

Report on the Test of the Assembl Platform for the Wikiprogress online consultation on Youth Well-being, 30 March to 15 May 2015

The purpose of this brief report is to describe the process of preparing and managing the test use of the Assembl platform for the Wikiprogress online consultation on Youth Well-being, and to highlight some lessons learned. For a full report of the content and outcomes of the consultation, please see the Summary Report available at: http://wikiprogress.org/index.php/Wikiprogress_Youth_Well-being_Consultation_Summary_Report

Purpose of consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to use the OECD's WikiProgress website to ask a diverse global audience how to improve well-being outcomes for young people. Specifically:

- How should we measure and define youth well-being?
- What works for improving young people's well-being?
- How can we improve the process for effective youth policy?
- Case studies and best practice.

It is the first time Wikiprogress has been used to host an online consultation, although a two-week "discussion" with the same theme was hosted in December 2014. The topic was chosen partly due to the interest generated by this earlier discussion. While the topic fits with the OECD's emerging interest in youth-wellbeing, there was no specific strategic or policy direction for this particular consultation.

How the consultation worked: sponsors and participants and "Assembl"

The following partners with an interest in youth well-being were invited to support and promote the consultation:

- ***IYFNet – The International Youth Foundation***
The International Youth Foundation (IYF) prepares young people to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. They believe that educated, employed, and engaged young people possess the power to solve the world's toughest problems. IYF mobilises a global community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations — each committed to developing the power and promise of young people.
- ***HBSC – Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children***
The HBSC research network is an international alliance of researchers that collaborate on the cross-national survey of school students: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC). The HBSC collects data every four years on 11-, 13- and 15-year-old boys' and girls' health and well-being, social environments and health behaviours. These years mark a period of increased autonomy that can influence how their health and health-related behaviours develop.
- ***Restless Development***
The mission of Restless Development is to place young people at the forefront of change and development, by envisioning young people taking a leadership role in addressing the most urgent issues facing their countries and the world. They have three goals: civic participation, sexual health, and livelihoods. As an organisation they are led by young people and young professionals, from the boardroom right through to the field.
- ***YouthPolicy.org***
YouthPolicy.org is building a global evidence-base for youth policy, published by Youth Policy Press. They support the development, review, renewal or revision of national and

regional youth policies, strategies and programmes; conduct independent evaluations and audits of youth policies, strategies and programmes; advise organisations, governments and/or agencies on youth, youth policy, youth research and youth work issues; and develop, prepare, run, support and/or evaluate training activities on youth policy.

- ***IFRC – International Red Cross and Red Cross Societies***
The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network that reaches 150 million people in 189 National Societies through the work of over 17 million volunteers. They act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. They do so without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions.
- ***EPA – European Parents' Association***
EPA gathers the parents associations in Europe, which together represent more than 150 million parents. EPA works in partnership both to represent and give to parents a powerful voice in the development of education policies and decisions at European level. In the field of education, EPA aims to promote the active participation of parents and the recognition of their central place as the primary responsible of the education of their children.
- ***UNDP – UN Development Programme***
UNDP works in more than 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. They help countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results. World leaders have pledged to achieve the [Millennium Development Goals](#), including the overarching goal of cutting poverty in half by 2015.
- ***YFJ – European Youth Forum***
The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. Representing 99 youth organisations, both National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, they believe youth organisations are the tool through which we empower, encourage, involve, represent, reach out and support young people. The Youth Forum works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives by representing and advocating their needs and interest and those of their organisations.
- ***Active - Sobriety, Friendship and Peace***
Active - Sobriety, Friendship and Peace is a European youth umbrella organization gathering 31 organizations from 24 different European countries to promote and practice a lifestyle free from alcohol and other drugs. The main activities of Active represent non-formal education methods such as trainings, intercultural learning and social activities on topics relevant for young people, such as democracy, human rights, social inclusion, youth advocacy and social proactiveness and participation.
- ***The Commonwealth***
The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of [53 independent and equal sovereign states](#). It is home to 2.2 billion citizens, of which over 60% are under the age of 30. The Commonwealth Secretariat provides guidance on policy making, technical assistance and advisory services to Commonwealth member countries. Their work promotes democracy, rule of law, human rights, good governance and social and economic development. They are a voice for small states and a champion for youth empowerment.

Participants in the consultation were recruited in a number of ways. The online consultation on Youth Wellbeing was marketed directly on the WikiProgress website and advertised in the WikiProgress

newsletter, which has around 35,000 subscribers, and the OECD civil society, which has more than 50,000 subscribers.

The participants were informed that all findings of the consultation would be presented at the OECD Forum in Paris in June 2015, and that a report of the consultation would be made widely available for policy makers, foundations, civil society organisations and others in the WikiProgress network.

The participants were also informed that a new online consultation programme “Assembl”, developed by Imagination for People, was being trailed for this consultation. They were asked to register and were provided links at the outset to a range of relevant materials, which were also accessible throughout the consultation.

The “Assembl” software is being designed to facilitate a more in depth online discussion than is currently available with other software. Participants can view the debate in a number of formats, including an ideas table, harvested quotes, and threaded conversations. The aim is for participants to be able to quickly identify an aspect of the debate they are interested in and provide comments, without necessarily following the entire debate. It allows multiple conversation threads to develop simultaneously.

The participation statistics available from the “Assembl” software are currently limited, and due to privacy and trust concerns, no demographic, geographical or organisational information is collected. Participants were only asked to provide an email address and an online user name (which may or may not be their real name).

304 people registered over the course of the formal consultation period, 107 actively contributed to the consultation by providing a total of 486 messages.

Table 1, below, shows the number and rate of registrations, active participants, and messages posted on Assembl each week. Registration was fairly well spread over the consultation period. The participation rate captures the cumulative registration rate so it appears to ease off over the consultation period, but actually is also fairly stable. Week 5 was clearly the apex of the consultation with 15% of registered participants posting 92 messages, or an average of 2.5 messages each. (Note that ‘total active participants’ is the unique count of active participants over the consultation period; many participants contributed over multiple weeks.)

Table 1: Assembl registration and participation

	Registered participants	Registration rate	Active participants (posted a message)	Participation rate	Number of messages posted	Message rate
30 March (launch)	100	33%	1	1%	26	26.0
3 April (week 1)	37	12%	24	18%	50	2.1
10 April (week 2)	33	11%	27	16%	68	2.5
17 April (week 3)	31	10%	15	7%	48	3.2
24 April (week 4)	20	7%	26	12%	85	3.3
1 May (week 5)	47	15%	37	14%	92	2.5
8 May (week 6)	26	9%	27	9%	53	2.0

15 May (week 7)	10	3%	14	5%	64	4.6
Total	304		107		486	

Source: Imagination for People

Table 2, below, shows the number of messages posted by participants over the entire consultation period. It is clear from this table that almost half the participants made only one comment, and another third made less than five comments. This indicates that the majority of participants treated the consultation as an opportunity to make a contribution to the debate rather than enter an in-depth discussion.

Table 2: Assembl messages

Number of messages posted	% of total participants	Number of participants
Posted > 20 messages	5%	5
Posted 15-20 messages	3%	3
10-15 messages	4%	4
5-10 messages	9%	10
2-5 messages	32%	34
1 message only	48%	51
Total	100%	107

In terms of the potential for future consultations, there were 1468 unique visitors to the site from 111 countries. A unique visitor is someone who opens the link to the Assembl site, and is not re-counted if they re-enter the site within 30 minutes. There were a total of 2400 visits (unique and non-unique) to the site over the formal consultation period.

Lessons learned

This was the first time that Wikiprogress has conducted an online debate on such a scale and duration (with previous Wikiprogress online discussions lasting a maximum of 2 weeks and attracting around 30-50 commenters). Using Assembl to conduct a more ambitious debate lasting almost 2 months, was an interesting and useful experiment and many lessons were learned from the issues encountered. In particular, it was very challenging to get large numbers of people to register and to actively participate in the debate on a sustained basis, and the role of the community manager(s) was central to the success of the activity. Ensuring that the user experience, as well as the experience for moderators and harvesters, were as smooth as possible was also a key challenge, and OECD worked closely with Imagination for People throughout to implement improvements throughout the consultation and in the period afterwards. The biggest challenge for the experiment came from the fact that Wikiprogress has a very large and diffuse audience, and so, in effect, the success of the debate relied on the ability to build an active sub-community of interest around the debate. Most of the lessons learned relate to reducing the barriers to participation for new arrivals to the debate. Overall, many useful lessons were learned, which are summarized below.

The objectives and audience of the debate need to be clearly defined and communicated

The leading questions for the online consultation were selected to be very broad. Similarly, the audience for the consultation was not narrowly defined, and we targeted both experts on youth issues (mainly through the partner organisations) as well as the general public, and young people in

particular, through various social media channels. These decisions were taken deliberately in order to appeal to as many people as possible, however, we noticed during the consultation that this approach was not necessarily the most fruitful to encourage participation. The fact that the questions were broad and not specific, meant that many people found it difficult to find an “entry point” into the discussions – more narrowly defined questions may have made it easier for people to grasp the objectives of the consultation. Similarly, the fact that many experts took part in the consultation meant that the quality of the interventions was very high. However, we heard from some non-expert users that they found the high standard of the discussion to be intimidating, and made them feel that they did not know enough about the subject to take part. This maybe one reason why the debate had such a high proportion of ‘lurkers’ as opposed to active participants. In the future, it will be necessary to be much clearer about the profile of participation and the purpose, i.e. is it to encourage expert-driven discussion, or to appeal to a broader, non-expert audience? The questions and targeting of participants will then need to be developed appropriately.

The role of community manager(s) is crucial

The Wikiprogress Assembl test differed from most other Assembl tests in that rather than starting with a small, well-defined community of interest, Wikiprogress instead has a large, yet diffuse audience (20k visitors to the website every month, 34k newsletter subscribers). For topic-specific activities, the Wikiprogress model is to build a sub-community of interest with the help of knowledge partners. The same approach was followed in this case, but it was clear that in order to keep momentum going in terms of the registration and active participation of the community, then a lot of effort was needed, equivalent to the time of a full-time community manager. Community creation/management tasks included:

- Writing blogs and newsletter articles to inform the broad Wikiprogress audience and to send out a call for partners
- Recruiting partners, explaining the process and objectives to them, providing them with communications material to promote the activity to their networks, and help trouble-shooting any issues that arise
- Profiling the activity on social media channels before and throughout the activity
- Answering questions to participants

These tasks are in addition to that of moderating/harvesting the debate, which themselves were also quite time-consuming. As the aim with the Assembl test was to encourage a very high-level of continued participation, then the requirements for community management ended up being very demanding (more than envisaged originally).

As Wikiprogress did not have a full-time community manager to devote to all of these additional tasks, then the different tasks were shared between OECD/Wikiprogress staff and Imagination for People staff. In particular, in terms of moderating the debate, the assistance of Imagination for People was crucial to the success of the activity in this regard as they went above and beyond their core responsibilities to foster community participation. In particular, Imagination for People was very active in the moderation of the debate, which helped to keep the discussion going. Imagination for People was in regular communication with OECD/Wikiprogress staff to deal with issues as they arose and suggest solutions.

The user experience for participants needs to be as smooth and simple as possible

In the early days after the launch of the debate, there were some technical issues with browser compatibility meaning that some motivated participants were unable to register or take part. Imagination for People dealt with these quickly. Furthermore in the first couple of weeks, we heard from many participants that they did not know how to ‘get started’ in the discussion. This was partially due to the broad questions, as discussed above, but it was also partly due to the user

interface, with a lot of information being made available on the landing page. After discussing with Imagination for People, we were able to vastly simplify the landing page to make it obvious how to take part. These technical and interface issues underlined the need to make the user experience as smooth and simple as possible, especially when dealing with new communities, who have less of an incentive to invest time in understanding a new platform. These issues were discussed at length with Imagination for People, who were very proactive in suggesting improvements that could be made in the short- and longer-term to improve the user experience.

The user experience for moderators and harvesters also needs to be as smooth and simple as possible

We had a one person fully devoted to moderating and harvesting points from the debate to create the Table of Ideas and Syntheses. The harvester had a number of detailed suggestions for Imagination for People to make the task of moderating and harvesting much more intuitive and less labour-intensive, and Imagination for People has worked extensively to take these on board. One of the main issues was that it was difficult to get an overview of the conversation, and impossible to print off the discussion in an easily-usable way. This is an important function, not only to help the work of the harvester/moderator, but also to make the content of the debate more easily readable after the debate has ended. Imagination for People has dealt with these issues and extensive improvements have been made for the future.

More detailed analytics are very useful

At the time of the OECD Assembl test, analytics on visitors and participants to the debate were quite limited. For a debate such as this, where the actual audience may be significantly larger than the number of active participation, more sophisticated analytics would be a useful community management tool, as well as giving more accurate numbers on the actual impact of the debate beyond active participation. Imagination for People have been working to improve this since the consultation.

Overall, the experience was a very fruitful one for the OECD, which led to a rich and interesting debate on Youth Well-being, which has now been presented to the Wikiprogress audience as well as to participants at the OECD Forum in June 2015. All together, the required input to the debate was more than originally envisaged, with a significant share of time of the Wikiprogress manager, a part-time consultant taking on the tasks of moderating/harvesting, and Imagination for People staff putting in a lot of effort beyond their task description to make the debate a success. However, a lot of useful lessons were learned on both sides that can be applied to future implementations of Assembl and future online consultations on Wikiprogress.