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*How would you like it to be? – Results and project development
from the first multi-phase online survey (online consultation) on
the future of the Bundestag's website content.*

Report on the results of the research project 11/2004 – 03/2005

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1 Introduction

The following report reflects the planning, the implementation and the results of the first multi-phase online survey in the Administration of the Bundestag, the Federal German Parliament. The aim was to gain better knowledge of the desires and criticisms expressed by users of the Bundestag's website so as to be able to optimise the site's content based on this information. The results show that this process has revealed new points of criticism and suggestions from the internet users that the provider would not have been able to identify, and that would not have been obtainable using previous methods. This method can be described as an online consultation without live moderation.

In order to distinguish this multi-phase online survey from other types of online consultation, and to point out the similarities, the various forms of online consultation are compared in appendix 1.

2 Initial situation

Division PI 4 of the Bundestag previously carried out surveys every two years into the acceptance and evaluation of the Bundestag's web offerings on their website www.bundestag.de. The method used for this always consisted of posting a questionnaire with closed or half-open questions in the internet in order to gain quantifiable results from largish numbers of participants. Apart from the final question asking for any further comments, there were no categories where open-ended answers could be given. The advantage of this method is that it makes it easy to evaluate particularly large quantities of data. However, the disadvantage is that from the provider's point of view, only known, 'positive' things can be evaluated and analysed. Desires, suggestions and criticisms on the part of the users cannot be investigated in this way.

This is the point at which the various methods of online consultation or phased, open-end surveys come into play. The intention with these methods is to prompt the target groups concerned into an active dialogue which then also helps shape the planning and implementation of processes in whose progress they are interested or even involved. Especially in the English-speaking world, these methods – known as 'online consultation' – are already used for the work of parliamentary bodies.

The initiator of the present online survey was Division PI 4, which after more than eight years of developing and designing the parliamentary website for the public wanted to know what

the strengths and weaknesses of the site were from the users' point of view. The question was therefore deliberately formulated very broadly:

“What information, functionalities and content offerings would you like the website of the German Bundestag to provide?”

The aim was to address the more technically oriented target groups, who might want to see IT-related changes or have questions in this area, as well as people who were interested in the structure and the content and wanted to express comments and criticism about the content and the way it was organised.

Because the Administration of the Bundestag does not, in principle, provide moderated online forums, and as there is no cross-party moderating institution like the Hansard Society in Germany, the multi-phase online questionnaire method from the British company Dialogue by Design was used for the first online consultation involving the Bundestag's Administration. Clients who have already used this method include the World Bank in New York and the Metropolitan Police in London. (For more information, see appendix 1.)

3 Project sequence in the Bundestag

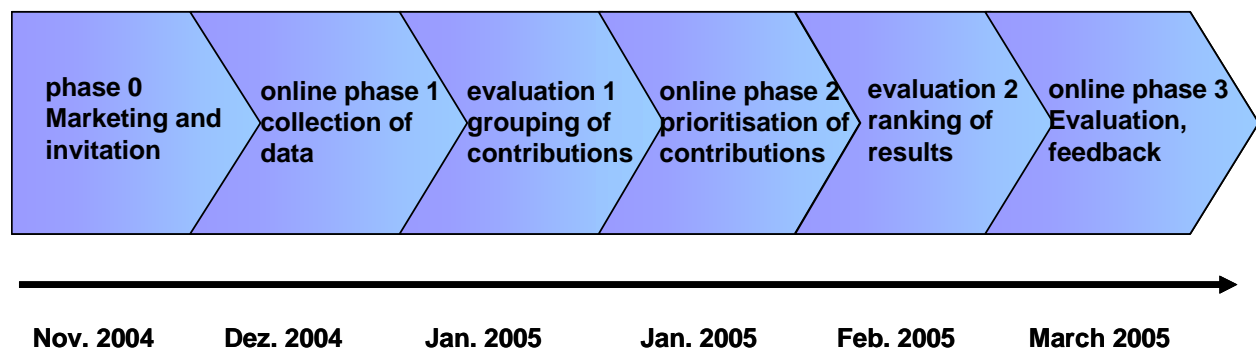


Fig. 1: Project timeframe

3.1 Preparatory phase (November 2004)

Preparations for the online survey got underway at the end of October. As the software had previously been used only in the Anglo-American world, the whole user interface including all texts and error messages were translated into German and the database was set up according to the question structure. Participants for the online survey were sourced from the

addresses in the four mailing lists that are kept in connection with the Bundestag's website. Each of these lists contains users who have provided their details because they are interested in the work of the German parliament and wish to receive regular e-mails informing them about new developments in specific areas, such as press work and public relations. After the data was cleaned up to remove duplicate entries, an address pool containing around 20,000 e-mail addresses was available. On the morning of 1 December, an 'invitation' to take part in the survey was sent to this group. The online survey was also advertised on the Bundestag's website.

Interest among users was extremely high. After just one hour, 168 users had registered to take part.

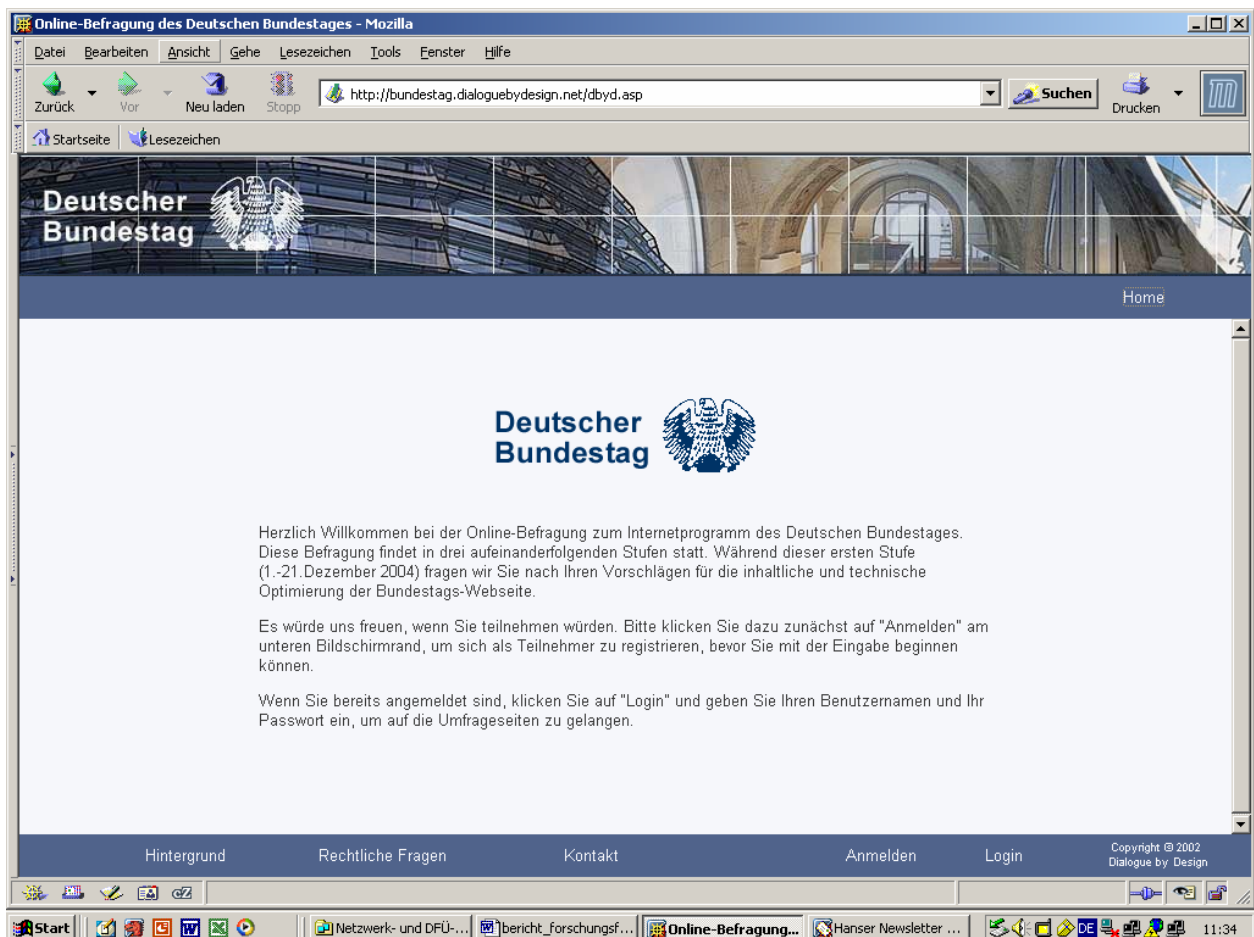


Fig. 2: The survey's start page.

3.2 registration of participants

The 'Electronic Democracy' project that was carried out in the Bundestag in 2001/2002 recommended a liberal registration concept for users¹. Users could register to take part in the online survey by clicking the 'Registration' button. Although this form did ask for the user's surname and first names, it accepted anything that users entered. Interestingly, almost none of the participants had a problem with giving their name. There were less than a dozen cases of obvious joke names or other combinations of characters. Of course it is only possible to guess whether the remainder of participants gave their real names, but this is in any case irrelevant for the survey method. It should also be pointed out that it is not usual for internet users to identify themselves by their name. Four e-mails – some of whose authors were thoroughly outraged at first – made this same point. The participants were satisfied with the response that although names were asked for, any other input was accepted without problems.

In order to support the analysis of the data with demographic and at least rudimentary geographic data, participants were also asked to state their sex, age, and post code. Finally they were asked to provide an e-mail address. This was required so that the participants could be sent the user name assigned by the system and password that they chose. These were then needed to take part in the survey.

¹ Bizer, Johann: *Erfahrungen aus dem Projekt Elektronische Demokratie* – presentation on 24/02/2005 in the Bundestag, p. 6.

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Dialogue by Design - Microsoft Internet Explorer". The page header features the "Deutscher Bundestag" logo and a navigation bar with a "Home" link. The main content area is titled "Anmeldung" (Registration) and contains the following text: "Wenn Sie sich BEREITS ANGEMELDET haben, klicken Sie auf 'Login' und geben Sie Ihren Benutzernamen und Ihr Passwort ein, um zur Umfrage zu gelangen. Ihre Kommentare werden Ihnen nicht persönlich zugeordnet. Die Angaben zu Alter und Wohnort werden gesammelt, um die Breite des Teilnehmerkreises abschätzen zu können." Below this is a note: "Alle mit einem * versehenen Felder müssen ausgefüllt werden. Klicken Sie anschließend auf OK." The registration form includes the following fields: "Anrede*" (dropdown menu with "Herr" selected), "Vorname*" (text input), "Nachname*" (text input), "Postleitzahl" (text input), "Altersgruppe" (dropdown menu with "Wählen Sie eine Altersgruppe" selected), "Ihre E-Mail-Adresse*" (text input), and "Wählen Sie ein" (text input). The footer contains navigation links: "Hintergrund", "Rechtliche Fragen", "Kontakt", "Anmelden", and "Login". Copyright information for 2002 is also present.

Fig. 3: Registration form

After submitting the registration, the welcoming mail with user name and password was sent out within a few minutes.

In the stated period, 1193 users registered to participate in the survey.

Participation in the survey was not necessarily limited to those who received an invitation to do so. Anyone could take part via the link on the Bundestag's website.

3.3 Online phase 1 (1 – 21 December 2004)

The survey was online from 1 – 21 December 2004 at www.bundestag.dialoguebydesign.com and users could enter their contributions in the form as shown in figure 4. As the answers were supposed to be kept short, in 'keyword' form, the first field was limited to 100 characters. One of the main reasons for this limitation is so that later on, a large quantity of answers could be presented in a group, which is easy to define using these 'headings'. The text box below this field provided room for further explanations.

The total number of characters here was limited to 500, although all contributions up to a total of 750 characters were stored.

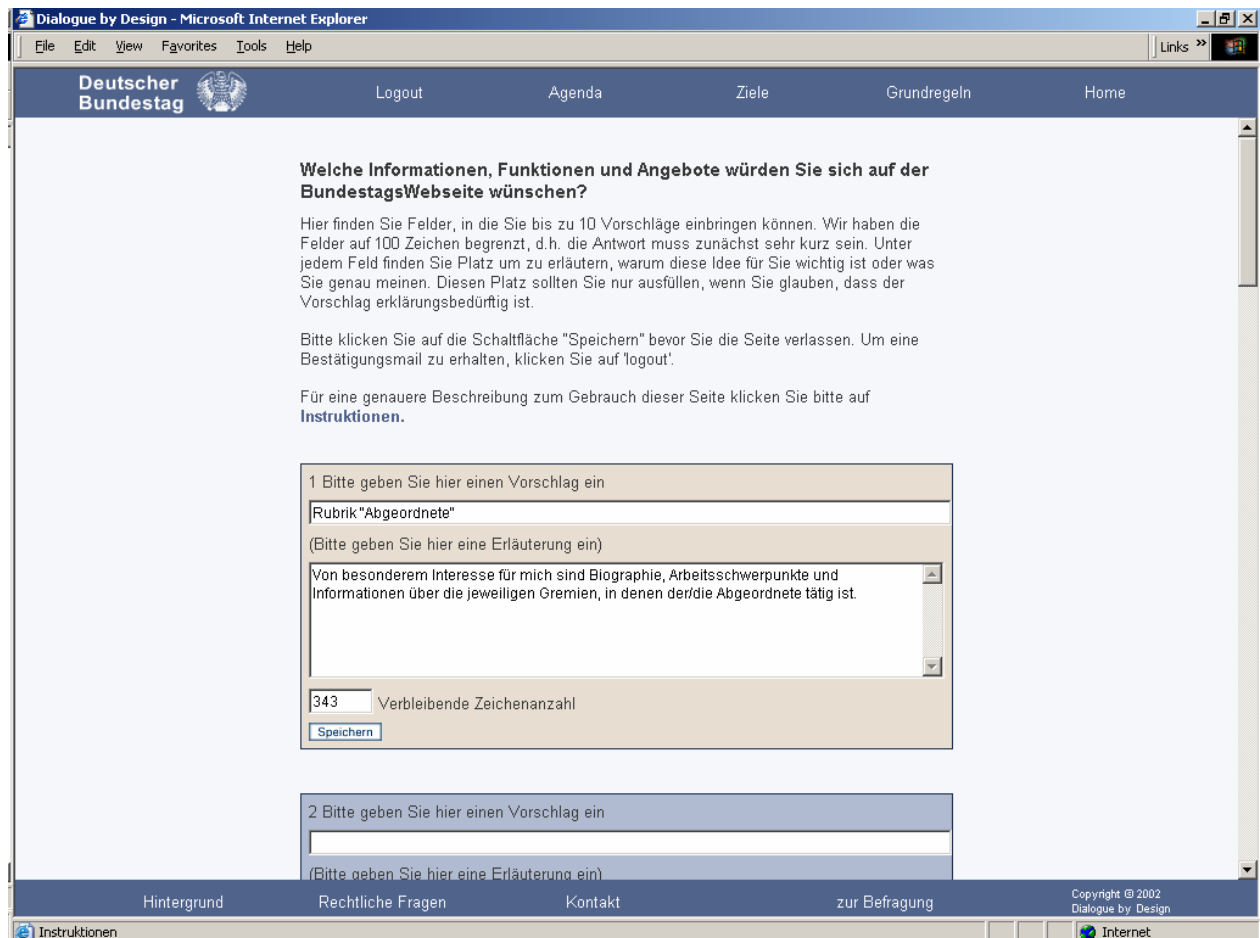


Fig. 4: Entering contributions online

After 8 and again after 15 days, the participants who up to that point had registered but not yet entered their contributions were sent a reminder mail containing a link to the survey along with their user name and password.

Overall, significantly more people registered to take part than actually did submit contributions later on. Registered participants totalled 1193, in contrast to 493 participants who added their contributions to the database. As in everyday situations, therefore, there is a large group of people who want to take part as an 'active observer' but not be an active participant in the survey. 41 % of the participants wrote 1121 contributions in the survey as a whole.

Contributions were received in great numbers at the start of the survey and then steadily trailed off. Almost half of all contributions (49 %) were submitted in the first two days.

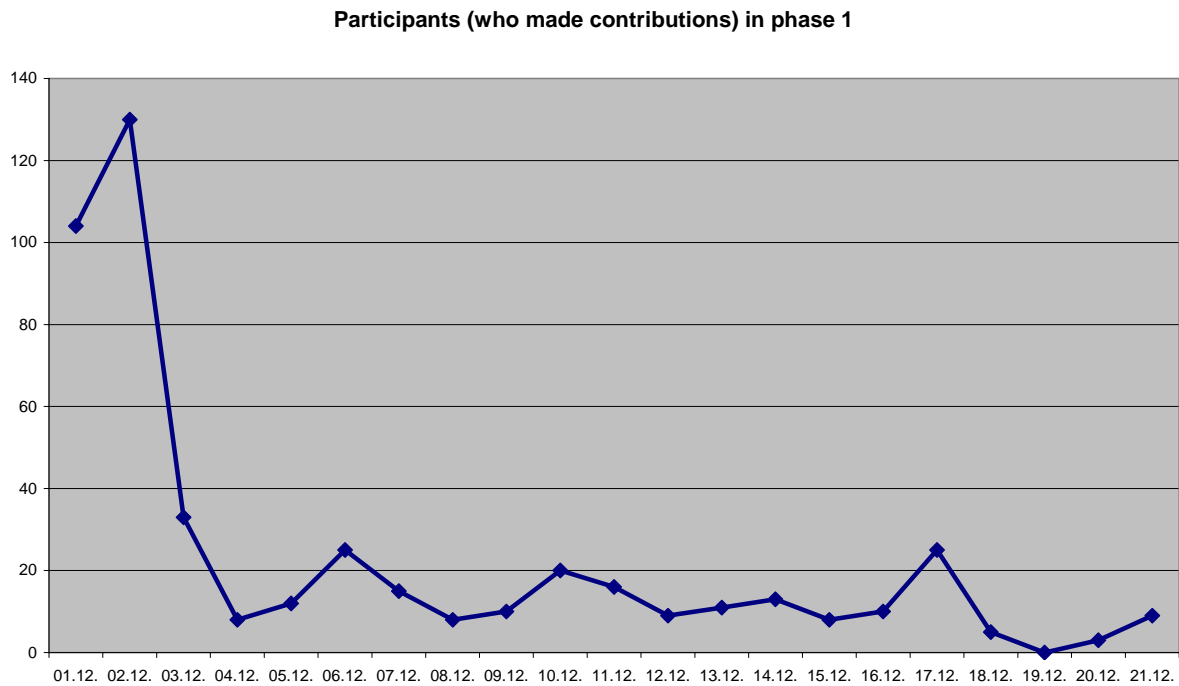


Fig. 5: Chronological sequence of participation

The reminder mails that were sent out on 8th and 15th December did result in a slight rise in participant numbers, but this was not as strong as originally hoped for. Consequently it can be noted for subsequent projects that it would make sense to send a reminder after just a few days, then again after 4-5 days. This would possibly allow the first phase to be shortened from three to two weeks.

3.4 Evaluation phase 1 (1 – 15 January 2005)

After conclusion of the first phase, the data was stored and from the beginning of January was analysed in a partly automatic, partly human evaluation phase lasting several days. The system supplied word frequencies and search operators are available for a convenient full text search. Nevertheless, each contribution was assigned again by a human user according to the main content themes or groups. The result was a list containing the main content themes, to which the individual contributions were assigned. For each group, the number of contributions grouped together under this theme is counted precisely.

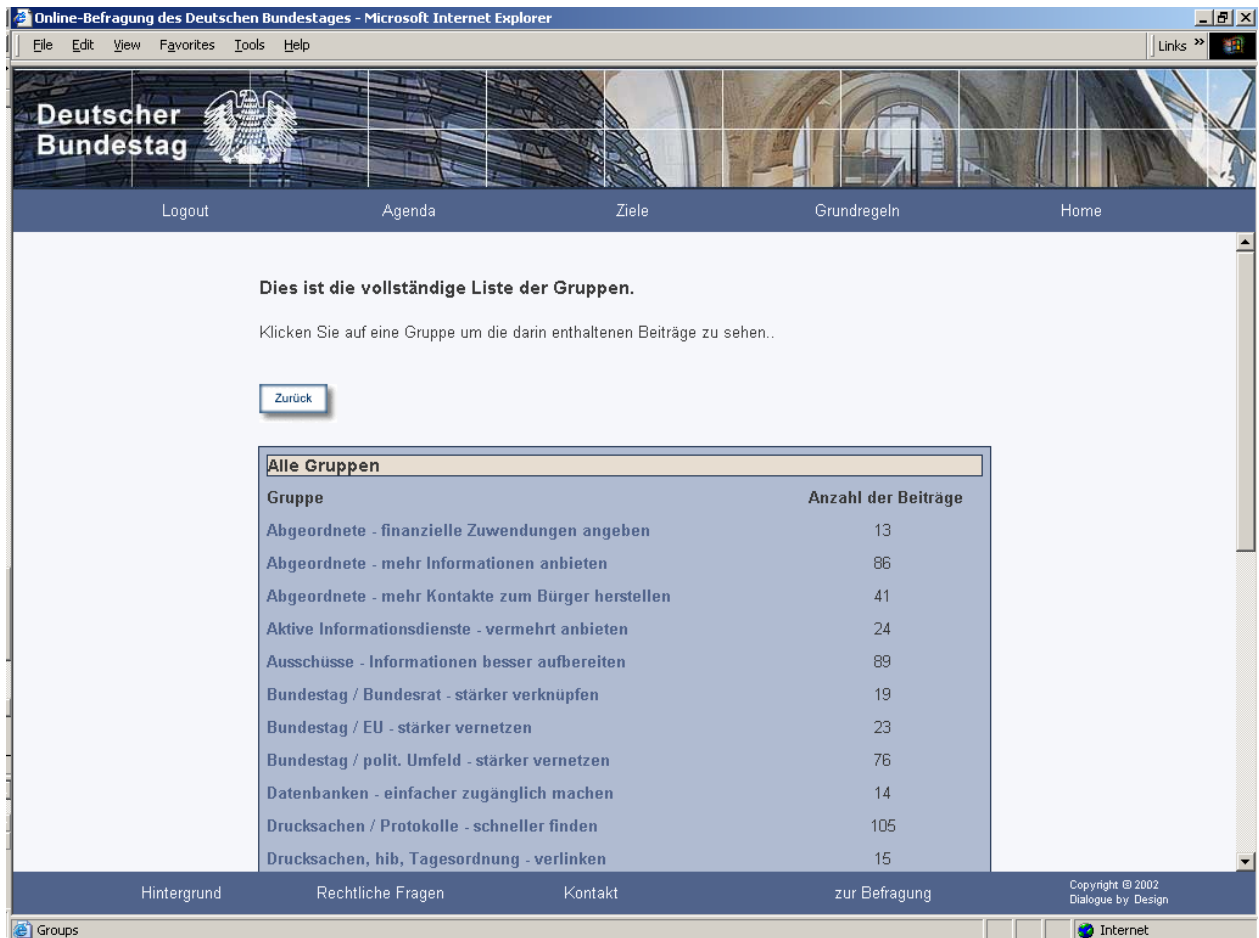


Fig. 6: Contribution groupings

Double-clicking on a group displays all the contributions that have been assigned to that theme.



Fig. 7: Contributions within a group

At the same time it is also possible to view all the contributions from a particular participant and so gain an overview of the overall set of opinions that was expressed.



Fig. 8: Contributions sorted according to participants

3.5 Grouping and ranking

Pos.	Group heading	Number of contributions
1	Existing information – better integration	144
2	Printed papers / minutes – quicker to find	105
3	Committees – better presentation of information	89
4	Status of legislation – keep more up to date	86
5	Members of parliament – provide more information	86
6	The public – allow them to participate	82
7	The work of parliament – explain it better	81
8	Bundestag / wider political sphere – create better links	76
9	Comments – general	68
10	Comments – on politics	62
11	Video / TV / webcam – expand services	49
12	Search functions – modify and improve	44

13	<i>hib</i> (Bundestag news service) – implement changes	44
14	Members of parliament – create more contact with citizens	41
15	Children / school – more target-group oriented information	39
16	New technical features (RSS, MP3...) – add	38
17	Historical material – provide it	37
18	Public – inform the public better	27
19	Well done!	26
20	Active information services – offer more choice	24
21	Bundestag / EU – better links	23
22	Bundestag / Bundesrat – improve links	19
23	Reporting on current events – expand	19
24	Printed papers, <i>hib</i> , agenda – provide links	15
25	Lay-out (photos, images, font) – change	15
26	Databases – make them easier to access	14
27	Summarise major/minor interpellations with responses	14
28	Members of parliament – state their incomes	13
29	Offer additional languages (as well as English, French)	8

The groups² show a clear focus on the content. The first group, ‘improve integration of existing information’ (144 contributions) was formed mainly for the reason that users wanted to view information on the website that was already available somewhere on the site but which evidently they didn’t find and therefore made a request for it to be provided. This shows that more work needs to be done on providing a clear structure to the content, especially in the lower levels.

The group of ‘Printed papers / minutes – quicker to find’ (105 contributions) is directed both at the time delay before documents are placed online and to their general findability in the database. This point is also where the most suggestions were made on how to improve the search function, for example with additional lists and matches.

² The first few large groups with more than 50 contributions are commented on here.

The following three places, each with more than 80 entries, are 'Committees – better presentation of information', 'Status of legislation – keep more up to date' and 'Members of parliament – provide more information'. These groups are also purely focused on the content and show just how much interest there is in more extensive and more current information about documents and the people who work inside parliament. Group 7, 'The work of parliament – explain it better' also confirms this interest.

The group 'The public – allow them to participate' occupies sixth place. With more than 80 contributions, this group shows how much users are interested in and have a desire for new ways of getting involved in the political process. On the other hand, the high ranking of course also shows that this target group was particularly active in the online survey in order to emphasise this wish.

In eighth place, the improvement of links between the Bundestag and its wider political sphere still commands some 76 entries. Here it is often a question of whether the content of the Bundestag's website shouldn't be integrated more closely with the content of other political institutions' sites.

The groups in ninth and tenth places contain general comments and opinions on political matters. These categories show that many people, despite the clearly defined questions, use a medium such as this to volunteer what are in some cases extensive commentaries on society, the political situation as they see it, and also on day-to-day politics. The upshot is that this total of 130 contributions with content that cannot be evaluated means that some 10 % of all contributions have to be classed as unusable.

3.6 Online phase 2 (14 – 24 January 2005)

The grouped contributions were published in the internet in mid-January and the registered users from phase 1 were asked to have a look at the collection of proposals and then prioritise this overall view of all suggestions to make it clear what they wanted to emphasise.

So as not to influence users by the number of assigned contributions, the list of groups was shown in alphabetical order.

For this prioritisation, the participants could allocate up to a total of 7 points to themes that they rated as particularly important.

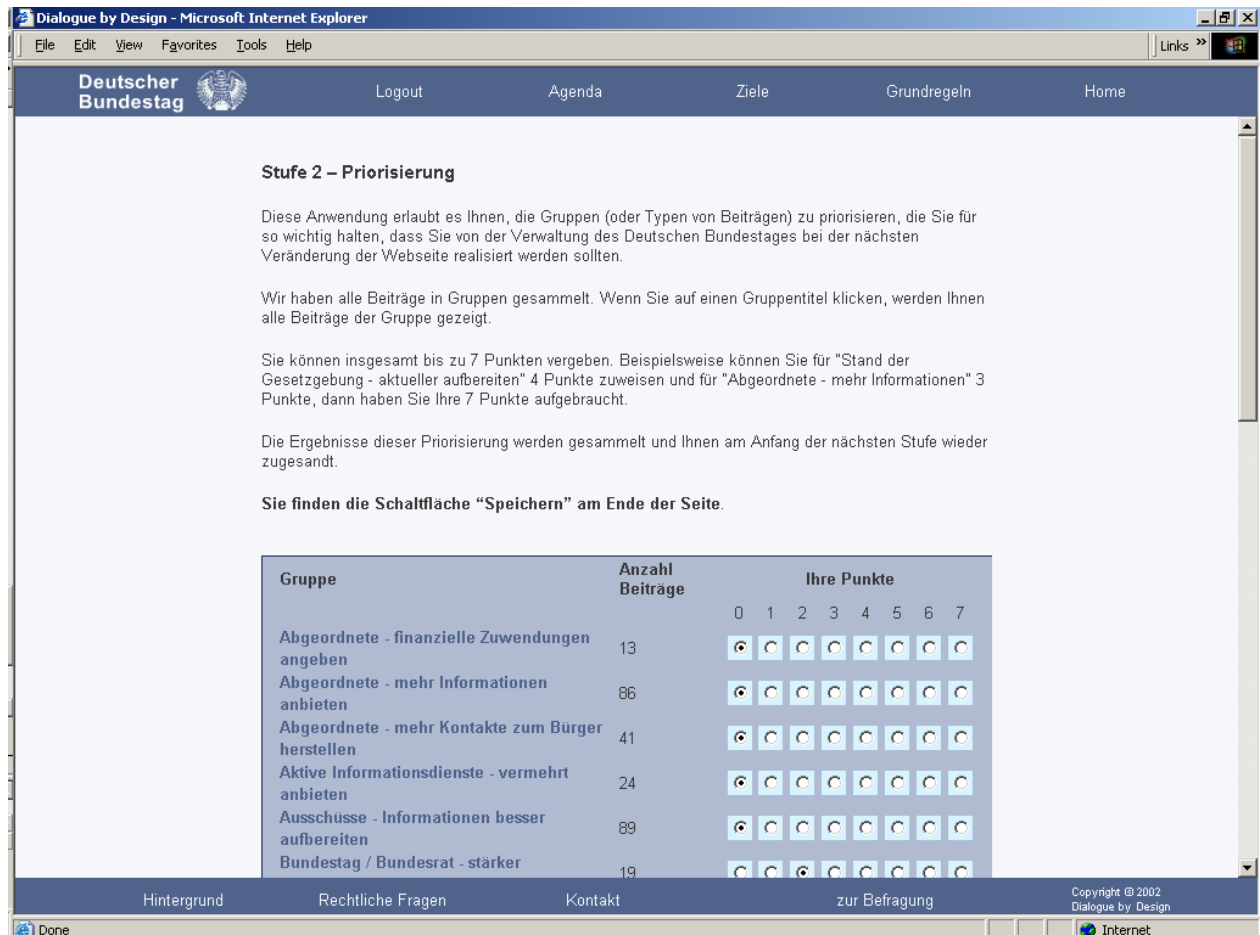


Fig. 9 Prioritisation of entries

3.7 Prize draw incentive for participation in phase 2

A prize draw was offered in the second phase of the online survey to give participants a small incentive to continue their participation in the survey. This incentive was deliberately avoided in the first phase so that people didn't participate simply for the sake of being entered in the prize draw.

Users could choose whether they wanted to be entered in the prize draw or not. The following passage mentioning the prize draw was included in the mail inviting users to take part in the second phase:

As a thank-you for participating in the second stage as well, we are holding a prize draw for a trip to Berlin with a visit to the Bundestag. The winner will be notified by e-mail. Our decision is final. If you do not wish to be entered in this prize draw, please send a short message (stating your user name) by e-mail to bundestag@dialoguebydesign.com

Five people did not wish to be entered in the prize draw. After five days, participants who had not completed their prioritisation were sent a reminder mail. The winner (trip to Berlin) was chosen and notified in March.

A total of 345 users took part in the second phase of the online survey.

3.8 Evaluation phase 2 (24 – 28 January 2005)

The prioritisations for the groups were evaluated and a new, modified results document was created that showed the changes in the rankings. This result was sent to the Bundestag's web development team in order to serve as feedback, with a request for information on any actions or plans that arose from it.

A total of 36 comments were received during the prioritisation phase, i.e. approx. 10 % of participants expressed views on various themes beyond the prioritisation itself. Very often they explained their own prioritisation or made concrete suggestions for improvements. These were passed on to the web team. The largest point of criticism, mentioned eight times, concerned the prioritisation method. The allocation of only seven points with almost 30 groups was universally seen as being too small. Three entries complained that the group classification was completely unbalanced since some of the groups were very specific while some others covered a wide field in terms of their content. One user complained that his or her own contribution had been placed in the wrong group.

3.9 Online phase 3 (March 2005)

At the start of online phase 3, the new ranking was published in the internet together with an evaluation form that asked users about the process as a whole.

The following table shows the changes in the ranking of the groups after taking into account the users' prioritisations:

Report on the results of the online consultation

Pos.	Group	Prioritisation	Contributions	Change
1	Members of parliament – state their incomes	343 points	13	↑28
2	Printed papers / minutes – quicker to find	234 points	105	→
3	Status of legislation – keep more up to date	197 points	86	↑1
4	Databases – make them easier to access	179 points	14	↑ 22
5	Committees – better presentation of information	176 points	89	↑ 2
6	Members of parliament – provide more information	148 points	86	↓ 1
7	Members of parliament – create more contact with citizens	133 points	41	↑ 7
8	Search functions – modify and improve	100 points	44	↑ 4
9	Historical material – provide it	96 points	37	↑ 8
10	Active information services – offer more of them	95 points	24	↑ 10
11	Existing information – better integration	80 points	144	↓ 10
12	Bundestag / Bundesrat – improve links	78 points	19	→
13	Printed papers, <i>hib</i> , agenda – provide links	75 points	15	↑ 11
14	The public – allow them to participate	74 points	82	↓ 8
15	Bundestag / EU – better links	71 points	23	↑ 6
16	Summarise major/minor interpellations with responses	56 points	14	↑ 11
17	Video / TV / webcam – expand services	53 points	49	↓ 6
18	Public – inform the public better	49 points	27	→
19	Children / school – more target-group oriented information	47 points	39	↓ 4
20	Reporting on current events – expand	41 points	19	↑ 3
21	Bundestag / wider political sphere – create better links	34 points	76	↓ 13
22	The work of parliament – explain it better	30 points	81	↓ 15
23	New technical features (RSS, MP3...) – add	26 points	38	↓ 7
24	Comments – on politics	25 points	62	↓ 14
25	<i>hib</i> (Bundestag news service) – implement changes	24 points	44	↓ 12
26	Comments – general	18 points	68	↓ 17
27	Offer additional languages (as well as English, French)	13 points	8	↑ 2
28	Layout (photos, images, font) – change	11 points	15	↓ 3
29	Well done!	8 points	26	↓ 10

3.10 Change in emphasis

3.10.1 Strongly improved rankings (by 10 or more places)

The prioritisation caused a change in emphases. A total of five groups were moved up by more than 10 places. The most conspicuous change was in first place, 'Members of parliament – state their incomes'. With just 13 entries, this group was of only minor importance in December. Day to day political happenings were evidently behind this change – at the end of December and early in January they were heavily influenced by discussion of members' additional jobs. Users' wishes and ideas relating to the website are therefore influenced by the topical political issues.

The group 'Databases – make them easier to access' moved up 22 places. This corresponds to the unchanged high ranking of the group 'Printed papers / minutes – quicker to find'. Participants in the online survey make it clear in this way that they are interested not only in the content of the databases (printed papers, minutes, etc.) but also particularly in user-friendly and easy access to this content.

The fact that each of the two groups 'Printed papers, *hib*, agenda – provide links' and 'Summarise major/minor interpellations with responses' moved 11 places up the table also points in the same direction. Here the users express the desire to see better links created between documents and information relating to parliamentary activity. Summarising the questions and answers to major and minor interpellations is just one particular example that can be mentioned here.

The group 'Active information services – offer more of them' was voted 10 places higher. This shows that users have a clear wish for proactive information on current developments, rather than having to become active themselves first to do the research to find the information.

Seen overall, the first 10 places are no longer so strongly orientated to the content as they appeared to be when the frequencies were counted. Technical and structural aspects in particular have joined the list, i.e. the desire for easier, automatic access to the databases and improved linking between the documents. Topical political concerns also figured highly.

3.10.2 Strongly fallen rankings (by 10 or more places)

Given the concrete suggestions for technical and structural changes in the upper ranks, the general desires for a greater range of information to be offered (the group 'The work of parliament – explain it better') and better integration (the group 'Existing information – better integration') were significantly downgraded. The two fell 15 and 10 places respectively. The same applies to the groups 'Bundestag / wider political sphere – create better links' and 'hib (Bundestag news service) – implement changes' with a loss of 13 and 12 places.

The fact that the groups with the general comments and comments on politics fell in ranking is due to the nature of their content. These contributions are unusable for the real questions that needed to be answered. It was pleasing to receive the comments, but their content is just as unusable as that of the 'Well done' group.

To conclude the project, the feedback from the web development team (see appendix 2) together with a final report is being published and made available to download.

3.11 Results of the evaluation

A short questionnaire to evaluate the process as a whole was placed online and completed by 242 participants.

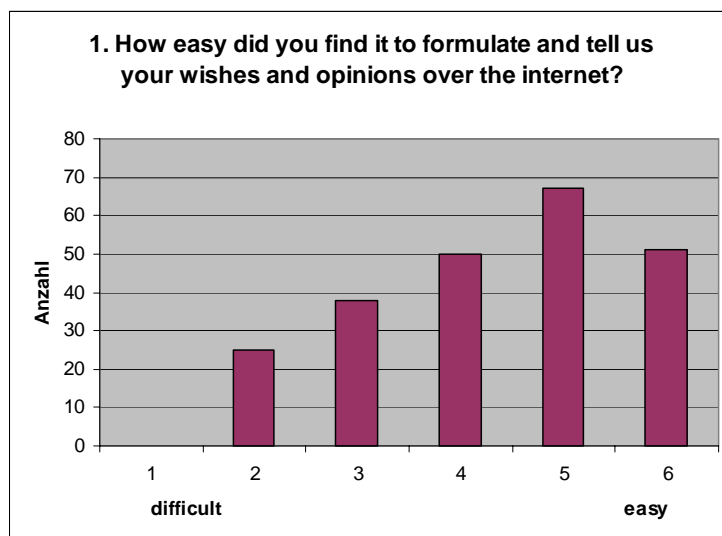


Fig. 10: How easy or difficult it was to convey opinions over the internet

Exactly two-thirds of participants (66.6 %) found it quite easy, easy or very easy to formulate their opinion over the internet. But there was also a largish proportion of participants who found this quite difficult (value 3) or difficult (value 2). In other words, acceptance of this form of expressing opinions cannot yet be taken for granted.

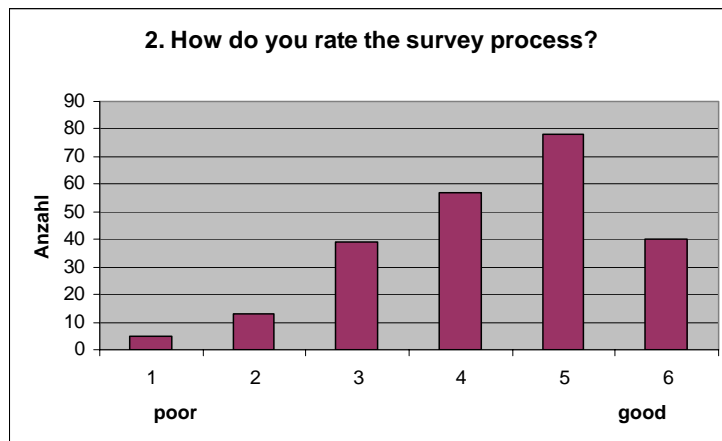


Fig. 11: Evaluation of the survey process as a whole

Three-quarters of all participants rated the survey process as good.

Due to the large number of comments, the evaluation of the open questions can only be summarised briefly here. However, there are a number of points that stand out in the large volume of contributions:

Comments on the method

There was a lot of praise for the fact that this project had been launched and that users were being asked for their opinions in this way. With respect to the method, many suggestions were offered as to how the method could be improved. Critical comments mainly concerned the length of the process.

Along with their praise for the process, several dozen participants at the same time wrote that they were now eager to see whether they would actually be listened to and whether something would actually be done in future. This means that this type of online survey clearly awakens firm expectations. Users are pleased that somebody is listening to their opinions. However, in return they also expect their suggestions not to go unheard and that they will form the basis for changes.

Comments on the outcome

There were numerous comments concerning the actual results, i.e. the groups that ultimately received the highest numbers of points. These ranged from enthusiastic approval to great disappointment. In the majority of cases, disappointment was due to the fact that current political issues had such an incredibly strong impact on the end result, i.e. in this case the discussion about the outside activities of members of parliament. Many found it hard to understand how a completely unrelated topic, namely the future internet presence, had been sidelined by a completely different political issue that happened to be a talking point at the time.

4 Who took part? Demographic and geographic data

4.1 Participant numbers

A total of **1193 people registered** to take part in **phase 1**. By the end of the third phase, 2 participants had requested to be deleted from the participant pool, as the process did not appeal to them. Of the registered participants, **493 participants (42 %)** actually entered **contributions** in the database. A total of 1121 contributions were received, which were then sorted into 29 thematic groups.

In **phase 2**, a total of **345 participants** prioritised the 29 groups with their allocation of 7 points per participant.

In **phase 3**, **240 participants** evaluated the method.

4.2 Sex distribution / age of participants

The sex distribution of the participants is interesting. Only 18 % of participants in the online survey were female. Thus women were significantly underrepresented since four times as many men as women took part in the survey.

Distribution of participants

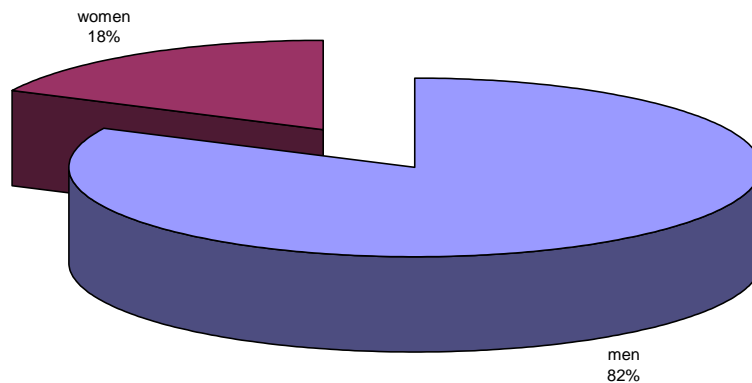


Fig. 12: Sex distribution of participants

This disparity occurred without exception across all age groups, as shown in the graph below. As far as the age distribution is concerned, the largest participant group can be found in the 36-45 year old age group. The age distribution as a whole has an almost bell-shaped, very even curve. It is conspicuous that hardly any young people (under-16s) took part in the survey, whereas the over-65s age group, in comparison, is pretty well represented. This can be taken as a pointer for the marketing of future projects. The projects evidently need to be advertised differently for specific target groups in order to reach the younger participants.

Age distribution / sex of registered users in phase 1

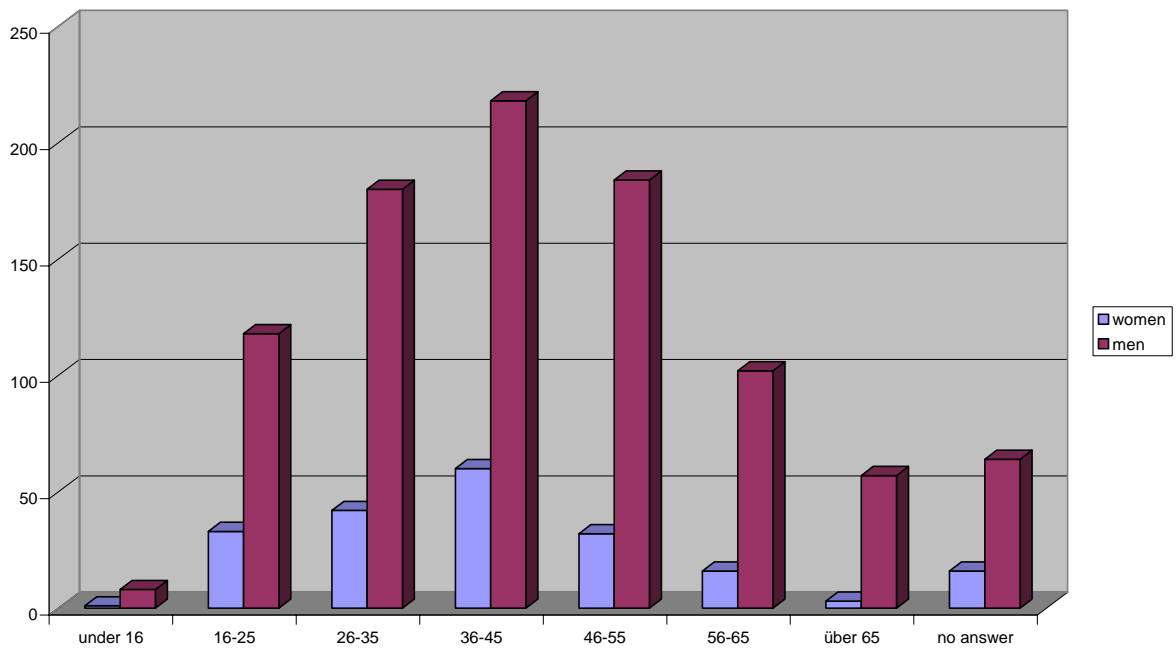


Fig. 13: Age distribution of participants

4.3 Geographic origin of registered participants

Land (federal state)	Number of Participants	Percentage
North Rhine-Westphalia	203	20 %
Berlin	173	17 %
Bavaria	110	11 %
Baden-Württemberg	96	10 %
Lower Saxony	92	9 %
Hesse	80	8 %
Brandenburg	40	4 %
Rhineland-Palatinate	37	4 %
Schleswig-Holstein	32	3 %
Hamburg	30	3 %
Saxony	25	3 %
Thuringia	19	2 %
Saxony-Anhalt	18	2 %
Bremen	12	1 %
Saarland	12	1 %

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	11	1 %
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There were few surprises in the geographic origin of participants. Apart from Berlin, the ranking of the *Länder* is broadly proportional to the size of their population.³ Berlin clearly takes a special position here as the centre of political activity at the national level in Germany.

5 Summary of results

The first online survey can be considered a success in terms of how the project went and its results.

With almost 1200 registered participants, the online survey had significantly more participants than, for example, the frequently cited British online consultations. However, the composition of participants was surprising since with women only accounting for 18 % of the total not quite one in five participants was female. The age distribution is roughly a normal distribution, with 36-45 year olds being the most strongly represented age group. Participants came from all the *Länder* virtually in proportion to the size of their populations. The only 'natural' exception was Berlin, as this is the focal point for political activity at the national level.

The high number of participants is all the more pleasing given that the question of changes to the Bundestag's website was rather a general theme. It could not automatically be assumed that particular target groups would find this particularly appealing. The theme was of somewhat average 'importance and urgency', with a wide target group that was hard to differentiate.⁴

Although the process ran without live moderation or direct participant discussion, there were many changes of opinion and corrections of viewpoint among the participants. This was shown by what were in some cases significant differences between the simple grouping and the subsequent prioritisation.

³ http://www.statistik-portal.de/Statistik-Portal/de_ib01_jahrtab1.asp researched on 8 March 2005.

⁴ This statement should be seen in the context that, for example, in the British online consultation on the topic of 'domestic violence against women', there was obviously a clearer target group and greater importance and urgency.

As concerns the content of the website, the result can be summarised as follows:

On the one hand, the website must meet the desire to see coverage of topical political issues, but its central task is to be the major information pool of data and documents that are relevant to parliament. This is seen in the forcefulness with which the following changes in particular were requested for the website:

- a) Easier access to the databases
- b) Greater topicality, i.e. documents should be available online sooner
- c) Better integration/linking of internal parliamentary documents
- d) Efforts to introduce new search features

In addition, there were many demands to create better links between parliamentary documents and other national and European institutions.

A second focus of user's wishes is on the key persons in parliament, in committees and the members of parliament. Here there were strong requests for more information and especially better contact opportunities.

The survey led to numerous new suggestions that could not have been obtained using the normal questionnaire method that was previously used. The consultation process allows the users' perspectives to be recorded and collected directly, whereas otherwise the questions to the users are always formulated from the provider's point of view. This participative process could also be used for committee work.

With more than 1000 proposals, many citizens have given the web development team a clear task to fulfil. The Online Services Division in the Bundestag has already issued a response to this (see appendix 2). For each individual group it has been stated how and whether the website will be modified in line with these wishes in future. Active cooperation between the Administration of the Bundestag and citizens has begun.

Appendix 1: Various different forms of online consultation

Online consultations based on online forums

Since 2001, the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom has been implementing e-consultations or online consultations for the government and parliament. These have been very widely publicised and also play a pioneering role in the European context. They are considered to be the 'heart of British e-democracy' and are conducted in the local context as well as in the national context.

The British online consultations are run as post-moderated forums. This means that users' contributions appear directly on the website of an online forum.⁵ In this case, moderation means that a moderator from the Hansard Society⁶ performs the following tasks:

Selection of participating persons on the part of parliament and the participating target groups and citizens:

- Assistance with registration
- Encouragement of discussion by:
- Welcoming the participants and announcing the rules
- Leading the discussion, e.g. by bringing in or adding new questions
- Producing a weekly summary that is sent to all participants and the committee
- Producing a final report on the consultation as a whole

⁵ In contrast to this there are also pre-moderated forums (as in the Administration of the Bundestag). Here it takes a certain time before the contributions appear on the website, during which time contributions are viewed and approved.

⁶ The Hansard Society, London, is an independent, non-party affiliated, non-profit educational organisation that was created to promote parliamentary democracy. The society was established in 1944. Its first members were Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee, at that time the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister respectively. Since this time, all Prime Ministers and leaders of the main opposition parties have publicly supported the work of the society. The post of President is always held by the Speaker of the House of Commons. The activities, meetings and publications of the society are concentrated on bringing citizens – and especially young people – closer to the way the British parliament works. Since the advent of new democratic developments in eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the work of the Hansard Society has also taken on an international dimension.

To register, participants are required to reveal their real name and e-mail address to the Hansard Society, but they can remain anonymous within the discussion. As is usual in online forums, discussion takes place both among participants and with the host persons. These are generally represented by the Hansard Society moderator. Particular value is attributed to the deliberative aspect of direct discussion and the direct exchange of opinion. Especially in the initial phase, Members of Parliament take part with a welcoming message or by stating their view on a particular topic. Background information and selected content relating to the themes are supplied by the committee secretaries.

PR for the projects begins once partners both within and outside parliament have been found for the online consultation. Measures used to publicise the consultation include printed leaflets, online newsletters, a letter to all MPs, and notices to public libraries and the local press.

Online consultations in the UK have so far been used in different phases of the legislative process and with different parliamentary committees. This shows that despite the degree to which they are known, the British online consultations even today retain the character of pilot projects and are still without any mandatory or institutionalised status.

Questionnaire-based online consultations with a feedback function

The method that was outlined for the Hansard Society is based on a moderated forum in which citizens can discuss issues with each other directly online. Another form of online consultation works without a moderator within the discussion. It initially operates like a kind of questionnaire that records the participants' opinions on one or more issues. Unlike the traditional questionnaire, however, these can also be very open-ended questions that leave room for participants to formulate their own ideas.

The British company Dialogue by Design has optimised the online consultation process for large numbers of participants, developing a multi-stage process that uses feedback mechanisms to produce clearly structured sets of opinions and results for the decision-makers.

This process works as follows:

- **Preparation phase**

First of all an 'invitation' to take part in the online consultation is issued to particular user groups. This involves the marketing as well as setting up the website and the database. This marketing for the consultation is highly important as the number of participants in a consultation is always a critical success factor. If this number is too low, then the set of opinions that is obtained will not be sufficiently diverse. The next step is for the participants to register themselves.

- **Online phase 1**

The online consultation is made available in the internet for 2-3 weeks and users can give their answers to the questions that are asked, with an upper limit on the length of responses.

- **Evaluation phase 1**

The users' responses are evaluated partly automatically, partly by humans, in a phase that also lasts 2-3 weeks. A results document is produced and a record is made of the most important outcomes in keyword form.

- **Online phase 2**

The results document is published in the internet and the registered users from phase 1 are given the opportunity to prioritise the collected suggestions again. The aim here is to make it clear what priorities they would set in the light of this new overview, having previously explained their individual opinion in the first session. This phase allows participants to relativise or to consolidate only their own individual opinion in the light of the arguments submitted by the other participants. This allows an indirect exchange.

- **Evaluation phase 2**

The prioritisations are evaluated and a modified or a second results document is produced according to these new findings. This document is submitted to the decision-makers and they are asked to respond to the opinions from the consultation and to state any actions or plans that result.

- **Online phase 3**

The final report, together with the response from the decision-makers, is published. This shows what concrete opinions were expressed and the reactions to them.

The advantages of this method are:

- It is possible to work without open discussion forums and therefore without a direct live moderator
- Also suitable for large numbers of participants
- Clear results are obtained due to the feedback function

It could be considered a disadvantage that the process is more time-consuming than a simple online consultation and, as mentioned, it also does not allow any direct discussion between participants.

The multi-phase process has already been used by the Metropolitan Police in London and by the World Bank.

Synopsis of the process

	Online consultations by the British government and parliament (moderated by the Hansard Society)	First online consultation by the Administration of the Bundestag (without live moderation)
Technical basis	Online forum	Database – open-ended response (with length limit) in online forms
Support	Live moderation	Possible without a moderator
Participant numbers	To date only small numbers of participants	Already implemented with larger numbers of participants
Opportunity for discussion	Direct discussion is possible between participants	Indirect exchange of opinion through multi-phase feedback process
Duration	2-3 weeks online	2-3 weeks online in the first wave, followed by another 1-2 weeks in each of the second and third phases
Evaluation	Human operator only to evaluate the contributions	Partly automatic, partly human evaluation of contributions

Appendix 2: Feedback report from the web development team

Feedback on the results of the online survey into the future design of the Bundestag's web presence.

	Group	Points	Contributions
1	Members of parliament – state their incomes	343 points	13 contributions
2	Printed papers / minutes – quicker to find	234 points	105 contributions
3	Status of legislation – keep more up to date	197 points	86 contributions
4	Databases – make them easier to access	179 points	14 contributions
5	Committees – better presentation of information	176 points	89 contributions
6	Members of parliament – provide more information	148 points	86 contributions
7	Members of parliament – create more contact with citizens	133 points	41 contributions
8	Search functions – modify and improve	100 points	44 contributions
9	Historical material – provide it	96 points	37 contributions
10	Active information services – offer more choice	95 points	24 contributions
11	Existing information – better integration	80 points	144 contributions
12	Bundestag / Bundesrat – improve links	78 points	19 contributions
13	Printed papers, <i>hib</i> , agenda – provide links	75 points	15 contributions
14	The public – allow them to participate	74 points	82 contributions
15	Bundestag / EU – improve links	71 points	23 contributions
16	Summarise major/minor interpellations with responses	56 points	14 contributions
17	Video / TV / webcam – expand services	53 points	49 contributions
18	Public – inform the public better	49 points	27 contributions
19	Children / school – more target-group oriented information	47 points	39 contributions
20	Reporting on current events – expand	41 points	19 contributions
21	Bundestag / wider political sphere – create better links	34 points	76 contributions
22	The work of parliament – explain it better	30 points	81 contributions
23	New technical features (RSS, MP3...) – add	26 points	38 contributions
24	Comments – on politics	25 points	62 contributions
25	<i>hib</i> (Bundestag news service) – implement changes	24 points	44 contributions
26	Comments – general	18 points	68 contributions
27	Offer additional languages (as well as English, French)	13 points	8 contributions
28	Layout (photos, images, font) – change	11 points	15 contributions
29	Well done!	8 points	26 contributions

For point 1: All the relevant items that show how much money members of parliament receive have been grouped together and placed on the website as a topical feature.

For point 2: Direct access from the website to the databases and the document server is planned. This will be implemented in the next 'minor' restructuring.

For points 3 and 4: The Bundestag's databases and hence, also, the GESTA information system showing the progress of legislation are currently being modified with the intention of making a more user-friendly version available. However, this will take approximately another three months. The databases are stored on mainframe computers. Consequently, implementation for the internet will require somewhat more work.

For point 5: The committees provide the information themselves and put it online via a content management system. Depending on the workload in the committees it can be difficult to put new information into the system. However, we will write to the committees again and ask them to provide more current information.

For points 6 and 7: Here the Bundestag can only provide official information such as the data from the Official Handbook, part I (biographies) and part II (information that must be disclosed by law). Additional information about members of parliament can be found on their private website(s). We also offer a page with links to the private web pages of the members of parliament.

It is also possible to get in direct contact with members of parliament via their private web pages. The Bundestag is only able to provide direct contact via online conferences, forums or e-mail.

For point 8: The search functions will be improved in the near future. We are currently testing various search engines. As well as a general search we will also offer the capability to search individual areas separately.

For point 9: At <http://www.bundestag.de/parlament/geschichte/index.html> we take a look back over the history of the parliament and of elections. Historical information about the Bundestag building can be found under Architecture and Art.

For point 10: We already offer in the internet all the active information services that the Bundestag has at its disposal.

For point 11: In the last restructuring we made efforts to integrate the data in such a way that it is easy to find. There are still a number of points that are in need of improvement. We are working on them.

For point 12: It is not intended to link the Bundestag with the Bundesrat's web offerings. In the legislative process, the databases of the Bundestag are linked to the Bundesrat printed papers.

For point 13: We also consider this area to be very important. We are working to do exactly this. In the foreseeable future we will also have implemented the linking of these items.

For point 14: This is a difficult point. Participation means citizens 'taking part'. This is not provided in any legislative process. In the e-parliament arena we can ask citizens their opinion and so allow them to have their say. But the ultimate decision is a matter for the members of parliament. Citizens will soon be given the option of submitting petitions online.

For point 15: In the 'minor' restructuring mentioned above, a 'Europe' section will be included once again.

For point 16: We have forwarded this request to the database engineers. We have suggested that this facility should be included the next time the databases are set up.

For point 17: We broadcast all plenary sessions live, uncommented and in their full length in the internet. If committee meetings take place at a time when no plenary session is taking place, these are also broadcast live. The parliament channel broadcasts 24 hours a day and everything is also broadcast as web TV. An expanded video on demand service provides access to all material broadcast from the Bundestag. This includes special events and in-house productions by the Bundestag.

For point 18: We inform the public about all activities that take place in the Bundestag. We offer a transparent parliament. Alongside web TV transmission (webcasting), the minutes of plenary proceedings can be viewed even while the session is still in progress. All printed papers and minutes of plenary proceedings can be accessed as PDF files. In addition, access is provided to all of the Bundestag's databases, the subject and speakers' indexes and the GESTA information system. It is also possible to sign up to four mailing lists to receive, for example, the latest *hib* announcements or press releases.

For point 19: Starting on 1 March 2005 a survey for children will take place at www.kindercampus.de Following the evaluation of this survey, a decision will be taken in conjunction with the Bundestag's Commission on Children's Concerns as to what kind of web content should be made available for children. For young people, the Bundestag offers a youth forum at www.mitmischen.de The 'School' area of the site is being revised with the intention of providing a greater variety of teaching material.

For point 20: As we carry out PR activities for the Bundestag, we can only relate our reporting on current events to the Bundestag. The agenda is constantly updated and amended. Printed papers and minutes are put online on an ongoing basis. The *hib* message service provides news about committee work. But we are making efforts to provide information even more quickly and thoroughly concerning current legislative projects.

For point 21: The Bundestag's wider political sphere consists of the political parties and the members of parliament. Links are provided to their web pages and incorporated into the Bundestag's web presence.

For point 22: We will produce a section called 'The German Bundestag: Functions and procedures' and make this available in the foreseeable future.

For point 23: We intend to provide RSS in the foreseeable future.

For points 24 and 26: It is not our task to comment on political matters. We refer to the newspaper 'Das Parlament' (www.das-parlament.de) and the magazine 'Blickpunkt' (www.blickpunkt-bundestag.de).

For point 25: '*hib*' stands for '*Heute im Bundestag*' ('today in the Bundestag'). The *hib* editorial team reports from the committee meetings and thereby provides information on the outcomes of sessions that are not open to the public. *hib* reports on legislative projects and the activities of the committees. Here there are no changes that the web development team can implement.

For point 27: An analysis of our log files has shown that very few users access our foreign language areas. Consequently we will develop the current areas to provide interesting static web content. We do not see any need to offer additional languages.

For point 28: The majority of our users are happy with our layout and the fonts we use are barrier-free in line with the provisions of the Barrier-free information technology ordinance (*Barrierefreie Informationstechnik-Verordnung, BITV*). In general we are making efforts to introduce some variety into our website with photos and graphics. However, we don't want to overdo it and only be offering picture pages in the internet.

For point 29: This is the point that pleases us the most. We try hard to continue to satisfy our 'customers', i.e. the users of our website.