

# Deliberation Day: An I-School Educational Project

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## Abstract

This poster describes the design and facilitation of a Deliberation Day (D-Day) implemented in an educational setting. The purpose of the D-Day event was to provide an enabling context for new students to explore their capacity to discuss a key informational issue in a public setting, and to experience the benefits and pitfalls of small group work. The informational issue being discussed was the European Court of Justice May 2014 Ruling on the *Right To Be Forgotten*. The preparation and design of the Deliberation Day is presented. Some preliminary findings from the Day are reported relating to three Polls taken before, during, and after students' public deliberations on the Right. Analysis of the poll data identifies a clear shift in opinion throughout the Day, from majority agreement in favor of the Right before discussion to a more diverse and circumspect range of opinions after deliberation.

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years the number of postgraduate students studying Information Management at the Information School University of Sheffield has nearly doubled. Larger class sizes are one of the main consequences of this increase in numbers. In a wish to maintain and improve the student experience a teaching innovation called Deliberation Day (D-Day) was designed and introduced during the Induction Week immediately prior to the first semester of the academic year. D-Day is an idea from political science that builds on the idea of deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2002). In a conventional democratic process a voter may only reflect on issues internally as part of a cognitive decision-making process before voting. In a deliberative approach to the democratic process, members of the public will participate in an external decision-making process and debate the issues with other citizens and experts before voting. In a process that is analogous to public deliberation, there are also good educational reasons for engaging in deliberation. The capacity to articulate and externalize one's views in a public context, where one will typically encounter opposing views, is a key transferable skill and one critical to the non-dogmatic reception and discussion of issues in a classroom context. This poster describes the design and facilitation of a D-Day event implemented in an educational setting. The purpose of D-Day was to provide an enabling context for new students to explore their capacity to discuss a key informational issue in a public setting, and to experience the benefits and pitfalls of small group work. The informational issue being discussed was the European Court of Justice May 2014 Ruling on the *Right To Be Forgotten*. The preparation and design of the Deliberation Day is presented. Some preliminary findings from the Day are reported relating to three Polls taken before, during, and after students' public deliberations on the Right. Analysis of the poll data identifies a clear shift in opinion throughout the Day, from majority agreement in favor of the Right before discussion to a more diverse and circumspect range of opinions after deliberation.

## 2 D-Day: Design and Facilitation

Preparation for D-Day involved the design and facilitation of a number of activities, the purpose of which was to provide an enabling context for students to reflect on their capacity to engage in discussion and small group work. These included choosing the initial topic for students to discuss; the design and implementation of three Polls at the beginning, middle, and end of the Day; the provision of sources of information and knowledge designed to enlarge students' understanding of the Right To be Forgotten; the design of small group work activity during which the issue and these sources would be discussed; the assembling of an expert panel; the training of facilitators; plus the organization of classroom space, the design of registration forms, acquisition of electronic polling equipment, data recorders, and obtaining ethical approval. *Topic.* We chose the recent European Court of Justice Ruling on the *Right To Be Forgotten* as the topic for students to discuss. First, the topic is a controversial one, in the sense of

provoking debate. Second, it is a topic of relevance to each member of the public and to everyday life. Third, it is a topic that with a minimum of understanding, any interested person is able to take up an attitude towards. Fourth the ruling is a topic of relevance to the information management students. A schedule for D-Day is presented in *Figure 1*. Due to timetabling constraints the actual day ran over two half days.

Time	Event
Day 1 (half-day)	
10.45	MSc Information Management degree. Welcome and registration.
11.45	Introduction to the D-Day event and the Right To Be Forgotten.
12.00	D-Day registration and completion of ethics documentation.
12.30	<i>Poll 1</i>
Day 2 (half-day)	
09.30	Introduction to the D-Day event and the Right To Be Forgotten. Main lecture theatre.
09.45	Small group discussion in break out rooms (I)
11.30	Plenary session.
11.50	<i>Poll 2</i>
12.00	Buffet lunch
12.30	Small group discussion in break-out rooms (II)
13.30	<i>Poll 3</i>
13.45	Evaluation
13.55	Prize draw and end of D-Day

Table 1. Deliberation Day (D-Day) Schedule

The Day began with an introduction to the Day from the MSc Information Management Programme Coordinator. This included an introduction to the purpose and structure of the event; including how participation can benefit their degree. Since the event was also a research project, this introduction was followed by an ethics process in which participants were made aware of the purpose of the research project via a participant information sheet and consent form. Registered students were then provided with a printed version of Poll 1 voting form, electronic clickers for displaying the results of Poll 1, plus a brief verbal introduction to the *Right To Be Forgotten* (EU Court of Justice, 2014). The voting form for all polls contained the simple statement: "Do you agree with the right to be forgotten"? With responses indicated on a seven-point scale: strongly agree-agree-slightly agree-neither agree nor disagree-slightly disagree-disagree-strongly disagree. The results from Poll 1 are presented in *Figure 1* in the next section. Following Poll 1 a perspectives sheet was distributed which identified a range of sources of information and knowledge on the Ruling. The purpose of the sheet was to provide an unbiased account of the conditions leading to the Ruling and its consequences for different actors; and in the process enlarge students' understanding of its content. This sheet included background on the definition and scope of personal data, EU data protection law, privacy, business, cultural and academic perspectives on data protection. Students were invited to reflect on these different perspectives and to discuss them in a small group setting. Discussions were tape-recorded with key points and questions listed on a flipchart. Following small group discussion students presented their questions to an expert panel consisting of I-School academic staff with interests and expertise in the area. After having had access to a range of sources of information and knowledge, the students were polled again as to their degree of agreement with the Ruling. The results from Poll 2 are presented in *Figure 2* in the next section. Students were then re-allocated to new groups based on their degree of agreement in Poll 2; with those in agreement or strong agreement with the Ruling placed in the same group, those in disagreement or strong disagreement with the Ruling placed in the same group, and those neither agreeing or disagreeing or in slight agreement or slight disagreement placed in the same group. The purpose of the exercise was to see to what extent similar views were reinforced and become more extreme when people with like-

minded views are placed in the same group. A final poll was then run. The results from Poll 3 are presented in *Figure 3* in the next section.

### 3 Preliminary findings

Table 1 presents the findings from Poll 1. This was a baseline poll to gauge students' opinion on the Right To Be Forgotten' while relatively uninformed about the Ruling and displaying a non-attitude to its content.

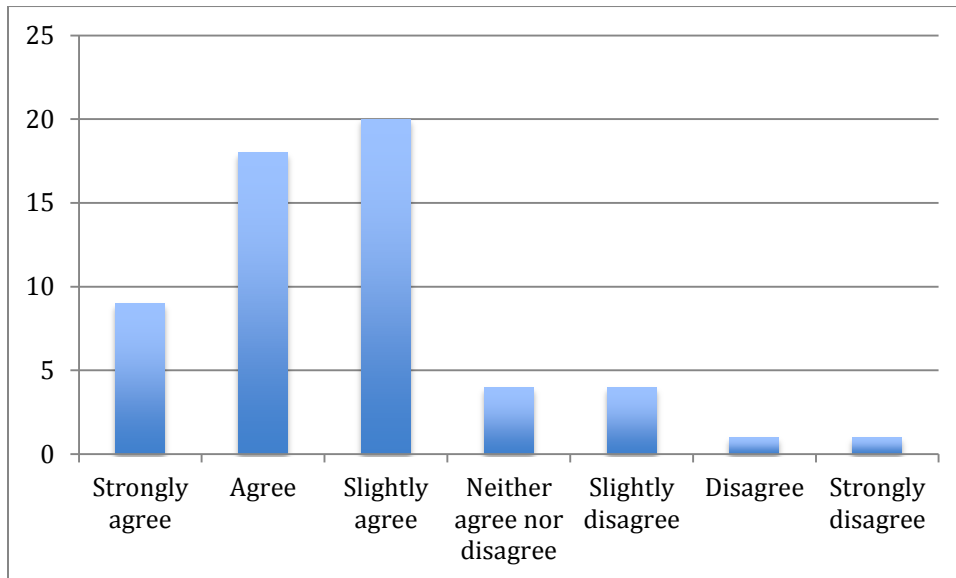


Figure 1. Poll 1 Results

57 students participated in Poll 1. The full range from 1 to 7 was used, and the mean response is 2.7. This initial baseline poll demonstrates a clear tendency within the group in favor of the ruling, with 82% of the class in some degree of agreement with the ruling. *Figure 2* presents the findings of Poll 2 after students have had an opportunity to access further sources of information and knowledge, to read and consider the perspectives sheet, to listen to and discuss the ruling with fellow students, and to ask questions of the Panel. Poll 2 illustrates a significant shift in attitude towards the ruling within the student cohort. A more normal distribution of responses emerges, and the mean response is 3.3. In other words there is overall a shift from agreement to slight agreement, accompanied by greater diversity of opinion. In general students became less dogmatic in their agreement, and demonstrating as a group a more circumspect attitude towards the ruling with some in slight agreement, some neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and some slightly disagreeing with the ruling. Poll 3 confirms the shift in attitude at the cohort level, with a mean response of 3.2. At the same time we see a slight indication of some polarization of views, with the mean response remaining the same, but with 25% of voters also slightly disagreeing, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

### 4 Discussion

The pedagogical aim of D-Day was to provide a discussion context in which students could articulate and externalize their views to others on a key informational issue, and in doing so experience some of the benefits and pitfalls of small group work. The general shift in opinion is evidence of the effect that the combined provision of a range of informational perspectives, group discussion, and expert opinion, can have on the formation and changing of individual views; and in this way an exercise in democracy. Student evaluation data also provides evidence in support of the benefits which students derived from working in small groups. These include: experiencing group discussion as a method; the improvement of listening and group discussion skills; but also the initial formation of friendships, and meeting students from other cultures. The slight indication of some polarization in views at the class level is perhaps indicative of a pitfall of working in groups with like-minded members, where views can become hardened and balkanized.

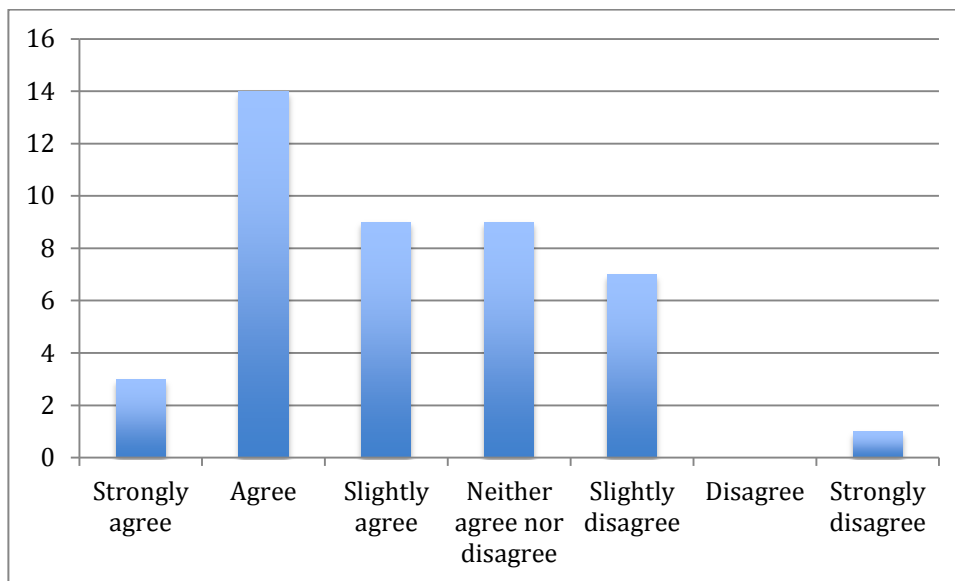


Figure 2. Poll 2 Results

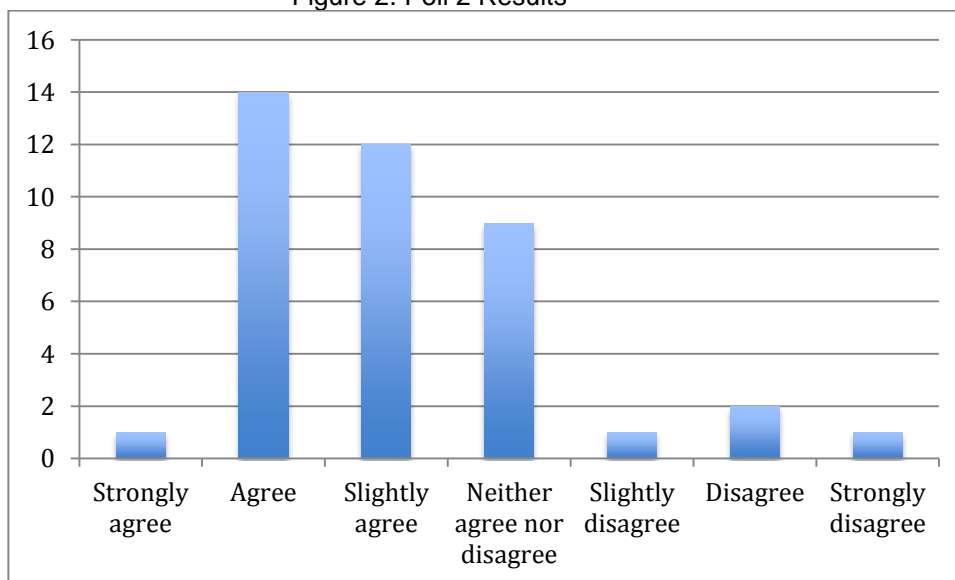


Figure 3. Poll 3 Results

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion D-Day was an effective vehicle for deliberative democracy, and for preparing students for the group work that they will encounter on their degree program. This was accomplished by: the provision and consideration of a range of informational perspectives, deliberative decision-making, and the creation of greater diversity of opinion. Further data analysis will seek to confirm any polarization at the small group level, along with analysis of discourse formats during group discussion. Student evaluation of the Day confirmed that the exercised performed both an educational and a social function.

## 6 References

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