

UNLOCK
DEMOCRACY

Annual
Report
2017



Unlock Democracy believes politics must work for everyone because currently the rules of democracy aren't fair.

We believe:

- The government is too powerful because we don't have a written constitution that sets out what they can and can't do
- Big money gives the powerful an inside track to decision making
- An outdated voting system means politicians don't represent us
- Politicians are unwilling to make desperately needed democratic reforms

It is those who don't 'do' politics who end up bearing the brunt of political decision-making, and this can – and must – change. Together we will ensure that democracy works for everyone.



Director's report

This is an exciting time for Unlock Democracy.

Brexit has put the debate about our democracy and constitution at the front and centre of our political discourse. While there are serious threats in the Brexit process, particularly a ministerial power grab in the Repeal Bill, there are also opportunities to remake our democracy. We have to make sure we seize the opportunities as well as fighting against the threats.

We have set out how we can do this in our Democratic Brexit report. At the heart of this is the case for a written constitution that limits the power of the government. This is fundamental to our mission at Unlock Democracy and something we will be focusing on more in the coming months and years.

Unlock Democracy has also begun coordinating the Repeal Bill Alliance - bringing civil society together to make sure that we have our say on the Repeal Bill. Organisations working on issues including food, farming, human and social rights, the environment and consumer standards are working together to make sure we have open and transparent law making and a high standards UK. This is another way that we can show people how the way we do democracy matters to our daily lives.

We have also made a number of behind the scenes changes over the last year which we you can read about in this report. This work has helped to increase our media profile and campaigning. Unlock Democracy is in a strong position to make change – do join us!

Alexandra Runswick, Director

“While there are serious threats in the Brexit process, particularly a ministerial power grab in the Repeal Bill, there are also opportunities to remake our democracy.”



Measuring our success

We've worked on two projects in the last year that help us keep focused on the prize – winning change faster and changing the lives of people who are most affected by government decision-making. A new Theory of Change and a new set of organisational targets using the Transformational Index.

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change is simply how we think the world works, what needs changing and our vision for how we change it.

We brought in help from Outrageous Impact, who helped us organise 'open space' events with our supporters and our friends within the campaigning sector. We discussed questions such as who we exist to serve and how we might relate democratic reform to people's everyday lives.

You can see the results on the first page of this report – a fresher explanation of why we're here and how we work.

We are now building campaigns more quickly, experimenting with new ideas and testing them with our members and supporters to make sure they resonate.



Transformational Index

For a campaign like Unlock Democracy that seeks to create systemic change, one of the challenges we face is knowing when we are making progress.

With the help of council member Rachel Collinson we used a system called the Transformational Index to develop new measurable indicators for Unlock Democracy. These show us how healthy our movement is and how well we're building power, both of which are necessary for our campaigns to succeed.

Our Visual Identity



As well as rethinking how we build and evaluate our campaigns, we have updated the look of the organisation.

We wanted a new logo that would be easier to use in the age of social media, and which clearly conveyed what we stand for. One thing that we preserved, however, was our colours – purple and sea-green, which have a long history in the fight for votes and democratic reform in Britain.

Council members worked with the staff team to pick the best option from among proposals submitted by designers from around the world. Our new logo is clean, professional, and more versatile, and we have been able to use it more widely across our website, printed materials, and social media output.

We've also used it on our new Unlock Democracy banners, on membership cards, and on a batch of branded tote bags.

“ We wanted a new logo that would be easier to use in the age of social media, and which clearly conveyed what we stand for. ”



Unlock Teams

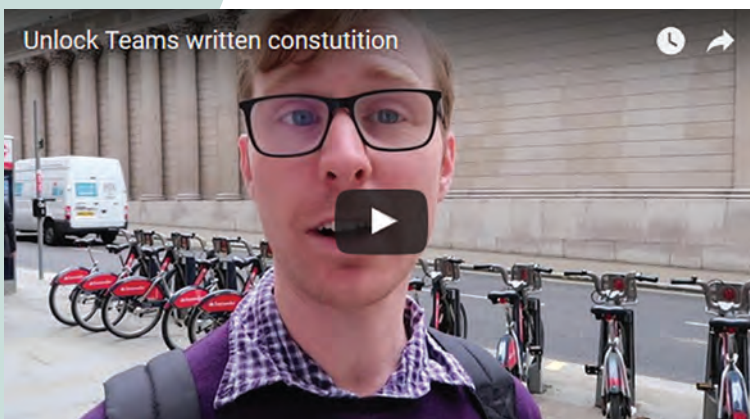
How we achieve change matters. If we want a democracy that puts power in the hands of the people then we need to build a movement that does that too. Genuine change can only be delivered by people coming together to demand it, which is why over the last year we've been exploring how to revitalise grassroots action for democratic reform.

That's why we've launched Unlock Teams, a new project to help our supporters organise together, build a relationship with their MP and secure their support for a written constitution.

An Unlock Team is a small group of supporters within a constituency, working together online and in real life, to build pressure for MPs to make democracy work for everyone.

We want all MPs to commit to fighting for a written constitution, but there are plenty of milestones along the way too. Right now, we're building pressure on MPs to fix the Repeal Bill – to make sure that 'taking back control' of our laws doesn't become a power grab by ministers or undermine democratically elected governments in Scotland and Wales.

To get the teams going, we've produced a series of emails and sixty-second videos to explain the concept and what needs to happen at each stage. We're also doing a tour of the first few teams to provide training to help them to take action.



Sam Coates, our Campaigns Officer explains why we're campaigning for a written constitution and how we plan to do it.

A roadtrip with supporters

Like the country, Unlock Democracy members and supporters were divided on Brexit. We started our Democratic Brexit project immediately after the referendum to bring people from all sides of the debate to explore what taking back control of our democracy might look like. A fundamental part of this was inviting supporters to a series of focus groups to talk to us about their hopes and fears for Brexit.



In Manchester we brought together a group of Remain voters to talk about their hopes and fears, finding a lot of sympathy for why people voted to leave the EU as a reaction against the political elite. In Birmingham we met Leave voters who'd arrived at their decision for a very wide range of reasons and who were keen to share with us their optimism about the changes Brexit could bring. We then worked on a series of 'vivid metaphors' to describe what was going on with Brexit – the Brexit bonfire, and who's driving Brexit, the fatcat or the fireman?

We then carried out phone interviews with some of our activists, where we explored with them what we had heard from the focus groups and tested the metaphors on them.



After a further round of tweaking, we then tested out these campaign metaphors on a mixed group of supporters, at the final focus group in Sheffield. This has helped inform our thinking and our campaigning on the Repeal Bill. We'd like to thank everyone who took part in these sessions for their time and enthusiasm!

Deliberating on the EU



Unlock Democracy didn't take a position on the referendum. Instead, our Europe project sought to give our supporters a fresh way to approach an exceptionally complex political issue: the question of EU membership.

In the lead up to the referendum in June 2016, Unlock Democracy joined forces with Talkshop to run a series of deliberative events to help people make their mind up about how to vote.

In November 2016 we launched our report, *Deliberating on the EU*. It delved into our experience of running the workshops and our findings. We also evaluated what we could learn from the referendum, and how we could hold better referendums in the future.

To launch the report we hosted an event in Parliament that brought together supporters to hear from Frances Foley, our Europe project coordinator, and Lindsay AQUI from History & Policy, author of *Understanding Britain's 'yes' to Europe: The official publication information campaign, January - June 1975*.



A Democratic Brexit: The report

The referendum result sent shockwaves through our political system. Far beyond just making a decision about leaving or remaining in the European Union, it has raised important questions about what we want the future of our country to look like, how this is decided, and who makes the decision.

But more often than not, the discussion around Brexit has been stuck on the same themes – from the lingering remain versus leave divide, through to what the vote in favour of Brexit means in practical policy terms.

In June 2017, one year on from the referendum, Unlock Democracy published a report, *A Democratic Brexit: Avoiding constitutional crisis in Brexit Britain*, that aimed to move the conversation forward by asking: who has control; and who should have control? We've concluded that Brexit must be, above all, democratic, and the report outlines what a democratic Brexit should look like and how that vision can be achieved.



The report takes a comprehensive look at the implications of Brexit for parliamentary sovereignty, the devolution settlement, and the power of the people. It highlights democratic deficits in our sometimes archaic political system, and poses solutions for how we can make sure that Brexit is above all, democratic.

As well as making the report available online, we sent copies to parliamentarians to help them engage with the issues raised.

Fixing the Repeal Bill

What is the Repeal Bill?

In July 2017 the government published the first of its Brexit bills - the **European Union (Withdrawal) Bill** - more commonly known as **the Repeal Bill**.

The bill:

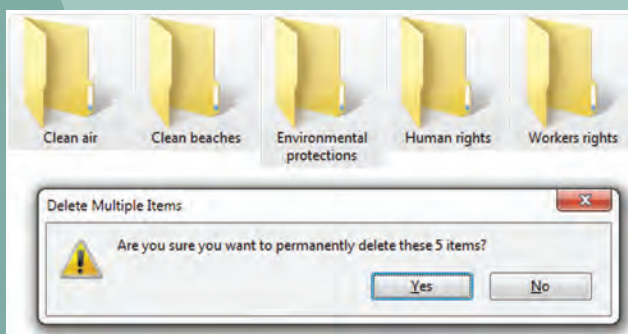
- repeals the European Communities Act 1972;
- converts the existing body of EU law into UK law to prevent a sudden legal vacuum on the day after Brexit is complete and corrects it so it "functions sensibly"; and
- implements the final deal we come to with the EU.

This is the most complex piece of legislation that Parliament has had to deal with in at least a generation and there are some big problems with it.

In normal circumstances only Parliament can change the law, but because of the enormous task of editing thousands of laws the bill proposes giving ministers very broad powers to make the changes without having to go through proper scrutiny in Parliament.

Without safeguards to prevent these powers from being abused, ministers would be free to dump rules and regulations they don't like with little more than the stroke of a pen.

The bill is also undermines the devolution settlements. Powers will be returned from the EU and politicians in Westminster will decide if and when they are given to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



We need new scrutiny measures to make sure that these powers are used only to convert existing EU laws into the UK and not make big policy changes. And we must all be able to take back control - not just Westminster.

The Repeal Bill Alliance

In the summer of 2017 Unlock Democracy was funded by a group of grant-making trusts and foundations to coordinate the response of civil society to the Repeal Bill.

With so many sectors affected – from human rights, environment, consumer rights, workers' rights, and equality, all the way through to democracy, transparency, food, farming, education, and trade – there was a need and an appetite to collaborate on the bill.

We welcomed Jane Thomas to our team to coordinate the Repeal Bill Alliance, to maximise the voice of civil society organisations in the Repeal Bill process. The alliance is campaigning around two broad aims:

Open and accountable lawmaking:

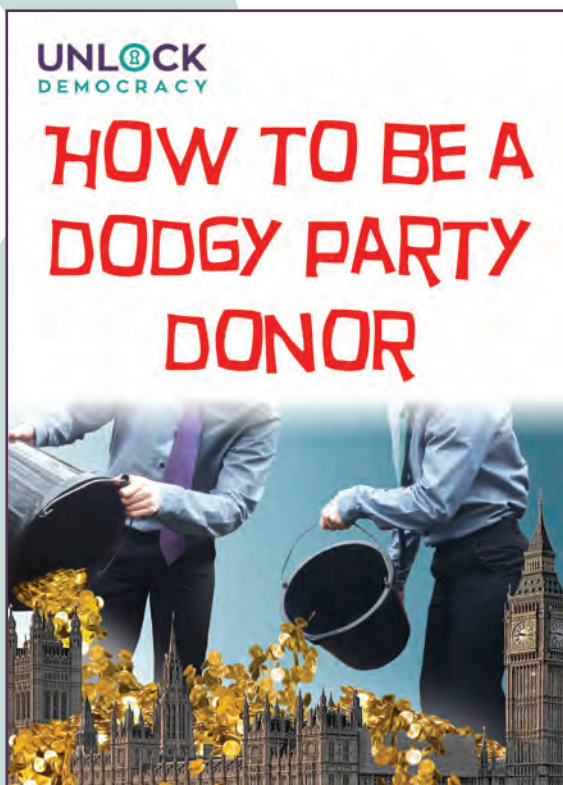
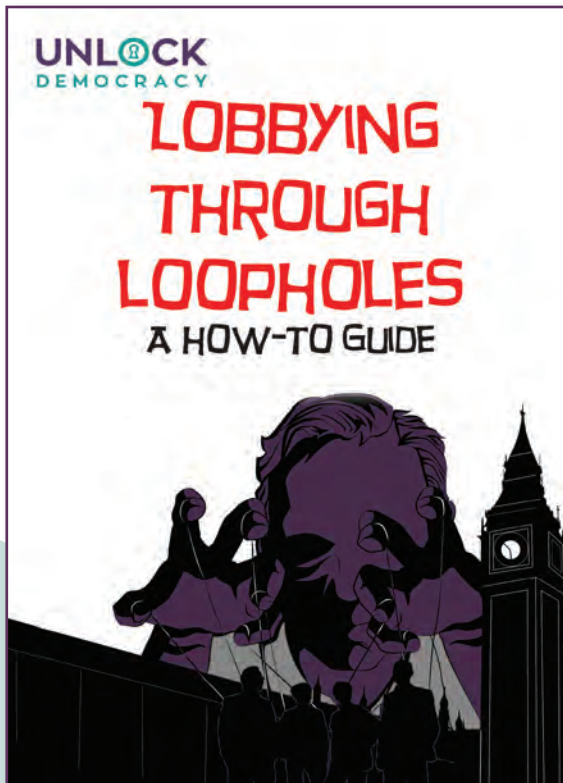
- Respect for democratic processes, including the devolved nature of the UK constitution.
- Clear limits and safeguards on the powers given to ministers in the bill.
- Robust parliamentary scrutiny at all levels with appropriate levels of transparency and debate both before and during the conversion process.

A high standards UK:

- Ensuring that as EU law is transposed into UK law, rights and standards for all sectors are maintained.
- A UK framework for common standards, that is mutually agreed between the four administrations, to enable cross-border working and maintain an internal common market. This framework must respect the devolution settlements, meaning any administration can raise standards within the scope of those settlements, if they wish to do so.

More information can be found on the Repeal Bill Alliance website:
www.repealbill.org

Exposing dodgy donors and lobbying loopholes



If you have cash to splash there are plenty of ways to influence the government and political parties behind closed doors.

If a government policy is getting in the way of corporate profit-making, or you're looking to land a government contract, it's easy to make your voice heard and drown out the public. More often than not, if you've got money you've also got the upper hand over under-resourced pressure groups, and getting around pitiful transparency legislation can be easy.

At Unlock Democracy we know that the rules around party donations and lobbying are absolutely littered with loopholes that enable the rich and powerful to gain the ear of our politicians and assert undue influence over the policymaking process.

So this year we took a satirical look at dodgy donors and lobbying loopholes in two pamphlets, which expose how big money is used to buy influence over politics, and how lobbyists get around the woefully inadequate lobbying register to make their voices – and the voices of their corporate clients – heard above others.

Exposing the latest election scandals

The scandal of political parties ignoring spending rules has rolled on and isn't over yet. These rules are designed to keep elections fair and we worked with Channel 4 News, to help shine a light when much of the media didn't seem interested.

In 2016 our supporters helped secure an investigation into allegations of MPs breaking the law in their 2015 election campaign.

“ The unfolding events since 2015 have shown us that our election regulations look effectively unenforceable, leaving parties free to flout the law. ”



This year, when the Crown Prosecution Service announced that no charges would be brought, we helped supporters living in the constituencies concerned to write to them requesting a review under the Victims' Right to Review scheme. Unfortunately, the CPS took a restrictively narrow definition of victim, and refused these requests.

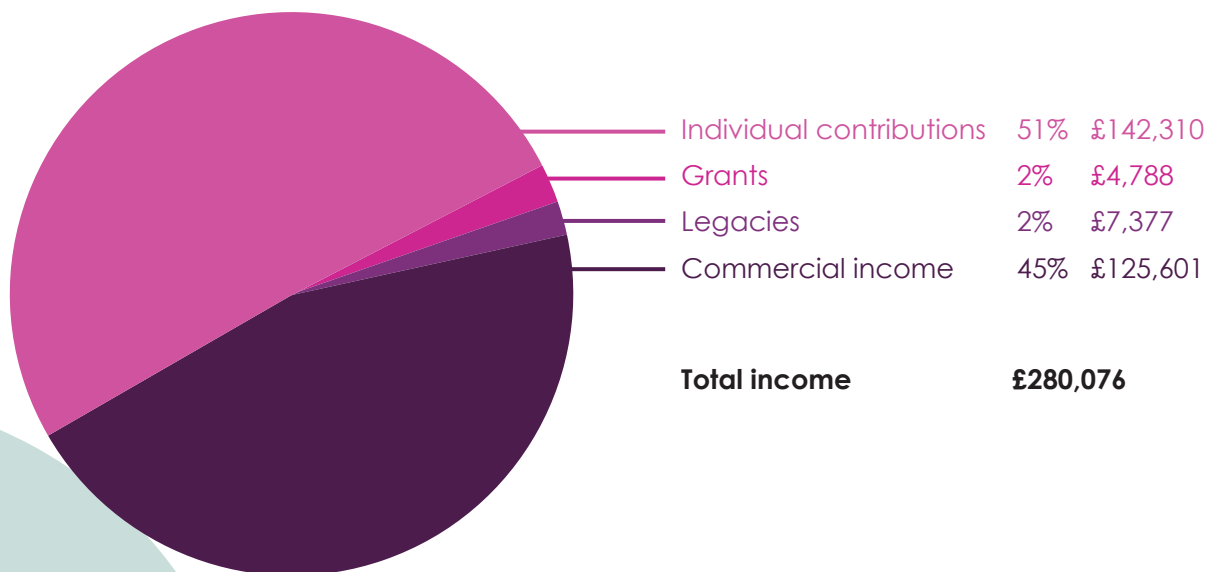
The unfolding events since 2015 have shown us that our election regulations look effectively unenforceable, leaving parties free to flout the law.

At the time of writing we continue to follow the unfolding case of Conservative MP Craig McKinley, accused of breaking the legal spending limit in his race against Nigel Farage.

The fight for proper regulation of big money in elections continues, but the increased media scrutiny of party spending in the 2017 general election should make candidates think again before trying to play the rules.

Thank you

Income from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017



You've helped Unlock Democracy win some key battles; we couldn't do this without you. Individual giving makes up just over half of our income and you make our campaigns possible.

We spent approximately £273,055 in the last year. The full audited accounts will be available in November 2017 in an independent report by our auditors, Berley Chartered Accountants and will be published on our website after our AGM.

We would like to thank the James Madison Charitable Trust for their support of our work.

We are grateful to have received a legacy of £7,377 from Sylvia Marshall. For more information about legacies please contact our office.

We extend our heartfelt thanks for this year's vital contributions to our fight for a fairer democracy. Whatever the donation, £5 or £5,000, we are extremely grateful for all your support.

Your Council

Unlock Democracy is overseen by a governing Council, which is elected every two years by our members. Council appoints a Management Board which focuses on the administration and finances of the organisations.

The 2016-2018 Council consists of:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Jack Maizels (Co-Chair)* | Lisa French* |
| Danny Zinkus Sutton (Co-Chair)* | James Grindrod* |
| Stephen Carter (Vice Chair - Policy)* | Sepi Golzari-Munro |
| Phil Starr (Vice Chair - Commercial)* | Peter Hirst |
| Andrew Blick | Andrew Manning |
| Debbie Chay | Vicky Seddon |
| Rachel Collinson* | Stuart Weir* |
| Jenny Cronin | |
| Ian Driver | |

* Denotes also member of the Management Board

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Theresa May: Here's how to build a democracy that works for everyone

Huffington Post, 5 October 2016

It's not just Northern Ireland's dodgy donation rules that need an overhaul

Open Democracy, 23 March 2017

Electoral reform is a feminist issue

Open Democracy, 7 June 2017

Brexit Repeal Bill 'must not be a power grab by ministers', says new alliance

Third Sector, 31 August 2017

Letter: Defend the independent judiciary

The Guardian, 12 December 2016

Unlock Democracy criticises CPS on election expenses

Ekklesia, 12 May 2017

Give MPs deadline on hiring relatives, campaigners urge

BBC News, 31 July 2017

How outdated election rules let parties 'buy' marginal seats using Facebook

The Independent, 15 May 2017