignment with the EU over no alignment**. If the only alternative is to leave the EU with no deal on future relations, most Members wanted the UK to remain within the Single Market and the Customs Union.

The referendum in 2016 decided that Brexit should happen, but it did not determine the form that it should take. If the Brexit process is to remain democratic, it is vital that politicians in parliament and in government – in Westminster, the devolved nations, and beyond – pay close heed to what the Members of the Citizens' Assembly have said. They want a pragmatic approach to Brexit that protects and enhances the things that matter in their own lives and the lives of people throughout the UK.

These conclusions are clear. In the following chapter, we show the extent to which they also deserve to be taken seriously by examining the processes that led to them. We show that the Assembly scored very highly on all measures. The final section of the following chapter also gives further evidence on Assembly Members' views, showing how their attitudes changed over the course of the Assembly's work.

## 5. ASSESSING THE ASSEMBLY

We have described how the Assembly was constituted, what it did, and what it decided. For two reasons, it is also important to assess its operation. These two reasons relate to our two basic aims for the project as a whole (see p.13). First, the weight that we attach to the Assembly's recommendations in relation to Brexit should depend on the quality of the process that led to them. Thus, assessing the Assembly is important for those readers who are interested in Brexit and the form that it might take. Second, the Assembly is an experiment in doing democracy differently that others – whether interested in Brexit or not – will want to learn from. Is the citizens' assembly process one that deserves to be emulated in other policy areas? Is running a citizens' assembly on an issue where opinions are already polarised feasible? Are there good features of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit that deserve to be copied elsewhere? Are there things that should be done differently by future deliberative mini-publics?

We have gathered a substantial body of evidence from the Citizens' Assembly. Beyond the voting results and documentation from all of the Assembly preparatory work, we also have records of the Assembly discussions and evidence from a series of surveys. At the time of writing this report, we have not completed analysis of all of these sources, and we will continue to publish detailed assessment work during 2018. Much can, however, already be said on the basis of the evidence that we have processed so far.

This chapter begins with an outline of the evidence that we have gathered. Subsequent sections then address four particular questions. First, did the Assembly adequately reflect the diverse make-up of the UK electorate? Second, did the processes within the Assembly live up to the principles set out above in section 3.2? Third, were the conclusions reached by the Assembly coherent and meaningful? Finally, how did Assembly Members' views change over the course of the Assembly's work?

### 5.1. SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

The analyses in the following sections are based on evidence coming from three principal sources:

- **Surveys:** The **recruitment survey** administered in July 2017 asked a broad range of questions on attitudes to Brexit, Brexit-related issues, and other aspects of politics. In addition, Assembly Members completed a **research survey** at the start and end of each meeting weekend: before any formal Assembly business had been conducted except basic introductions; and then after all business had been concluded except for thanks and farewells. These surveys repeated many of the questions from the recruitment surveys. Those administered at the end of the weekends also contained questions about Members' perceptions of the Assembly discussions, drawing on elements of the Perceived Discourse Quality Index (PDQI), which has been used to assess deliberative quality in some other deliberative mini-publics (Caluwaerts et al. 2016). Members also completed an **evaluation questionnaire**, prepared by Involve, at the end of each weekend asking what they thought of the weekend as a whole. This overlapped in part with the research survey, but focused more on the running of the Assembly, especially the facilitation. Finally, we submitted a version of the final research survey to the **control group** (see p.17) at the time of the second Assembly weekend.
- **Meeting records:** We audio-recorded all of the small-group discussions during the two weekends. A recorder was placed on each table for this purpose, operated by a member of our support team. That person also acted as a notetaker, noting down when each person at the table spoke. We have used these notes to calculate the extent to which each Member spoke during the discussions, and, at the time of writing, we are also using them to aid transcription of the audio files. We are coding these transcripts to analyse the nature of the discussions among Assembly Members. This coding exercise remains incomplete and is therefore not included in this report. We will present findings from it in later publications.

- **Facilitator interviews:** The facilitators who guided the Assembly discussions have considerable experience of working in a wide variety of deliberative exercises. Their perceptions of how the interactions among Members on this occasion compared with those they have witnessed elsewhere are thus extremely valuable. We are therefore interviewing them to gather evidence on their perceptions, and we draw on material from the first six of these interviews in the sections below.

The Citizens' Assembly generated a very large volume of research material, and it will take us some time to analyse it fully. As noted above, we have not yet completed transcription and coding of the Assembly discussions. In addition, our analysis of the results of the control group survey are at this stage only preliminary. Beyond these sources, we plan to gather further information, including further surveys of the Assembly Members and the control group two months after the Assembly concluded its business, and qualitative interviews with Assembly Members.

As we take the research and analysis further, we will continue to publish findings over the coming months. Our existing evidence base does, nevertheless, allow us to say a great deal about how the Assembly worked.

## 5.2. REFLECTING THE DIVERSITY OF THE UK ELECTORATE

We begin with the first question stated above: did the Assembly adequately reflect the diverse make-up of the UK electorate?

Just what this question means is open to some discussion. It is not generally thought necessary that a deliberative mini-public should be strictly representative in the narrow sense that the number of people from any group within the assembly should reflect the shares of those groups in the wider population: what matters is that the diversity of views and life experiences should be present, heard, and fully considered, not how many people voice them. On the other hand, in the case of a body such as the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, which addresses questions on which opinion is already polarised and on which extensive polling research has been conducted, questions of representativeness are more sensitive. Had the Assembly contained a substantial majority of Remain voters in the 2016 referendum, for example, we could not have claimed that its recommendations reflected the informed conclusions of a cross-section of the UK electorate. Thus, while we should not be fixated by precise numerical representativeness – there are natural limits to what can be achieved in an assembly of around fifty members – broad representativeness is an important goal. Indeed, oversampling of smaller and more politically marginalised social groups can be desirable to ensure that their voice is adequately heard.

Chapter 2 presented detailed evidence on the composition of the Citizens' Assembly. Key points that should be drawn from that evidence are the following:

- In terms of the demographic criteria that have been used to stratify and assess citizens' assemblies in the past – gender, age, ethnicity, social class, and place of residence – the membership of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit very closely resembled the UK population as a whole.
- Where certain groups were slightly overrepresented, this favoured groups that have traditionally been marginalised in UK politics, particularly women, those of 'lower' social class, and those living furthest from London.
- Looking at socio-demographic criteria that we did not use for stratification, the most striking finding is that fewer Members had young children than is true for the wider population. On the other hand, taking those with caring responsibilities in the home of different kinds together, such people were not underrepresented. People with higher

degrees were over-represented.

- Slightly more Assembly Members voted Leave in the 2016 referendum than voted Remain, reflecting the referendum result itself. Non-voters were, however, significantly underrepresented.
- The Members started with somewhat more permissive attitudes towards immigration than are to be found in the wider population, including particular overrepresentation of those with the most pro-immigration views. We took account of this when reporting the recommendations of the Assembly in Chapter 4.

These results show that, at least in terms of its composition, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit does deserve to be taken seriously. It reflected opinion from all parts of the UK and all sections of society. Crucially, it also closely represented the core Brexit divide within the electorate.

In terms of processes, our results show the importance both of stratification and of compensating Members for their participation: without these measures, parts of the population might well have been absent or represented in sharply diminished numbers. We would recommend that a similar stratification exercise be applied to any future assembly of this kind. In particular, at least where the assembly addresses an issue that has already been widely discussed and on which people are likely already to have developed views, we recommend the inclusion of stratification criteria relating to attitudes: stratification by demographics does not guarantee representativeness in terms of people's views. We cannot also assume that one attitudinal variable, in this case the referendum vote, can act as a proxy for other attitudes such as attitudes towards immigration.

### **5.3. PROCESS PRINCIPLES**

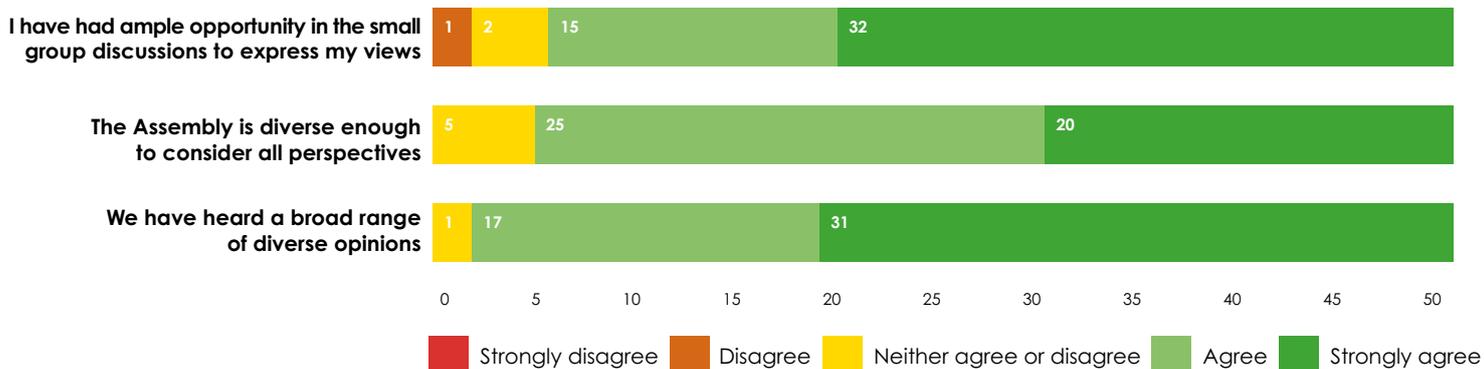
Chapter 3 set out five basic principles that we wanted the work of the Citizens' Assembly to fulfil. We now assess the available evidence on how the Assembly performed against each of these. At the end of the section, we add further evidence on Members' perceptions of the Assembly weekends in the round.

#### **Inclusion**

The first principle is that all voices should be heard and given due attention. That is achieved partly through the composition of the Assembly, as discussed in section 5.2. It is also achieved through what happens within the Assembly itself: whether all Members feel able to participate, and whether they are all listened to and respected.

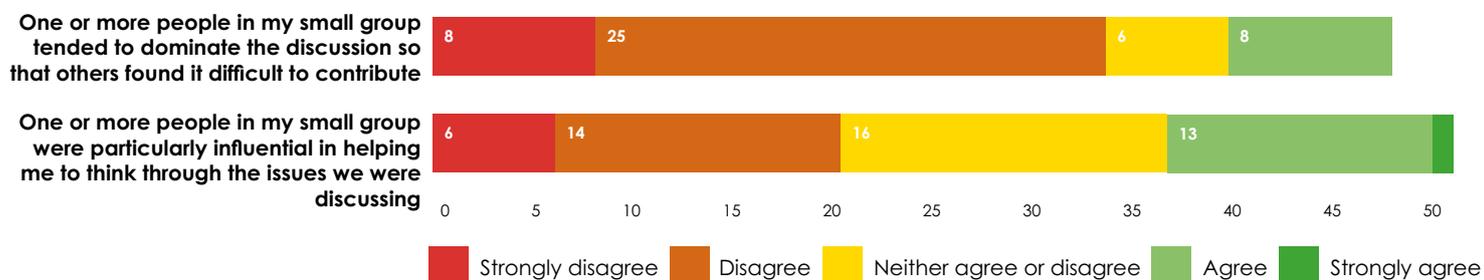
The research surveys that we conducted during the Assembly weekends offer strong evidence that Members felt able to participate and felt that the Assembly as a whole contained an appropriate range of perspectives. Figure 5.1 shows the responses at the end of the second weekend to the three relevant questions. Only one Member disagreed with the statement that they had had ample opportunity to express their own views, while 47 agreed or strongly agreed. No one disagreed with the statement that the Assembly had been diverse enough to consider all perspectives, while 45 agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, no one disagreed with the statement that a broad range of opinions had been heard.

**Figure 5.1. Inclusion in the Citizens' Assembly: evidence from Member surveys**



A further and tougher way of thinking about inclusiveness considers the degree to which Members were able to take equal part in the discussions and have equal influence over the thinking of others. We asked two survey questions relating to this at the end of the second weekend, as shown in Figure 5.2. Most Assembly Members did not find that particular Members dominated discussions to the exclusion of others, but 11 Members agreed that this was the case. This suggests that a high but not perfect level of equality of participation was achieved. On the other hand, the second question suggests that some Members found the contribution of specific other Members particularly influential and saw this as helping them think through the issues. So long as this influence derives from the content of what they say rather than from who they are or how they say it, it is not in any way detrimental to the quality of the process. These particularly influential individuals might not have been loud or have talked a lot: it is, for example, possible to influence through being quiet, concise, and considered. They are not always the dominant Members identified by some in the previous question.

**Figure 5.2. Equal participation in the Citizens' Assembly: evidence from Member surveys**



We can also provide robust data on the degree to which Members were in fact able to take equal part in the discussions by looking at our records of how much each Member spoke. Caution is required here: some people may appear to speak more than others simply because they speak more slowly; there is also variation in how concisely people express the same point; and active participation in a citizens' assembly is about listening as well as speaking. Still, when appropriately interpreted, the data can yield useful insights.

With these caveats in mind, we have calculated the total amount of time that each Member spoke during the small-group discussions over the course of the two weekends. There is considerable variation between individuals, from around 10 minutes at the bottom end, to around 50 minutes at the top end. Given the caveats just mentioned, this variation does not mean much: there could be all sorts of factors underlying it. What matters is whether there is systematic variation between different kinds of people, such that certain types of people are speaking for longer than others. As Table 5.1 shows, there was not. In almost all cases, the numbers across the categories of each of our six stratification criteria are very similar to each other. None of the differences are statistically significant: they are likely attributable to inevitable variation across individuals rather than to any systematic patterns.

**Table 5.1. Speaking time among Assembly Members**

Age (years)	18-34	29
	35-54	32
	55+	27
Gender	Female	32
	Male	26
Ethnicity	White	30
	Non-white	24
Place of residence	North	30
	Midlands	21
	East of England	30
	London	22
	South	32
	Wales	25
	Scotland	38
	Northern Ireland	38
Social Class	ABC1	30
	C2DE	28
Referendum vote 2016	Voted to remain	30
	Votes to leave	29
	Did not vote	29

These data also confirm that it is possible to be influential without necessarily speaking a lot. While on average the seventeen Assembly Members who were mentioned as having been particularly influential did speak for longer than those who were not mentioned, six of these seventeen spoke for less time than the average Member – and two spoke for less time than the average 'non-influential' Member.

The participation data thus confirm Members' perceptions that the discussions were inclusive. This is testament to the high quality of support provided by our table facilitators and the willingness of Members to respect the views of others.

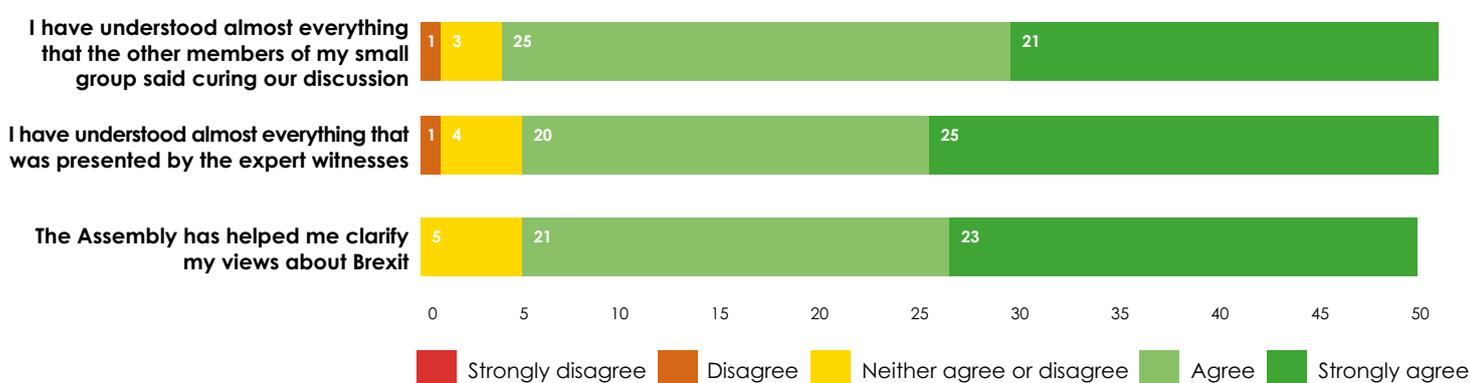
## Understanding

As already described, we structured the Assembly sessions and the materials that Assembly Members received very carefully in order to promote relevant knowledge and understanding. The expert speakers included many of the leading independent voices in the UK on the issues on the Assembly's agenda. We carefully researched and consulted on the briefing papers, which have been widely praised in the feedback we have received for providing detailed information in a concise and accessible way.

The depth of understanding that Members in fact developed of the issues before them is very hard to measure. As discussed in section 5.3 below, the conclusions that the Assembly as a whole reached were consistent and meaningful. The anecdotal impressions of the expert speakers who spent time with the Assembly Members were very positive: they strongly praised the quality of the questions that Members put to them.

We also have evidence on this point from the Member surveys. Specifically, we asked the Members to assess their own learning, and the responses from the end of the second weekend are shown in Figure 5.3. As is evident, only one person disagreed with each statement about their own understanding, and no one disagreed with the statement that the Assembly had helped them to clarify their views about Brexit. Beyond the evidence in Figure 5.3, we also asked Members to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 their own understanding of the issues of trade and immigration in relation to Brexit. Their assessments rose significantly across the two weekends, from an average of 3.2 at the start of the first weekend to 4.2 at the end of the second.

**Figure 5.3. Understanding among Assembly Members: evidence from Member surveys**



Feedback from facilitators provides valuable evidence on Members' understanding. Some facilitators who attended only the first weekend suggested that Members did not always show deep understanding of how the issues discussed – particularly those relating to trade – would affect their own day-to-day lives – though they also pointed out that Members sought to help each other, making sure everyone on the table understood concepts before moving on. By contrast, facilitators who attended the second weekend were far more positive. They were impressed with the level of understanding and insight that Members' reached in such a short space of time, citing their dedication as one reason why this might be the case. One example of this was a discussion around ID cards: a facilitator cited a very engaging discussion about the ramifications of using ID cards or a similar system for registering migrants.

These findings mirror Members' own perceptions that their knowledge increased over the course of the Assembly. Levels of understanding grew over time, exactly as they should have.

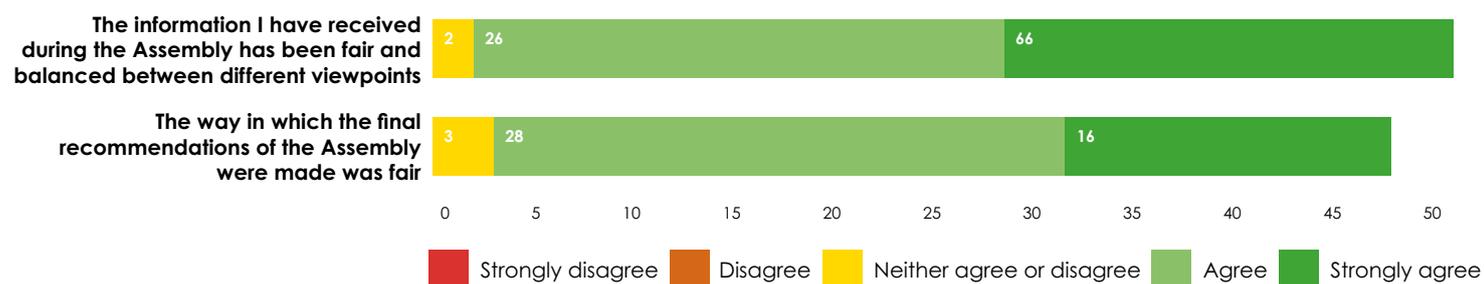
## Balance

Chapter 3 outlined the considerable steps that we took in pursuit of balance in the presentations and other materials that were given to the Assembly. The feedback that we received from the Advisory Board and the expert speakers suggests that these steps were highly successful. The materials are freely available on [our website](#), and anyone is therefore able to look through them and make their own judgements.

It is also helpful to see the judgements of the Assembly Members themselves. The Members encompassed the full spectrum of views on Brexit and related issues, and they naturally experienced the learning programme that we developed more intensely than anyone else. Their perceptions therefore carry considerable weight.

Members' responses to two relevant questions at the end of the second weekend are reported in Figure 5.4. No Assembly Member disagreed with the statement that the information provided had been fair and balanced. Nor did anyone disagree with the more general statement that how the Assembly reached its conclusions was fair. This is despite the fact that some Members disagreed with those conclusions: in response to a further question (not shown here), eight Members said that they disagreed with the conclusions and seven more gave no answer. Disagreement is, of course, perfectly legitimate. The striking point is that even those who did not support the conclusions were nevertheless content with the processes leading to them.

**Figure 5.4. Balance in the Citizens' Assembly: evidence from Member surveys**



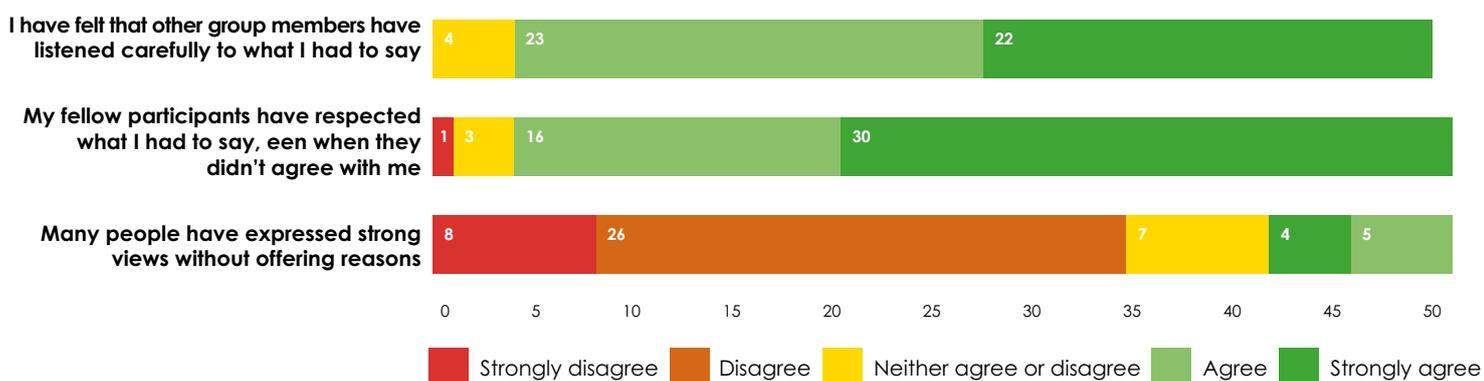
## Deliberation

As we explained in Chapter 3, quality deliberation requires not just that diverse and balanced information and perspectives be available, but also that the members of an assembly be open to engaging with them: to listening to others and, if appropriate, changing their minds. It also requires that members be willing to explain their own views, rather than just asserting them.

Figure 5.5 offers evidence on these points from the survey taken at the end of the second weekend. It shows that no Member disagreed with the statement that other group members listened to what they said. On the whole, agreement was even stronger with the statement that others had respected what respondents had said. One Member did, however, say that she or he strongly disagreed with this statement. Most Assembly Members disagreed with the statement that many people had expressed strong views without offering reasons. But a significant minority – nine of the fifty – agreed or strongly agreed.

These answers paint a picture of high deliberative quality. Perfection is impossible, but the vast majority of Assembly Members appear to have had an overwhelmingly positive experience.

**Figure 5.5. Deliberation in the Citizens' Assembly: evidence from Member surveys**



Building on this evidence, several facilitators in their feedback commented on what they thought was a surprising level of respect between Members with different viewpoints, despite the emotive nature of some of the subjects addressed. As one facilitator put it, the quality of deliberation was as good as at most of the other events they had worked at, which they thought 'a fantastic achievement' given the contentious nature of the topics.

This is important. One of our original research questions focused on whether it would be possible to foster high quality deliberation in the context of an existing highly polarised debate. The evidence from facilitators, together with that from the Members themselves, gives strong evidence that respectful and genuine deliberation is indeed possible.

The facilitators' feedback again varied somewhat depending on which weekend or weekends they had attended, with those present for the second weekend seeing the level of deliberation as much higher. One suggested that, at the first weekend, there were things that some Members wanted to 'get off their chests', which made full deliberation harder. Particularly on the topic of immigration, facilitators said that some Members held strong views, and others on their table did not always feel confident enough to contradict them. One facilitator suggested that it was only on the final day that all Members felt fully able to express themselves. This illustrates the value of allowing deliberation over an extended time period. Indeed, many Members and facilitators regretted that it had not been possible to continue the conversations for longer.

All of these findings suggest that the quality of deliberation was high. We will have further evidence on this once we have analysed the Assembly transcripts as well.

### Personal reflection

Our final process criterion relates to whether the design of the Assembly succeeded in encouraging personal reflection among Members. This is the hardest point on which to secure evidence. It relates not to outcomes – such as whether Members changed their views or felt that the discussions had helped clarify their views – but to processes: whether Members were able to think about their own views and then reflect on them in light of what they heard from others. Members might have reflected deeply, but still maintained the views that they began with. They might have changed their views in response to particular things that they heard in a way that was not deeply reflective.

Most facilitators – particularly from the second weekend – saw what one described as a 'good interplay of ideas' on their tables, suggesting that people were reflecting on what they heard. This was harder at the first weekend, particularly on the subject of immigration. One facilitator said it took time for personal reflection to emerge, as some Members needed first to air their views and make their stand, and only after that were able to reflect more on what they were hearing from others. A further comment that supports this was that it takes time for many people to feel that they are in a safe space and to trust the organisers and the other Members on their table.

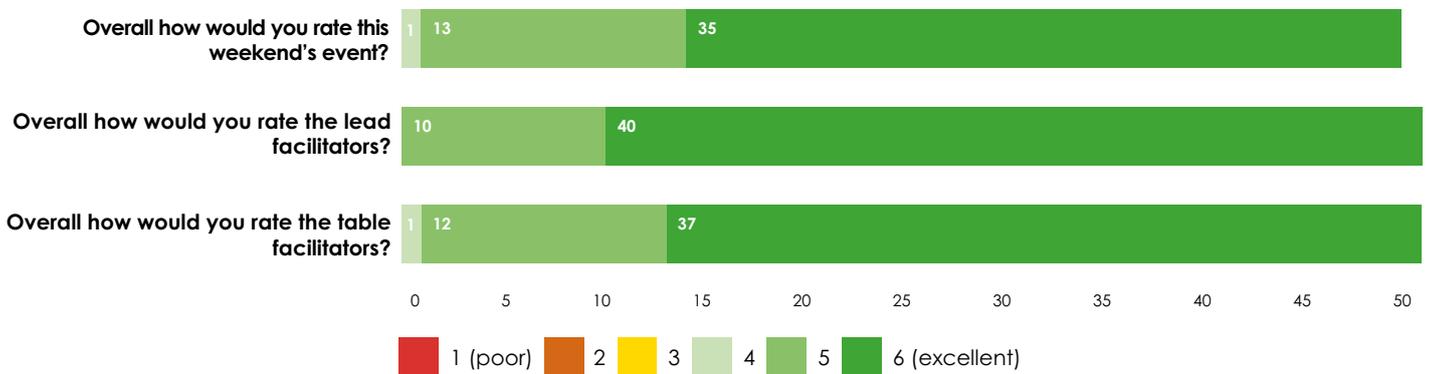
We did not include survey questions on this point. But we plan to gather further evidence on this point from the follow-up qualitative interviews that we will conduct with Assembly Members.

### Assembly Members' overall impressions

We have presented evidence in relation to the five specific process principles that we outlined in Chapter 3. Here we present further evidence on Assembly Members' evaluations of the Assembly weekends in the round. The evidence presented here comes from the evaluation questionnaire filled in by Assembly Members at the end of the second weekend.

As Figure 5.6 shows, Members' evaluations of the event as a whole and the facilitation were overwhelmingly positive. Substantial majorities rated the event and both levels of facilitation as 6 on a six-point scale, and almost every other Member rated them as 5.

**Figure 5.6. Assembly Members' overall perceptions of the Assembly weekends**



We also asked Members to what extent they agreed with the statement 'Assemblies like this should be used more often to inform government decision-making'. Forty-three of the fifty Members said they 'strongly agreed' and four 'agreed'. One Member said they 'disagreed' and two 'strongly disagreed', but answers to the question of why they had answered as they had suggest that the two who strongly disagreed may accidentally have ticked the wrong box: in response to the question of why they had answered as they had, both made positive comments. Only the person who ticked 'disagree' did express a concern, saying 'I think the natural desire to find compromise may make decisions and recommendations somewhat "fudged".' Figure 5.7 shows a selection of other answers. They show wide appreciation of the opportunity to learn about the issues, express a considered view, and influence government policy.

**Figure 5.7. Why assemblies like this should be used more often**

They give the ruling powers the opportunity to find out what the public they (supposedly) serve actually think.	Interesting to participate in, cheaper to administer than referendum	This would have been useful before the vote so if something like this should arise again, please can we have assembly before voting
I often feel ignored by the government	Give a diverse group of citizens a voice on major issues	Helps to clarify positions, information, views and different options
Citizens should have the opportunity to give feedback after being informed on an issue - they're the ones the decisions are being made for!	As long as clear protocols exist to ensure such assemblies are (and are seen to be) unbiased and independently facilitated/ analysed, then absolutely.	It is a good way for the public to receive unbiased information about what is happening
They are a great way of getting the public's opinion on something important like Brexit	Politicians need Assemblies like this to be informed about the public's views. Makes democracy more accessible to everyone.	Because it gets people from different places in sharing different ideas
Interesting to learn the facts without the spin - unbiased and balanced. Interesting to hear other people's points of view.	I think that this has been an excellent exercise and the information presented has given me a clearer perspective on the issues	Politicians do not have an informed view about the opinion of the general public. Although I think they should take place before the referendum
They offer a relatively reliable snapshot of the country's view		More democratic

*This is a selection of responses to the prompt 'Please tell us why' after Members were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Assemblies like this should be used more often to inform government decision-making'.*

## Conclusions on process principles

No deliberative process can be perfect – there will always be times when particular people try to dominate, are not respectful or do not give reasons for their opinions. But the evidence set out above suggests that the design of the process, the experienced facilitation, and the good will of the participants meant that the deliberations in the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit were of high quality and compared well with previous assemblies that did not deal with such controversial issues. The numbers reported above are very similar to those seen in the 2015 Democracy Matters pilot citizens' assemblies, which tackled much easier subject matter (Flinders et al. 2016: 37–40).

It appears, therefore, that the controversial nature of the topic examined by the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit did not harm the quality of deliberation. This is an important and striking conclusion.

## 5.4. CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The criteria considered so far have looked at processes. These are crucial: the conclusions that a citizens' assembly reaches are only as good as the processes that lead to them. But it is also important to look at the Assembly's outputs – its recommendations. Clearly, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that the Assembly considered: that is, in part, why a citizens' assembly is a good forum for examining such politically contentious topics. We therefore cannot assess the Assembly's recommendations in terms of whether they were 'right' or not.

But we can look at the clarity of these recommendations. Were the views of the Assembly clear-cut, or were there sharp divisions between different viewpoints? Clearly, there is no sense in which Assembly Members or the process of the Assembly could be blamed if Members happened to have sharply and evenly divided views on the matters in hand – this may simply reflect the reality of the views of the wider population. But it would then be difficult to know quite what the message coming from the Assembly was. Furthermore, we can also look at the consistency of the recommendations. Where there are overlaps between the questions that the Assembly considered, are the responses mutually consistent? Are the recommended policy directions plausible means of pursuing the ends agreed by the Assembly in its guidelines?

The recommendations reached by the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit are both clear and consistent. Their clarity is evident from the voting figures set out in Chapter 4. There were certainly disagreements: the Assembly Members never agreed on any one option unanimously. But the first preference of clear majorities of Members was for a bespoke trade deal accompanied by measures on migration that would protect the advantageous effects of immigration while somewhat reducing overall immigration levels, taking a tougher line on those whom the UK could deport, and using domestic initiatives to better mitigate some of immigration's disadvantageous effects. In the event that their preferred balanced solutions proved unattainable, Members, again by clear majorities, preferred the option of staying close to the EU over cutting entirely loose.

These positions are consistent. On all issues, the Assembly sought midrange solutions that deliver a clear Brexit while maintaining close ties to the EU. On all issues, the Assembly's preferred back-up option was one of closer alignment to the EU (staying in the Single Market and Customs Union) rather than more distant (leaving with no deal at all). When asked to vote on overall Brexit packages, Members came to the same conclusions as they had on specific policy sectors.

These positions were also consistent with the guidelines that the Assembly Members agreed in the first part of their second weekend together. Most clearly, the guidelines relating to migration policy emphasised particular advantages and disadvantages to do with the economy, public services, and social benefits, rather than general concerns about immigration as such.

It would seem, therefore, that Members had a consistent sense of what mattered to them and what policy directions would deliver what they wanted. In saying this, we make no judgement on the content of their preferences: they might equally have shown consistent support, for example, for a 'low-alignment' Brexit. The point that matters here is simply consistency. The Assembly's conclusions are consistent, which confirms the conclusion from earlier sections of this chapter, that they deserve to be taken seriously.

## **5.5. HOW MEMBERS' VIEWS CHANGED**

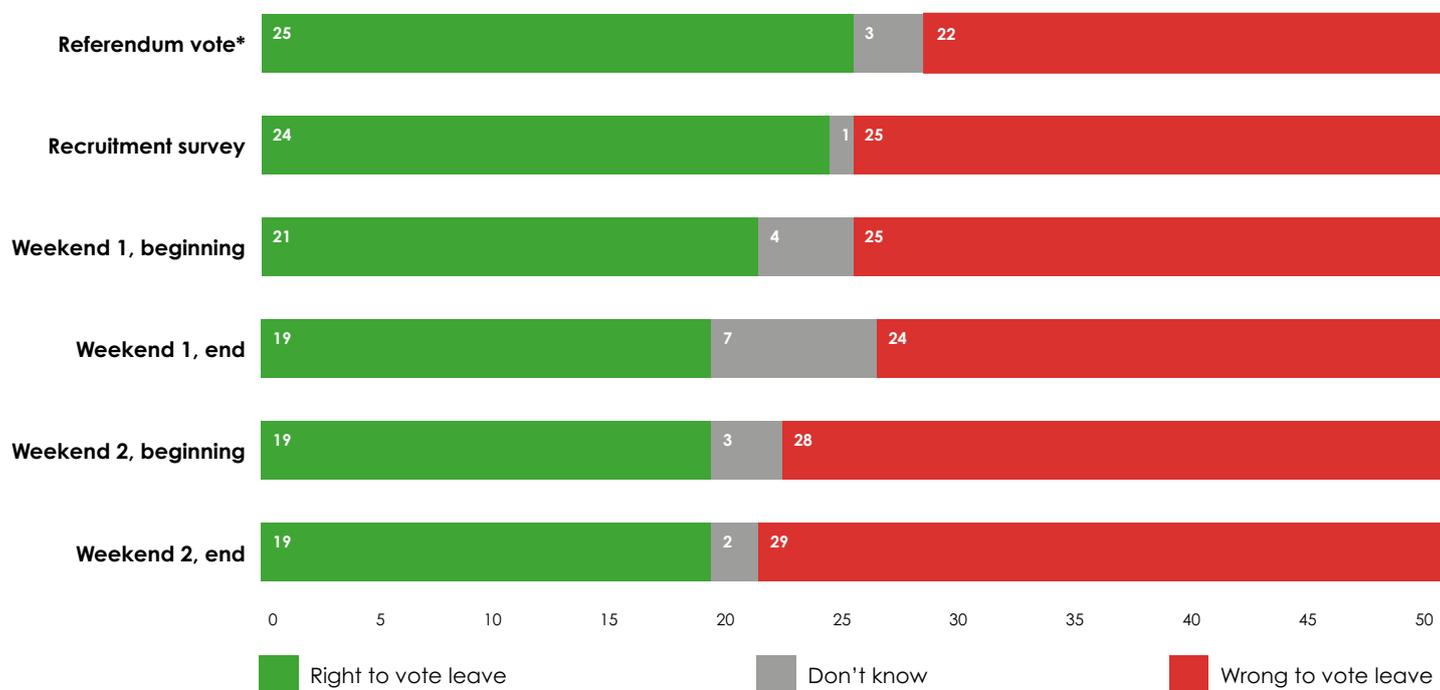
As explained in section 5.4, whether Members' views change in the course of a citizens' assembly is not a direct measure of the assembly's success or failure. What matters is that their views become richer and more informed – that they have views on more things, in more detail, based on firmer foundations – rather than that they necessarily shift their positions. The evidence set out above clearly indicates that Members' perceptions and views were indeed enriched over the course of the Assembly's work. They perceived their own knowledge and understanding to be increasing. By the end of the process, they confidently made choices between options of which it is reasonable to suppose that most non-Members still have little understanding – such as choosing between 'the' Customs Union and 'a' customs union, considering whether to tackle tariff barriers only or non-tariff barriers as well, and looking at the operation of the benefits system as it affects recent migrants.

Nevertheless, we are often asked about whether and how Members' views did change over the course of the Assembly and it is a question that deserves consideration. In this section, we present initial evidence drawn from the surveys of Assembly Members that we conducted at the start and end of each meeting weekend. We also draw on evidence from the recruitment survey conducted several months earlier. And we compare the responses of Assembly Members with those of our control group.

Figure 5.8 shows how opinion evolved on the biggest Brexit question of all: whether the country was right or wrong to vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum. Though more Members voted Leave than Remain in the referendum, one or two had changed their views by the time of our recruitment survey just over a year later (11–17 July 2017), with the result that opinion among the fifty people who would go on to form the Assembly was very evenly split. It appears that uncertainties grew for several more people over the course of the summer before the Assembly gathered. The discussions at the first weekend apparently caused doubts to rise slightly for people on both sides of the Brexit divide. But most of these doubts had dissipated by the start of the second weekend, and that weekend itself saw little further change.

The overall drift of opinion was towards the view that the country had been wrong to vote to leave. The numbers who shifted their view were, however, very small, and so it would be wrong to draw strong inferences for the wider voting public. From the start of the first weekend to the end of the second, the number of Brexit supporters fell by just two, while the number of Remain supporters rose by four. The great majority of Members retained their previous view. Survey responses from our control group did not show a drift towards great Brexit scepticism. But, again, the numbers were very small and general inferences therefore should not be drawn.

**Figure 5.8. Opinion change: was Britain right to vote Leave? (n=50)**

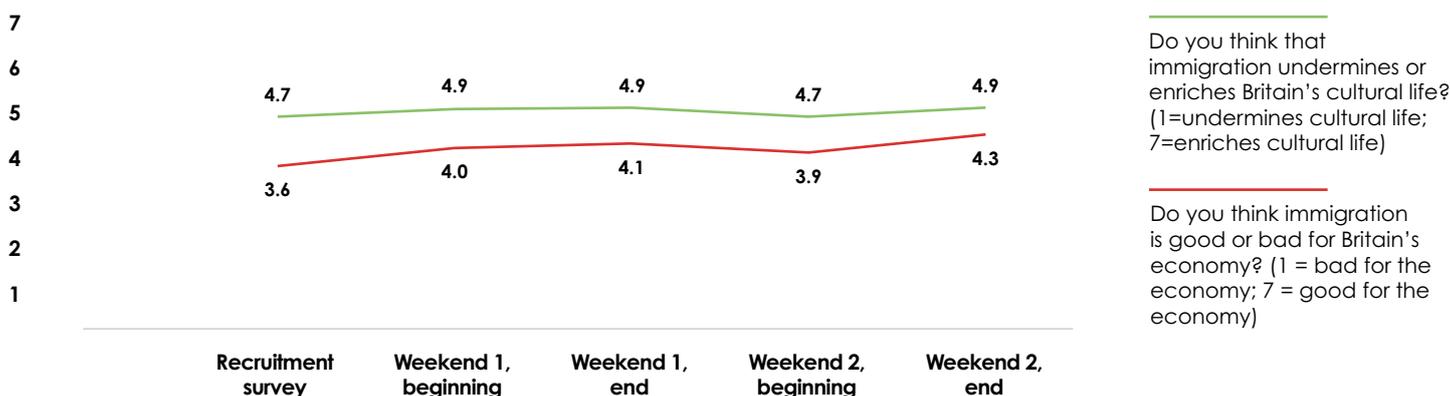


**Note:** The question asked was 'In hindsight do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the EU?'  
 \* The referendum vote bars show the number of Assembly Members who reported voting Leave, not voting, and voting Remain.

Figures 5.9 and 5.10 show how opinion shifted on some of the issues that the Assembly discussed.

Figure 5.9 indicates that perceptions of the cultural effects of immigration oscillated very slightly over the course of the Assembly, but saw no substantive change. With regard to the economic effects of immigration, Members' views changed to a degree over the summer before the start of the first weekend, becoming somewhat more positive. Views were fairly stable during the first weekend and between the weekends, then shifted slightly again towards a more positive impression of immigration during the second weekend.

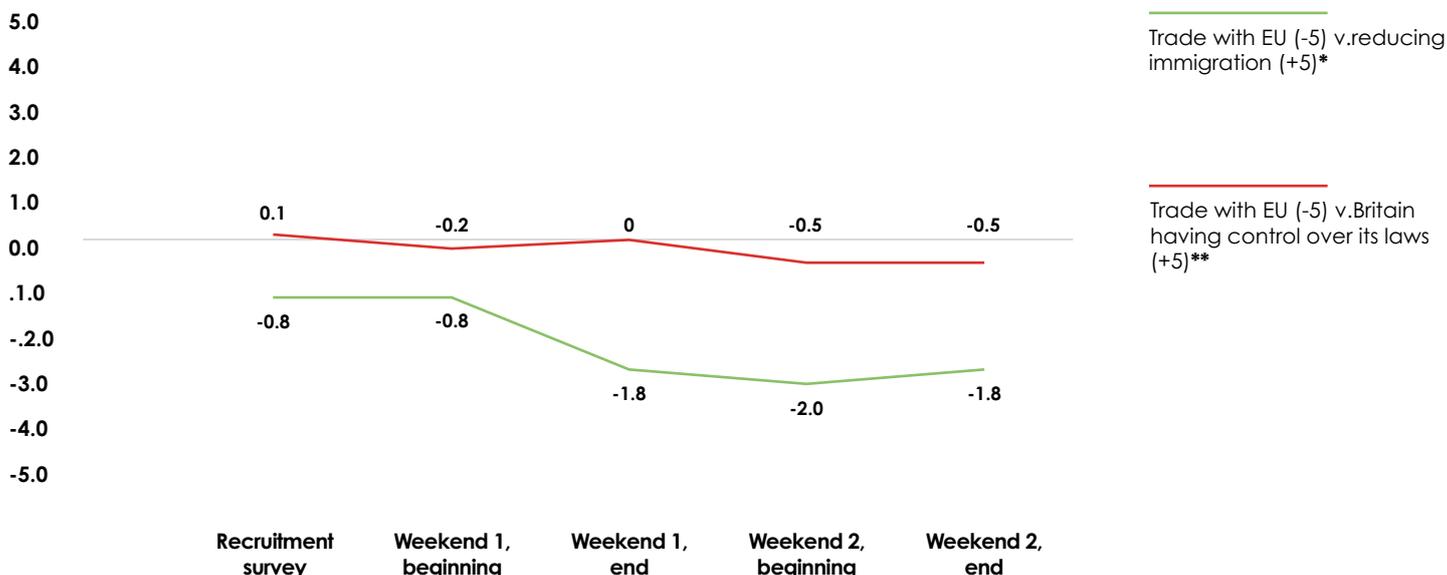
**Figure 5.9. Opinion change: immigration (mean scores, 1–7 scale)**



**Note:** The scale in the second question was originally the other way round (1 = good for the economy; 7 = bad for the economy). We have inverted it for ease of comparison between the questions.

Turning to Figure 5.10, Members started in the recruitment survey with very balanced views on the trade-off between maximising trade with the EU and maximising the UK's control over its own laws, while they marginally favoured maximising trade over reducing immigration. Both indicators saw some shift over the course of the Assembly towards greater emphasis on trade. This change was greater in the case of the trade-off between trade and immigration and occurred during the first weekend.

**Figure 5.10. Opinion change: policy trade-offs (mean scores -5 to +5 scale)**



\* Exact question: Negotiating Britain's exit from the European Union may come down to striking a balance between British businesses being able to trade freely with Europe and reducing the amount of immigration to Britain. Which should the Government prioritise?

\*\* Exact question: And what if Britain's exit from the European Union came down to striking a balance between British business being able to trade freely with EU countries, and ensuring Britain has control over its own laws?

The opinion shifts displayed in the figures above are all small. The fact that the largest changes in Figures 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10 happened, respectively, between the two Assembly weekends, during the second weekend, and during the first weekend suggests that there was no decisive moment when views shifted across the different issues. It is interesting that all the changes are in broadly the same direction: towards greater opposition to Brexit, acknowledgement of the benefits of immigration, and emphasis on maintaining trade rather than cutting immigration or controlling laws. Given the size of the shifts, however, we urge great caution in drawing inferences for the broader population.

The direction of change for the control group was different over the same time period: they moved away from emphasising the benefits of maintaining trade and from seeing advantages to immigration; they came to focus more on cutting immigration and gaining UK control over laws. As previously, the numbers are very small and the differences, therefore, should not be over-interpreted.

## 5.6. CONCLUSIONS

We have evaluated the work of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit in terms of three broad areas: how far the Assembly membership reflected the diverse composition of the UK electorate; how far the Assembly's operations lived up to the five process principles that we set out in Chapter 3; and how far the Assembly delivered recommendations that were clear and consistent.

The Assembly scores very highly on all these fronts:

- As a result of our careful process of recruitment and stratification, **the Assembly's membership closely resembled the UK electorate.** Indeed, it represented the population that it was intended to reflect more closely than has the membership of any previous citizens' assembly around the world. We do not claim perfection: we think further attention should be given by future assemblies to stratification according to attitudes; and we have been careful to interpret the Assembly results in light of the slight skew in terms of certain attitudes that we have identified. Nevertheless, the Assembly reflected the diverse composition of the UK, and a full range of views was present.
- **The Assembly scores highly on all our process principles.** All the evidence that we have suggests that the discussions were inclusive, that Members' understanding developed strongly, that the discussions and the resources underpinning them were balanced, that Members genuinely listened to and respected one another, and that Members became increasingly reflective over the course of the Assembly's meetings.
- **The Assembly yielded clear and consistent conclusions.** The options that Members chose are consistent both with each other across the various policy areas and with the underlying policy guidelines that Members had chosen. There is no ambiguity in what the Assembly concluded.

In addition, this chapter has set out evidence on how Members' views changed over the course of the Assembly. While opinion change is not a measure of success in an Assembly, we recognise that it helps give flavour to the process. Assembly Members' views in fact on the whole did not move far. The key change was an enrichment of opinion and understanding, rather than a shift of basic position.

## 6. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We have had two audiences in mind throughout this report: those who are interested in what the Citizens' Assembly has to say about Brexit; and those who are interested in the Assembly's implications for how the UK and other countries might conduct democracy better in the future. These audiences are not mutually exclusive and, for many, both issues are vital.

In this short concluding chapter, we sum up the Assembly's work and the lessons that can be drawn from it in relation to each of these two areas.

### 6.1 BREXIT

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit examined the question of what kind of Brexit the UK government should pursue, focusing on future relations between the UK and the EU in terms of trade and migration. As we set out in detail in Chapter 4:

- Most Members of the Assembly wanted **a close, bespoke relationship**: a trade deal between the UK and the EU; an arrangement allowing the UK to conduct its own international trade policy while maintaining a frictionless UK/EU border; and ongoing free movement of labour between the UK and the EU subject to various controls and other policy changes.
- If it proves impossible to negotiate a deal of this kind, most Assembly Members preferred the UK to remain **closely aligned to the EU** than to cut loose: to stay in the Single Market and the Customs Union rather than to leave the EU with no deal on future relations.

As we argued in Chapter 5, these conclusions deserve to be taken seriously: they are clear and consistent; and they were reached by a microcosm of the diverse UK electorate through an intense, rigorous, balanced process of informed deliberation. The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit is unique in the depth of insight it provides into informed public opinion on the Brexit options.

Beyond the specifics of the recommendations, the conclusions of the Citizens' Assembly have important implications for politicians and others who are engaged in or who seek to influence the Brexit negotiations:

- Assembly Members do not want an approach to Brexit that is dictated by rigid ideology. They want a **pragmatic approach** that lays greatest stress on protecting and further strengthening the economy, public services, jobs, and living standards.
- The great majority of Assembly Members reject the position advocated by some leading politicians who talk up the 'no deal' option as a desirable solution if a favourable trade deal cannot be reached with the EU.
- The great majority of Assembly Members also reject the over-riding emphasis on strong restrictions on immigration that is presumed by many politicians and commentators. Most Members wanted to see a reduction in immigration, but they wanted to see this done in a manner that is fair and that does not harm the UK economy. They thus supported a series of targeted measures – controls on immigrants who cannot sustain themselves financially; better training for UK citizens to reduce the need for immigration; investigation of reforms to the benefits system; better adjustment of public services in areas where immigration is high – rather than across-the-board immigration limits. These conclusions still stand even if we allow for the slight skew in the Assembly membership towards people with more permissive views on immigration.

Finally, the Citizens' Assembly also reveals a great public appetite for further engagement in serious discussion over the form that Brexit should take. It is of course true that the people who accept an invitation to attend a citizens' assembly are likely, on average, to be unusually enthusiastic about public discussion of major policy questions. Still, the level of engagement and commitment that we saw was impressive:

- The acceptance rate among those whom we invited to take part in the Assembly was around twice that seen for similar exercises in the past. A range of factors contributed to this, but we think that strong public interest in Brexit was one of these.
- Once they had been recruited, Members' participation was exceptionally high. Every one of the people who had confirmed their attendance in advance did attend. Just one of the original Members was prevented (by illness) from attending the second weekend. The focus and commitment shown by Members in the Assembly meeting room was remarkable to watch, and was commented on by the experienced facilitators and expert speakers.
- In their responses to evaluation questionnaires, many Members commented on how they thought more public discussion of and participation in Brexit policy-making is needed.

The decisions that are to be made on the form that Brexit should take are likely to be the defining political choices of our time. The Members of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit have important things to say about them, and they ought to be heard.



## 6.2 THE CONDUCT OF DEMOCRACY

Dissatisfaction with the state of democracy is widespread, in the UK and elsewhere. Concerns are expressed that too few people take an active part in politics, that the quality of public discussion is too low, that influential information is often inaccurate, and that politicians and voters are too distant from one another. In particular, both supporters and opponents of Brexit were deeply worried by the quality of information and discussion in the course of the 2016 referendum campaign.

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit confirms the evidence of previous similar exercises elsewhere: events such as this, which gather groups of people together to learn about, discuss, and reflect on important policy decisions before reaching conclusions, can do much to tackle many of these concerns. As we set out in Chapter 5, the quality of the discussions within the Assembly was very high, leading to robust and consistent conclusions. The level of engagement from Assembly Members was impressive. Experts from all sides of the debate gave considerable time and energy to enable deliberation that was informed and balanced.

Indeed, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit shows that well organised events of this kind – often referred to as 'deliberative mini-publics' – can work even on a highly contentious topic where opinion has already become heavily polarised. While most past citizens' assemblies have addressed less contested subject matter, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit tackled the biggest and most divisive issue in UK politics today, and it did so while maintaining a high quality of deliberation. This gives persuasive reason to believe that deliberative mini-publics could become more central elements of our democratic process.

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit also yields important insights on how citizens' assemblies and other similar deliberative exercises might best be run in the future:

- Our key lesson is **the importance of professional design and facilitation**. This ensured that the Assembly could address complex issues within limited time. It also enabled the Assembly to confront contentious and sometimes emotive issues while maintaining a constructive and good-humoured atmosphere. Past citizens' assemblies have often performed well using less experienced facilitators, but on less contentious issues. If deliberative mini-publics are to be used to confront the most contested issues, skill and experience are needed. Chapter 3 sets out in detail many of the design and facilitation decisions that we took to ensure a successful Assembly.
- Equal care is required in **the development of a learning programme** for the members of a citizens' assembly that is balanced and insightful. It has become commonplace to say – misquoting Michael Gove – that the public 'have had enough of experts'. The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit gives the lie to that. Members in their feedback cited the opportunity to engage with experts as one of their favourite aspects of the Assembly. Crucially, these experts did not address Assembly Members from on high or tell them what to think. Rather, they worked closely with the Members, on occasion sitting at the same tables as them, engaging with their concerns and answering their questions. The Citizens' Assembly shows the vital importance of **interaction between regular citizens and experts** if our democratic discourse is to be improved.
- It is possible to **recruit a diverse microcosm of the wider population** into a citizens' assembly. Working with ICM and then our own in-house recruitment team, we were able to recruit fifty Assembly Members who reflected the make-up of the population it was drawn from more precisely than has any previous deliberative exercise of this kind. One crucial innovation – as explained in Chapter 2 – was the inclusion of an attitude-based stratification criterion: namely, how people voted in the 2016 Brexit referendum. Our analysis suggests that we were right to do this and, indeed, that further attitudinal stratification may be desirable in future deliberative mini-publics in order to promote the greatest possible representativeness. We urge further investigation of the use of attitudinal criteria for selection in the future.

For all the reasons we have set out, the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit was a great success in terms of its composition and internal functioning. The biggest challenge for any deliberative mini-public is to ensure that its work connects with the wider political system. Rich, intense discussion can be a wonderful experience for those who are in the room. But this has little wider value if people outside the room – especially policy-makers – pay it no heed. This has been a problem for several past citizens' assemblies, where politicians and commentators have felt little inclination to listen to the recommendations that assembly members have reached. Only in Ireland have such bodies led to substantive change: to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2015; and to intense public discussion of abortion liberalisation today.

The team behind the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit is working hard to ensure that the voice of the Assembly's Members is heard. We have, to date, given evidence to two parliamentary select committees, and we are planning events in the devolved assemblies as well as in Westminster. We strongly welcome the positive engagement we have had from many parliamentarians and officials.

We hope that this engagement will continue to develop further. Our democracy is in a troubled state, and the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit indicates how this situation might be improved:

- For policy-makers, citizens' assemblies and other deliberative mini-publics will be particularly valuable, we suggest, on issues where decisions have to be made but all of the options involve difficult trade-offs. Engaging the public in informed discussion of such issues is likely to yield richer debates and policy conclusions that can expect to command wider public legitimacy.
- For democrats, citizens' assemblies offer a mechanism to tackle the problem of a vicious circle that can emerge in democracies. Public engagement with politics is currently limited in part because people find political debate unedifying and bewildering. In turn, debate is often poor partly because engagement is low, allowing catchy headlines, rather than serious arguments, to gain attention and traction. A citizens' assembly can break out of that cycle, fostering quality discussion and engagement, encouraging politicians, campaigners, experts, and regular citizens all to raise their game.

The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit thus deserves to be listened to – both by those who want to shape Brexit and by those who want to strengthen democratic practice in the future.



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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1. CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT PROJECT TEAM: BIOGRAPHIES AND ROLES

The notes below give brief biographies of the members of the Citizens' Assembly project team and outline their principal roles within the project. In addition to the roles set out here, all members of the team worked collaboratively on many aspects of project design and delivery.

**Dr Alan Renwick** is Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit at University College London. He was Principal Investigator for the Citizens' Assembly research project and Director of the Assembly. In addition to coordinating all aspects of preparation for the Assembly, he led the process of developing the content of the Assembly's programme. He welcomed Assembly Members at the start of each weekend and introduced other team members. He acted as a source of basic information for Assembly Members, gave presentations on each set of options during the Discussion and Decision phase, and presented the voting results.

**Sarah Allan** is Head of Engagement at Involve and was the Design and Facilitation Lead for the Assembly. She led the design of the Assembly meetings, working closely with **Kaela Scott**, Involve's Head of Democratic Innovation. She was one of the lead facilitators during the weekends themselves, alongside Involve Director **Tim Hughes**. She and Tim Hughes led all of the Assembly's sessions, setting the tone, introducing tasks, receiving feedback from tables, and ensuring discussions kept to time.

**Professor Graham Smith** is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster and was a Co-Investigator for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit. He worked closely with colleagues on Assembly design and on developing the research programme attached to the Assembly. During the Assembly weekends, he presented basic information to Assembly Members and supported the facilitation team in identifying matters needing attention as they arose.

**Professor Meg Russell** is the Director of the Constitution Unit at University College London and was a Co-Investigator for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit. As well as contributing to general project planning, she helped guide the Assembly's external engagement work, in terms of links with policymakers and the media. During the Assembly weekends, she presented basic information to Assembly Members, chaired the Q&A session with two MPs, engaged with external observers, and monitored external responses to the Assembly's work.

**Professor Will Jennings** is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of Southampton and was Recruitment and Survey Consultant for the Citizens' Assembly. He was closely involved in the design of the Member recruitment process and of Member surveys. Since the Assembly weekends, he has had an important role in the analysis of the findings.

**Dr Rebecca McKee** is the Research Associate for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit. She contributed to the design of the research plans relating to the Assembly and has subsequently worked on executing those plans. She worked alongside Edd Rowe in coordinating the processes of Member recruitment and retention. During the Assembly weekends, she managed the notetakers and the process of data collection.

**Dr Edward Molloy** was the Democratic Innovations Officer at the Electoral Reform Society and coordinated the ERS's role as the Citizens' Assembly's Impact and Public Engagement Partner. He worked closely with the ERS's former and current directors, **Katie Ghose** and **Darren Hughes**, and with ERS colleagues **Doug Cowan**, **Charley Jarrett**, and **Josiah Mortimer**.

**Edd Rowe** is the Citizens' Assembly's Project Administrator. He coordinated all aspects of project administration before, during, and after the Assembly meetings. He also worked alongside Rebecca McKee in coordinating the processes of Member recruitment and retention.

## Table facilitators

We are very grateful to our team of table facilitators for all their hard work on the project. There were:

Weekend 1	Weekend 2
Simon Burall	Diane Beddoes
Emily Graham	Emily Graham
Hally Ingram	Hally Ingram
Suzannah Lansdell	Suzannah Lansdell
Julie Mellor	Julie Mellor
Reema Patel	Clive Mitchell
Remco van der Stoep	Kaela Scott

## Support staff and volunteers

We are equally grateful for the work of a large group of support staff and volunteers who performed various roles before, during, and after the Assembly weekends: conducting background research; helping in the preparation of briefing materials; making recruitment calls; helping Assembly Members find the meeting venue; taking notes of the Assembly discussions; ensuring that weekend administration ran smoothly; and processing data. There were:

Alexandra Albert	Hannah Dowling	Megan Raybould
Brad Albrow	Kasim Khorasane	William Shankley
Jonathan Benson	Alice Kinghorn-Grey	Jolanta Shields
Jessica Bryant	Charlotte McKee	Kelly Shuttleworth
Phil Conor	Mat Mattias	Willie Sullivan
Leah Culhane	Aleksei Opacic	Dominic Ward



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## **APPENDIX 2. CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT ADVISORY BOARD**

The Advisory Board included representatives of both sides in the referendum campaign, experts with diverse perspectives on the EU and trade, as well as parliamentary researchers and committee clerks. The Board's work was to review the Assembly's approach, programme, briefing papers and speakers in light of their own areas of expertise.

### **Professor Anand Menon**

Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs, Kings College, London.

### **Professor Catherine Barnard**

Professor of European Union Law at University of Cambridge.

### **Chris Johnson**

Principal Clerk, EU Select Committee in the House of Lords

### **Dr Clodagh Harris**

Lecturer in the Department of Government, University College, Cork

### **Doreen Grove**

Head of Open Government for the Scottish Government

### **Hugo Dixon**

Journalist, entrepreneur and campaigner

### **James Rhys**

Clerk to the Exiting the EU Committee in the House of Commons

### **Professor John Garry**

Professor of Political Behaviour at Queen's University Belfast.

### **John Mills**

Economist, Entrepreneur and political commentator

### **Professor Peter John**

Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at University College London

### **Professor Simon Hix**

Professor of Political Science, London School of Economics

### **Dr Swati Dhingra**

Lecturer in Economics, London School of Economics

### **Dr Jack Simson Caird**

Constitutional law specialist at the House of Commons Library

**Suzanne Evans** was initially a member of the Advisory Board and attended its meeting in late July 2017, but was subsequently unable to participate for personal reasons. She asked to be removed from the Advisory Board membership after the Assembly's second meeting.

## APPENDIX 3. CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT WEEKEND SCHEDULES

Weekend 1: 8–10 September 2017, Marriott Manchester Airport Hotel

Day	Time	Event	Room
Friday	6.30pm	Welcome to the assembly	The Cheshire Suite
	7.30pm	Dinner	The Cheshire Suite
Saturday	From 7.00am	Breakfast	Cast Iron Bar & Grill
	9.00am	Introduce the team and members	The Cheshire Suite
	10.15am	Speaker panel 1: Introduction to the EU, UK and Brexit	The Cheshire Suite
		Break	
	11.30am	Discussion group session 1	The Cheshire Suite
	12.30pm	Lunch	Cast Iron Bar & Grill
	1.30pm	Speaker panel 2: Trade	The Cheshire Suite
		Break	
	3.25pm	Discussion group session 2	The Cheshire Suite
	5.30pm	Finish for the day	
	7.30pm	Dinner	The Cheshire Suite
Sunday	From 7.00am	Breakfast	Cast Iron Bar & Grill
	9.00am	Welcome	The Cheshire Suite
	9.30am	Speaker panel 3: Immigration	The Cheshire Suite
		Break	
	11.15am	Discussion group session 4	The Cheshire Suite
	12.20pm	Discussion group session 4	The Cheshire Suite
	1.30pm	End of the assembly	The Cheshire Suite
	From 1.30pm	Lunch	Cast Iron Bar & Grill

**Weekend 2: 29 September–1 October 2017**

Day	Time	Event	Room
Friday	6.20pm	Welcome to weekend two and unanswered questions	The Cheshire Suite
	7.20pm	Dinner, with speakers	The Cheshire Suite
Saturday	From 7.00am	Breakfast	Cast Iron Bar & Grill
	9.00am	Introduction to the weekend the team and members	The Cheshire Suite
	9.30am	Recap and trade guidelines development	The Cheshire Suite
		Break	
	11.15am	Immigration guidelines development	The Cheshire Suite
	12.20pm	Lunch	Cast Iron Bar & Grill
	1.20pm	Guidelines votes	The Cheshire Suite
	2.10pm	Trade with the EU	The Cheshire Suite
		Breaks x2	
	4.10pm	Trade with countries outside of the EU	The Cheshire Suite
	5.40pm	Finish for the day	
	7.30pm	Dinner	The Cheshire Suite
	Sunday	From 7.00am	Breakfast
9.00am		Introduction to the day	The Cheshire Suite
9.30am		Immigration	The Cheshire Suite
		Break, including group photo	
11.50am		Voting results revealed	The Cheshire Suite
12.05pm		Trade-offs	The Cheshire Suite
1.30pm		End of the assembly	The Cheshire Suite
From 1.30pm		Lunch	Cast Iron Bar & Grill

## APPENDIX 4. LIST OF BRIEFING PAPERS

### Welcome Pack

The following papers were sent to Assembly Members in advance of the first meeting weekend:

- **Citizens' Assembly on Brexit: Introduction for Members**
- **What will the Assembly discuss? A very quick introduction**

All remaining papers were provided during the first Assembly weekend. They came in three sets: background papers, and papers dealing with trade and migration.

### Background Papers

- **The European Union: A Quick Introduction**
- **The Brexit Process**
- **What is a Citizens' Assembly?**

Slides from the introductory presentation to Assembly Members on the Saturday morning of the first weekend are available [here](#).

### Papers on Trade

- **Trade: The Basics**
- **Trade: How It Works Today**
- **Trade: The Numbers**
- **Trade: Options for the Future**
- **Trade: Issues to Consider**
- **Trade: Free Trade v. Protectionism**

Slides from the expert presentations on trade during the first weekend and the summary presentations of options during the second weekend are available [here](#).

### Papers on Migration

Note: Following the terminology that we adopted in the early stages of the Assembly process, the titles of these papers refer to 'immigration' rather than to 'migration'.

- **Immigration: The Basics**
- **Immigration: How It Works Today**
- **Immigration: The Numbers**
- **Immigration: Options for the Future**
- **Immigration: Issues to Consider**

Slides from the expert presentations on migration during the first weekend and the summary presentations of options during the second weekend are available [here](#).

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