

DEMOS

2025 REVIEW



POLLY CURTIS

Chief Executive, Demos

I wanted to share a little update from me at the end of what has been a huge year for the team at Demos, in an ever more complicated and challenging political context, and to say Happy Christmas and thank you for all the many ways our networks have helped us this year.

A year of democratic innovation...

This year the team has made incredible strides in designing and delivering more participatory ways of doing democracy. From the **biggest ever trial in local digital democracy in the UK**, with Waves, to new experiments in MPs constituencies to help MPs hear beyond the loudest voices, to deliberative work on planning, tax and now immigration, we are tackling the hardest policy questions by building new partnerships between state and citizens. We are working with central government, combined authorities, local government and MPs to build trust and design better policies. As the year ends, we notice a shift in government and renewed interest in this agenda - at the moment we're developing citizen-informed approaches to BBC governance, Pride in Place roll out, local health plans and digital reforms.

...public service reform...

We launched People Powered Public Service Reform, looking at how the centre can work better to liberate the frontline, building on an agenda that has helped the heart of the government's reform plans. We were delighted that language we championed was reflected in the spending review, that the government has taken forward work on funding public services - from accounting for prevention to Total Place to impact investing. I was particularly pleased to be involved in the launch of the Civil Society Covenant, which focused on the cross sectoral approach needed now. Our plans now focus on cross-cutting issues of how the centre needs to change culturally, in its funding and accountability approach, on digital and, critically, by telling a better story about renewal.

DEMOS

2025 REVIEW

...and digital take-off.

Demos Digital has had an extraordinary year. Starting strong our **AI Parliamentary scheme** saw a cross-party group of MPs (ranging from Dawn Butler to Suella Braverman) gather in Ditchley park for 48 hours in the spring, to deepen their understanding of this technological revolution we are living through.

And we launched the **Epistemic Security Programme**, which is examining the security of our information supply chains. We host a **network** of 50 civil society organisations, in the new year will publish a (frankly terrifying) report which sets out the scenarios for information meltdown, we are doing very local information ecosystems mapping to design interventions to work out ways to secure better information flows for democracy. Our new year plans include the future independence of the BBC, how to deal with Southport-style information crises, future support for local news and what the next generation of AI will add to this mix. This work is proving hugely influential and has been cited by the BBC director general, in developing trust strategies in government, and by global civil society organisations as well as industry experts.

Looking ahead...

Over the course of this year, we have been doing a **strategy refresh** with our team and trustees, led by our chair Dame Julie Mellor. We started from the point that this moment in time is different. There is a mounting democratic emergency caused by a crisis of faith in our democracy and its institutions. The relationships between citizens and the state, the private sector, and between different parts of the citizenry, are breaking down and fuelling this emergency.

Our new mission is to help to upgrade democracy by focusing on the interface between the different actors in a democracy, to improve the trust that underpins those relationships, in order to achieve better outcomes together. We are focused on the practice of democracy rather than the structures or philosophy. To do this we need a new deal for democracy, that asks something of us all, delivers for all citizens and is built through collaboration. Our policy agenda in the course of the next year will form the elements of the new deal to rebuild trust in our shared systems.

DEMOS

2025 REVIEW

What next?

If you had told me a year ago Demos would be in the position it is in now I would have been absolutely over the moon. I am - but in a more pensive way now. The challenges facing democracy now are bigger than ever before. We have an American president dismantling democratic norms and targeting Europe. We have a citizenry that is restless and demanding something different. We have a political mainstream struggling to achieve its purpose. This democratic emergency will present in new and unexpected ways in the coming year.

It feels like 2026 is the year Demos has been building and preparing for.

We are in a position to power ahead on this idea of a new deal to repair the relationship between state and citizen. And for the first time, we have core funding ringfenced for more agile work to respond to the moments of democratic emergency - something that's unusual for think tanks and I think will be critical. Democracy has been eroding over years and decades. But it could unravel in moments and we need to be ready for those tipping points.

I am so proud of the work the Demos team has done this year - led by Miriam Levin, Lucy Bush, Anna Garrod. I am grateful to our trustees and specifically to our chair Dame Julie, who is the most superb chair of the charity. She has led a board that has overseen a remarkable transformation of Demos over eight years - in the new year we begin the recruitment process for her replacement. I hope our networks will help us with the difficult task of finding someone who can match Julie's experience and vision.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this. We really wanted to focus on partnership working in 2025 and I feel like we have rich networks and are part of a determined ecosystem focused on building a better democratic future.

Merry Christmas and happy new year from team Demos!