



[Charity Commission official]

September 23rd, 2011

The Charity Commission, Taunton

BY EMAIL

Wiki UK Limited (“WMUK”)- your ref: ME/5005466/C-332018/RTN CC:01720956

Dear [Charity Commission official],

In your email of September 5th to Stone King, you have encouraged us to “make as full a case as possible”, so we hope the length of this letter is excusable, but even so we are only able to deal superficially with many aspects of the issues, given both the size and complexity of the projects and the wealth of independent coverage. Wikipedia alone has been the subject of several full-length books and over 1,300 academic papers and articles. We will address the issues you have asked us about in the order of your email of September 5th. Your queries referred, we thought, to the [Wikimedia projects](#) in general rather than the activities of WMUK in particular, and we have addressed them in that spirit, but would just like to reiterate that WMUK itself does not create, control or own any of the projects or the content on them, as covered in our last submission.

1. **Charitable purpose**

We are glad to see that you think there is scope to consider the activities as “analogous to the provision of a reading room or library”. We would also like to point to iCommons, Registered Charity No. 1111577, whose Memorandum of Association gives (Clause 3) as its purpose: “Facilitating the sharing of scientific, creative and other intellectual works by the general public through research, education, and promotion.” Contributions to the Wikimedia projects are almost always licensed under the Creative Commons licences that iCommons promotes, and their purpose, and perhaps also their position in relation to the US non-profit [Creative Commons](#), seems very similar to that of WMUK. As the Wikimedia projects consist of material licensed under many millions of individual Creative Commons licenses, of which they are probably the largest single users, they can claim to be prominent among the “scientific, creative and other intellectual works” whose facilitation the Commission has

accepted as a charitable purpose. For example, since June 2009 all text added to Wikipedia has been released under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#), as the notice on the edit mode pages states.

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2. **Comparison with libraries**

2.1 We would however like to make some comments on the distinction you draw between the “control” that you say is exercised by libraries and reading rooms over the material they provide to the public, and the comparable situation in the Wikimedia projects. You say that “libraries exercise complete control of the material and information held and distributed”. It is true that with the exception of the copyright libraries, libraries choose what printed works to buy, and may (or may not) attempt to control what online resources are used from their buildings. But libraries only very rarely review or read the “material” they provide, relying mostly on reviews, and buy periodicals on subscription, with only a general idea of what future issues will contain.

2.2 The control of libraries is normally only exercised by the surely rare action of removing a whole work from the shelves or by selective acquisition based on library acquisitions policies or similar. Such policies are analogous to the content control policies operated by Wikipedia (information on which has already been provided to the Charity Commission and see further below). Furthermore, libraries are generally held immune from claims of defamation in regard to their material, their role being limited to “innocent dissemination”, precisely because there is no expectation that they control the material (for example by reading it or checking the accuracy of its contents). Libraries do not normally consider the correction of the many small and large errors inevitably contained within works on their shelves any part of their business. It is some centuries since the manual annotation of the books, or removal of certain pages, was considered a proper part of a librarian’s duties. Nor do libraries insist that the works they contain follow any consistent editorial practices or policies. We would suggest that libraries in fact exercise very little control over their material after their initial selection (which is subject to broad policies, analogous to Wikipedia’s content policies as we have said), and actually rely on the publishers and reviewing press to carry out the control processes for them. The selection of works by non-specialized libraries is also made very largely with financial and space constraints in mind, rather than any thought of controlling the content of the material itself.

- 2.3 In the Wikimedia projects the situation is very different, as all the content visible to users is under active review, and may be adjusted or corrected by any user at any time, or, after a process, a whole article may be removed. Where appropriate the editing history, normally available to view, may be edited to redact edits, for example those containing potentially defamatory material. As we have already explained, a large number of editorial policies are in place, and the material is expected to conform to them. Material that does not conform is removed or otherwise flagged for further editorial attention. We will cover these controls in more detail in section 13.3 below.

3. **Structured arrangement**

- 3.1 The Commission raised in your letter of 5 May 2010 to [WMUK's previous solicitors] (page 4, 2nd bullet point) the issue of the "structured arrangement" of the information, as compared to that in a library. We would argue that crucial factors in the success of the projects have been the consistent layout and design of Wikipedia articles, and pages on other projects, as well as the enormous power of the flexible links, including the redirects which allow several different search terms to take the user straight to one article. In addition the system of categories (at the bottom of the page) allow readers very easily to group and move between articles on similar subjects, which can be collected in several different ways. Links between the projects, especially those between Wikipedia articles and categories of media (mostly images) on Wikimedia Commons, allow very rapid access to often very large groups of images.
- 3.2 The user of a traditional library of printed matter can only navigate between different works in most subjects in a way that is time-consuming and haphazard in comparison. This is especially the case in the humanities, though there are subjects, such as medicine, some parts of science and the law, where sources are relatively and atypically well-organized and cross-referenced, though often only the largest or most specialized libraries will contain sufficient books to take advantage of this, and these will often not be on the open shelves. We would argue that most of the paid-for online resources that libraries provide are also much less easy and flexible to navigate than the Wikimedia projects, mainly because they cannot afford the manpower to do the time-consuming and skilled work of adding links and categories that is done by thousands of volunteers on Wikimedia projects.
- 3.3 The information in the Wikimedia projects is also subject to a wide number of controls and measures to ensure consistent standards of style, format, indexing by categories, relevance and presentation, as well as its quality and accuracy. Some of these issues are covered in later sections, but we will mention here the main [Wikipedia Manual of Style](#), which has many subsidiary guideline pages, covering elements of style by type or subject area, such as the many thousands of words on the subject of [Wikipedia:Naming conventions \(geographic names\)](#).

4. **Public benefit of the Wikimedia projects**

- 4.1 We shall leave our lawyers, Stone King, to relate our broader comments on the public benefit delivered by the WMF projects and WMUK to the Charity Commission's published Guidance on Public Benefit, although our Trustees are aware of and have regard to that Guidance and consider that we meet the public benefit requirements outlined in it.
- 4.2 As well as the Objects of WMUK, which are the subject of separate correspondence, the [mission statement](#) of the WMF is relevant: "The mission of the Wikimedia Foundation is to empower and engage people around the world to collect and develop educational content under a free license or in the public domain, and to disseminate it effectively and globally.
- 4.3 In collaboration with a network of chapters, the Foundation provides the essential infrastructure and an organizational framework for the support and development of multilingual wiki projects and other endeavors which serve this mission. The Foundation will make and keep useful information from its projects available on the Internet free of charge, in perpetuity."
- 4.4 The WMF also has a [vision](#) statement, which is: "Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. That's our commitment."
- 4.5 Turning to the actual achievements, the Wikimedia projects collectively received [393 million unique visitors](#) across the world in the month of July 2011. They are consistently rated amongst the top 10 internet sites by traffic, and are supported worldwide by voluntary donations from individuals which in 2010 totalled [over US \\$16 million](#), and included donations from over 32,000 individuals in the UK. Access to all Wikimedia projects is free to anyone anywhere in the world with an internet connection, or a newer type of mobile phone, and they are especially useful in areas of the world where libraries and bookshops are scarce or expensive by local standards.
- 4.6 The Wikimedia projects are used on the widest scale by all sectors of society, from primary schools to the Houses of Parliament. The information in the projects covers a famously wide range of subjects, and the public benefits accordingly arise in a great variety of ways. We shall mention a few of these but there are many others. We are fortunate in having a very large body of academic studies specifically of Wikipedia (mostly) and the other projects, and we shall refer to and quote from the most relevant of these below, as independent academic papers offer a high standard of evidence. However some aspects of Wikipedia and its effects

have been studied far more than others, and for reasons including access to funding and sample populations, higher education and public health have far more studies than, for example, the benefits of Wikipedia to remote third world communities, where we have not so far been able to find any specific academic studies in English.

5. **Primary and Secondary Education**

5.1 Education at primary and secondary level makes wide use of Wikipedia, in the UK and around the world, and it is especially useful in third world countries where textbooks are not as widely available as in developed countries.

5.2 We attach as Annex 1 a letter from Mr Andrew Cates, CEO of SOS Children, a UK charity (Registered no. 1069204), in which describes the collaboration between SOS Children and WMF and subsequently WMUK in producing the Wikipedia Selection for Schools, a special static version of the English-language Wikipedia containing twenty million words and 34,000 images, equivalent to a twenty volume encyclopaedia, that fits on a single DVD of which some thousands have been distributed to schools in an organized fashion, and can also be freely downloaded to DVD or other formats by any individual. He concludes:

“We estimate there have been some 5 million beneficiaries worldwide of this educational selection, with India the single largest location, and regard the project as very successful in terms of public benefit. The current 2008/9 version is the third produced since 2005, and we plan to release a further update in the future.”

6. **Higher education**

6.1 In the sphere of higher education, we hope you will forgive us if we quote Casper Grathwohl, an American Vice-President of Oxford University Press, at some length; his full article is in Annex 2:

“As Wikipedia has grown, it has become increasingly clear that it functions as a necessary layer in the Internet knowledge system, a layer that was not needed in the analog age. A study carried out by Alison Head and Michael Eisenberg, published in a March 2010 edition of the Web journal First Monday, surveyed university students about their research habits and, in particular, how they begin research projects. Most of the nearly 2,500 students who responded said they consult Wikipedia, but when questioned more deeply, it became clear that they use it for, as one student put it, “pre-research.” In other words, to gain context on a topic, to orient themselves, students start with Wikipedia.”

That makes perfect sense. Through user-generated efforts, Wikipedia is comprehensive, current, and far and away the most trustworthy Web resource of its kind. It is not the bottom layer of authority, nor the top, but in fact the highest layer without formal vetting. In this unique role, it therefore serves as an ideal bridge between the validated and unvalidated Web. ...

My opinion of Wikipedia, like the tool itself, has radically evolved over time. Not only am I now supportive of Wikipedia, but I feel that it can play a vital role in formal educational settings—something that five years ago I never would have imagined saying [writing in 2011]. To go further, while I do agree that teaching information literacy is important, I do not agree with those who argue that the core challenge is to educate students and researchers about how to use Wikipedia. As we have seen, students intuitively understand much of that already.

The key challenge for the scholarly community, in which I include academic publishers such as Oxford University Press, is to work actively with Wikipedia to strengthen its role in "pre-research." We need to build stronger links from its entries to more advanced resources that have been created and maintained by the academy."

["Wikipedia Comes of Age"](#), By Casper Grathwohl, January 7, 2011, The Chronicle Review, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

- 6.2 The academic study Mr Grathwohl refers to made a survey in 2009 of over 2,300 American college students in six colleges, and confirmed that most used Wikipedia for the early stages of "pre-research" or getting a feel for a subject:

"...we found that if a student uses Wikipedia, it is surgically and methodically applied; usually in the very beginning of the research process as a precursor to a more in-depth investigation of a topic.

Wikipedia plays an important role when students are formulating and defining a topic. But when students are in a deep research mode scholarly research, it is library databases, such as JSTOR and PsychINFO, for instance, that students use more frequently than Wikipedia.

All in all, Wikipedia has a unique information utility. We define information utility in terms of how useful a resource is to students, based on their needs, standards, and expectations [21].

Wikipedia's information utility is tied to four Cs it delivers — currency, coverage, comprehensibility, and convenience.

It is Wikipedia's hyper currency combined with a sheer range of coverage that is brief and easy to understand and access that makes Wikipedia useful and distinct from so many other sources (e.g., Encyclopedia Britannica, both the online and offline versions) [22].

On any given day, Wikipedia’s breadth of coverage is something that was unfathomable a short time ago.”

“Discussion” section in, “ [How today’s college students use Wikipedia for course-related research](#)”, by Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg. First Monday, Volume 15, Number 3 - 1 March 2010.

7. **Popular culture**

The range of information covered in Wikipedia is indeed remarkable, with 3,750,418 articles in the English language version, compared to ["Over 65,000 Articles"](#) in the 32 volume printed *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Wikipedia is often associated in the popular mind especially with its unrivalled coverage of “popular culture”, and though the proportion of entries on these topics is relatively small, they are very popular with users, and often cover areas that printed books only catch up with after a considerable time delay. Wikipedia articles on current topics in these areas are therefore of necessity largely or entirely sourced from newspapers, magazines and online sources. We would argue that applying a consistent encyclopaedic format and approach, subject to Wikipedia’s editing policies such as neutrality and verifiability, to such material, can play an important role in introducing the mostly young readership of such material to the concepts that underlie serious reference material, which they will not find in the alternative material available to them on the same topic.

8. **Cultural heritage - as a library or archive resource**

8.1 Although Wikipedia, the best known Wikimedia project, consists of articles mostly newly written for the site, with some still in whole or part reproduced from public domain sources, other projects include large amounts of material that is essentially unaltered and originates somewhere else. This is especially the case for the Wikimedia Commons for media and Wikisource for texts.

8.2 [Wikimedia Commons](#), which unlike Wikipedia exists only in a single version using English as a lingua franca (but also many translations into other languages), stores media, the great majority of which are photographs, although film clips, music and other sound recordings, and other media are also included. It has over 11 million items. The great majority of all images, and film and sound extracts, used on Wikipedia and other projects are merely taken from (technically “transcluded from”) Commons, which actually hosts the files. The material on Commons includes a number of large-scale releases or “donations” from museums and archives that are, as online collections, only available on Commons. Often this material is large collections of digitized old photographs, of which the institutions retain the physical original prints or negatives. These are usually described internally as “donations” of material, and we will do so below, but the term is not strictly correct, as the material is

released on open source licenses for WMF to host online, but WMF is transferred no IP rights.

- 8.3 To generalize, the institutions concerned had digitized or were prepared to digitize the material, but realized that releasing it (in digital form) to Wikimedia projects to host was cheaper for them and would give the material wider exposure to a global and local public than hosting it on their own sites, and thus increase the public benefit. The commitment of the WMF Mission statement, quoted above, that “The Foundation will make and keep useful information from its projects available on the Internet free of charge, in perpetuity” is attractive to institutions.
- 8.4 Among the largest donations are those from the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) , which gave [100,000 photographs](#) in 2008, saying this would make public access easier, and the Tropenmuseum, the Dutch national anthropological museum in Amsterdam, which released [over 45,000 items](#), mostly photographs from Indonesia and elsewhere in the Dutch colonial period. Wikimedian volunteers are working to restore some image files, and the Indonesian chapter is working to expand relevant articles in local languages. A collaboration with the National Archives and Records Administration in the US only began to work in July 2011 and has already put online over 100,000 photographs, many of documents, but including for example [over 200 landscape photographs by Ansell Adams](#) for the Department of the Interior. Wikisource are also heavily involved in this collaboration, putting the text of documents online, sometimes the same documents that have images on Commons.
- 8.5 Other donations include several from provincial museums in France, Australia and elsewhere, typically historical photographs of the area, and [over 200 selected photographs](#) from the Novosti press agency in Russia of World War II and the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. Other donations may be much smaller, as with, in the UK, the release by the Victoria & Albert Museum of images of a specific object, [Tipu's Tiger](#), or the release of [64 images by the Mary Rose Trust](#). As in these examples, such donations are usually negotiated or coordinated by the local Wikimedia chapter, and although there have not yet been any very large donations in the UK, WMUK has been and is involved in several discussions with national and regional institutions on the subject.
- 8.6 “[Wikisource: the Free Library](#), to use the full name, is a project which puts online published and unpublished out of copyright texts, from poetry to unpublished correspondence from archives. A good deal of the material is either unobtainable by the public anywhere else except for the library or archive holding the original, or is only found in old and rare books, which if digitized at all are often only available in the form of photoscans or machine-read text of the original pages on sites such as Project Gutenberg. Instead Wikisource puts

corrected, and where necessary edited, texts online, together with scans of the source and sometimes an accompanying apparatus including commentary.

8.7 Wikisource certainly does not dominate its online sector to the extent that Wikipedia does, but it has particular advantages which add to its public benefit. As [the abstract](#) of an academic paper in 2010 explains, Wikisource “improves upon the shortcomings of existing open access repositories by bringing source texts and commentary together in a single place, with additional contextual materials hosted on other Wikimedia Foundation sites just a click away. These features of Wikisource, if more widely adopted, may improve academic discourse by highlighting conceptual interconnections among works, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and reducing the competitive advantages of proprietary, closed-access legal information services.” Another important advantage is that the texts can be cut and pasted or otherwise captured as text by users, and used elsewhere, something that is often not possible with other online textual resources, such as Google books, and those using PDFs or photographs for example.

9. **Cultural heritage – public outreach**

9.1 WMUK’s last submission mentioned several of the collaborations with public institutions that WMUK is undertaking, especially with “GLAM” (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) institutions. For the institutions the benefits of these are the promotion of public interest in, and understanding of, their collections.

9.2 Our ongoing collaboration with the British Museum was mentioned in their Annual Review for 2010-11 under the heading “Widening engagement online”, and noted that “The BM was the first institution globally to host a Wikipedian-in-residence. Articles such as Wikipedia’s on the [Rosetta Stone](#) are viewed five times more often than the BM’s own, and the site is one of the largest sources of referrals to the BM website” [Review 2010-11, p.37](#) The success of the British Museum project attracted a great deal of attention in the GLAM world, and as a result WMUK are now collaborating with a number of national and regional institutions.

9.3 With the Victoria & Albert Museum the emphasis was on increasing translations into languages other than English, especially Indian ones; WMF is opening an office in India to support the growing participation there in Wikimedia projects, and WMUK is keen to support this both in the sub-continent and to involve East Asian communities in the UK. In the Derby Museum and Art Gallery, WMUK pioneered the very new field of [QR codes](#) in museums, allowing visitors to see on their mobile phone the Wikipedia article for the object they are viewing in their own language, where such a version exists. The number of objects in the museum with QR codes labels beside them is currently 120 and, after a drive for translations, the corresponding Wikipedia articles exist in a total of some 1,250 language versions.

9.4 Very recently, from 12 September, The National Archives in Kew in collaboration with WMUK have started to test QR code labels on a number of the exhibits in their museum displays, with links to the Wikipedia articles on “Domesday Book, muniment, Million Lottery, Grant of Arms, Valor Ecclesiasticus, Mervyn Peake, United States Declaration of Independence, William Joyce, Chartism, Emma, Lady Hamilton, King James Bible and QR code.” [Project page](#)
[Government news press release](#)

9.5 Other institutions working with WMUK to promote information and outreach about, and open online access to, their collections include the British Library, Science Museum, Wellcome Trust, Historic Royal Palaces, Royal Society, Museums Galleries Scotland, and the National Railway Museum.

10. **Public health**

10.1 Although the projects are clear that they should never be used in place of professional medical advice, there is a very wide coverage of medical topics, which has proved very beneficial, even life-saving, to many readers. The Wikipedia guideline [on writing medical articles](#) says, amongst much else: “Do not include dose, titration or pricing information except when they are extensively discussed by secondary sources, or necessary for the discussion in the article. Wikipedia is not an instruction manual or textbook and should not include instructions, advice (legal, medical or otherwise) or “how-to”s; see [WP:NOTHOWTO](#), and the [Wikipedia:Medical disclaimer](#)”; this last in turn includes: “Nothing on Wikipedia.org or included as part of any project of Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., should be construed as an attempt to offer or render a medical opinion or otherwise engage in the practice of medicine.”

10.2 Although “official” online coverage of public health issue has improved very considerably in recent years, perhaps especially in the UK, many users still find material on Wikipedia easier to read, and with better links to scientific papers, than the alternatives.

10.3 As for accuracy, a large survey of the membership of the American Society of Toxicologists in 2009 asked them to “indicate how accurately you feel each of these organizations/media sources portrays chemical risks to human health”, choosing between [six statements](#). The survey showed that:

“Over 80 percent see America’s leading newspapers, news magazines, and health magazines as overstating chemical risk, and the proportion rises above 90 percent for both broadcast and cable television networks.

New media trumps old

In perhaps the most surprising finding in the entire study, all these national media outlets are easily eclipsed by two representatives of “new media” – WebMD and Wikipedia. WebMD is the only news source whose coverage of chemical risk is regarded as accurate by a majority (56 percent) of toxicologists, closely followed by Wikipedia’s 45 percent accuracy rating. By contrast, only 15 percent describe as accurate the portrayals of chemical risk found in the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal. The preference for Wikipedia in particular seems like an indictment of professional journalism, since anyone can contribute to this site.”

- 10.4 In the same survey Wikipedia was also rated more highly than the US government “Environmental Protection Agency, which is rated as overstating risk by 41 percent, accurately stating risk by 40 percent, and understating risk by 19 percent”.

[Are chemicals killing us?](#) By S. Robert Lichter, Ph.D, *Journal of Oncology Practice* May 21, 2009; A groundbreaking study conducted by STAS, and The Center for Health and Risk Communication at George Mason University, shows how experts view the risks of common chemicals - and that the media are overstating risk

- 10.5 Another study published in the American [Journal of Oncology Practice](#) in 2011 compared Wikipedia’s coverage of “five common and five uncommon cancers” with that in the National Cancer Institute’s “Physician Data Query” (“PDQ”) online cancer database. The study found that although Wikipedia “had similar accuracy and depth as {sic} the professionally edited database, it was significantly less readable”, as measured by machine-read readability indices.

Malolan S. Rajagopalan, Vineet K. Khanna, Yaacov Leiter, Meghan Stott, Timothy N. Showalter, Adam P. Dicker, and Yaacov R. Lawrence (2011). Patient-Oriented Cancer Information on the Internet: A Comparison of Wikipedia and a Professionally Maintained Database. "Journal of Oncology Practice" 7(5). [PDF](#)

- 10.6 In April 2008 the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry submitted a [Memorandum](#) to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology which contained the following: “Genomics, genetics, pharmacogenomics and pharmacogenetics

The terms genetics and genomics are often used inter-changeably, even amongst academics and regulators. Useful definitions can be found under ICH[11]. Wikipedia has more detailed explanations of the underlying science.” and then defined in a few words each of the four terms in the header, with a footnote giving the address of the Wikipedia article on each term.

- 10.7 A study in 2010 by Professor [Carol Haigh](#) of the School of Nursing at Manchester Metropolitan University is described in its [abstract](#):

“Although a number of disciplines have accepted that Wikipedia can be viewed as an accurate and legitimate evidence source nurse educators tend to view Wikipedia with a degree of suspicion. The

purpose of this paper is to carry out an exploratory study of health and health related content on a sample of Wikipedia site with the overall intention of assessing the quality of their source and supporting information.

A 10% sample of health related Wikipedia entries were evaluated, with a total of 2598 references assessed. In total 1473 (56%) of the references cited on the Wikipedia pages reviewed could be argued to come from clearly identifiable reputable sources. This translates to a mean number of reputable sources of $M = 29$ per Wikipedia entry.

The quality of the evidence taken obtained from the 2500 plus references from over 50 Wikipedia pages was of sufficiently sound quality to suggest that, for health related entries, Wikipedia is appropriate for use by nursing students."

"Wikipedia as an evidence source for nursing and healthcare students", by Carol A. Haigh, *Nurse Education Today*, Volume 31, Issue 2, February 2011, Pages 135-139

- 10.8 An article published in 2011 by 19 medical professionals and academics who are also Wikipedians writing on medical subjects covers many of the issues addressed in this letter, with a specifically medical perspective: "This paper, written by members of the WikiProject Medicine, discusses the intricacies, strengths, and weaknesses of Wikipedia as a source of health information and compares it with other medical wikis."

[Wikipedia: A Key Tool for Global Public Health Promotion](#), by James M Heilman et al., *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, Vol 13, no 1 (2011)

- 10.9 Among the health-related institutions who have hosted training sessions for Wikipedia editing to encourage contributions from their own staff or members, or others professionally involved in the field, are the [National Institutes of Health](#) in the US and [Cancer Research UK](#) .

- 10.10 The statements collected as a part of the annual Wikimedia Fundraiser contain a great variety of [statements from individual](#) donors on how Wikipedia has helped them, including several in relation to health issues, a sample of which are given in Annex 4.

11. **Public life**

- 11.1 Examples of the public benefit the projects bring to public life are found in parliamentary proceedings, as follows:

Scottish Parliament: Petitions Process Inquiry (23 September 2009)

Michael McMahon: ...so it is disappointing that, by 2008, Westminster had established a dedicated YouTube channel and was experimenting with Twitter before the Public Petitions Committee had generated its own blog and Wikipedia page. That blog and page will now permit greater interaction between the committee, petitioners and interested members of the public and are welcome additions to the petitions process. We must acknowledge that, even with our best efforts so far, there remains a gulf between the Parliament and the public. .. The report and the implementation of its recommendations will ensure that the gap between the public and the political system will close further and I thank the committee for bringing the report to our attention.

[Scottish Parliament record 23 Sept. 2009_col19847](#)

House of Lords: National Security Strategy — Debate (4 February 2010)

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots: ...curiosity or awareness of the problem, and I think that there is a great deal more to be done in that regard. The scale of attacks and their sophistication are quite staggering. If you go on to Wikipedia—that essential support for a Back-Bench Member of your Lordships' House so far as research is concerned—you will find listed what are called botnets, which are collections of autonomous...

[Hansard 4 Feb 2010 : Column 360](#)

- 11.2 The website of the Houses of Parliament records (among its current 238 mentions of Wikipedia) several suggestions in committee that the website should add a wiki, perhaps using WMF's MediaWiki software, although a House of Lords report in 2006 noted ([Annex, right at the end](#)) that this was "Probably not necessary—wikipedia covers Parliament; other tools outlined above provide similar opportunities." The Parliamentary Archives have several times reported that keeping relevant Wikipedia entries on the Houses accurate and up to date was part of their functions (eg Annual Review, 2006-2007, p.22).
- 11.3 A study, "Wikipedia as a Data Source for Political Scientists: Accuracy and Completeness of Coverage", appeared in 2011 in the journal *PS: Political Science & Politics*, published by the American Political Science Association. The author concluded: "'My finding is optimistic for the health of our country... It doesn't have to be hard to learn about the political process, or your political candidates."
- 11.4 When Brown conducted the study, Wikipedia contained articles for 230 of the 246 major-party candidates that ran for governor between 1998 and 2008. Brown found that all of the verifiable biographical information in those articles was completely accurate."

[Press release Brigham Young University](#), April 14, 2011, referring to: "Wikipedia as a Data Source for Political Scientists: Accuracy and Completeness of Coverage" by Adam R. Brown, *PS: Political Science & Politics* (2011), 44: 339-343, [abstract](#)
- 11.5 Lord Leach of Fairford expressed a similar opinion in the House of Lords in 2008:

“Lord Leach of Fairford: I thank the noble Lord for making exactly the point in the context of the Swiss about why referendums are such a good thing. Although they are not in the EU, the Swiss become so well informed that when asked questions about the EU they happen to know more about them than people in the countries that are already members. That is exactly the point I am making.

Dicey was a great believer in referendums, because they put nation above party and focus objectively on a single big question—he presumably had in mind Irish home rule. John Locke said:

“If the thing be of great consequence”

I think this thing is of great consequence—

“the proper umpire should be the Body of the People”.

If that was a good idea then, it must be an even better one today when there is unprecedented access to information through Wikipedia and the net. So please may we be spared talk about voters being too ignorant to take the right decision?”

Hansard, 20 May 2008. Columns 1379-80

12. **MediaWiki software for the public benefit**

12.1 As described in our last submission, the WMF has developed the MediaWiki open source wiki software which as well as being used in the Wikimedia projects is available for free download and use by anybody. Continued development of MediaWiki is funded by WMF, and represented 17.9% of their total expenditure in the year to June 2010. MediaWiki is used by a large number of organizations and individuals, including many charities and public organizations (the total number is unknown, as no formal registration as a user is required). Incomplete lists, sorted by language and other criteria, of sites that use the software, [can be found here](#).

12.2 The style and form of the sites using MediaWiki software varies greatly; for example whether any or all pages are editable by the public is controlled by the site owner, and many sites are private and can only be accessed at all by password. Some sites make use of all the possibilities for user-generated content, discussion pages etc, while others are not editable by the public, and choose the software for the ease of navigation, linking and other features. Many sites are a mixture. Sites run on MediaWiki should be identifiable by a box with the flower logo and “Powered by MediaWiki” somewhere at the bottom of each page. We will mention a few examples of sites of various types which demonstrate clear public benefit, and the helping of other charities by WMF:

[ConsumerWiki](#), a site of the State of California Department of Consumer Affairs for providing consumer and state services information to the public.

[WikiEducator](#), a wiki-based project with funding mainly from the Commonwealth through its [Commonwealth of Learning](#) IGO, and with which the WMF has been closely involved. Its aims are: “building capacity in the use of Mediawiki and related free software technologies for mass-collaboration in the authoring of free content; developing free content for use in schools, polytechnics, universities, vocational education institutions and informal education settings; facilitating the establishment of community networks and collaboration with existing free content initiatives in education; fostering new technologies that will widen access, improve quality and reduce the cost associated with providing education, primarily through the use of free content.”

The wiki part of HM Government’s [data.gov.uk or Opening up Government](#) site. The reasons for choosing MediaWiki were explained to the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee by Professor [Nigel Shadbolt](#), former Information Advisor to the UK Government, in March 2011:

“[Q102](#) Tim BernersLee and I were involved in setting up what was an agile project within Government, the data.gov.uk site, which is a site where all of the Government’s nonpersonal public data is being catalogued, and that work has continued apace under the Coalition Government too, and partly because we did not know what we could not do or should not do, we simply went in. We had very little resource, but we did have a small group and we specified open source software.

The reason for that was of course it was not going to cost us anything, but more importantly it was not rung about with licences for reuse, but also, one particular piece of software we used was at the base of Wikipedia [MediaWiki], and we knew, therefore, that it had been subject to the most massive range of collective attacks and subversion that you could imagine. So it had been improved and hardened by a large community effort. That is not something you can get with a single supplier perspective. So open source software has a number of merits: it is cheap, it can be easily licensed, and it can be subject to large scale collective improvement, and we think those are really strong reasons why people should be looking at open source solutions.

The other element of that is open standards, and much of this relates to why the web has succeeded as the most successful information structure in history, because that is at the heart of the web. It really took off because many of the original software elements were open source, but they conformed to basic standards about how machines would talk to one another, how they would work out how to exchange content and, indeed, how that content itself was to be expressed. It was not proprietary, it was not a Microsoft product, it was not a CISCO product-it was open and the standards are developed in an open forum.”

In passing, we would also note what would hope is an obvious point: that WMUK operates entirely independently of any national government and does not operate for the purposes of assisting any government fulfil its duties. Like the other examples given, the wiki part of the data.gov.uk web pages illustrates enormous use and value to the general public of MediaWiki software.

[Wikiprogress](#), the “communication tool” for the OECD’s Global Project on “Measuring the Progress of Societies”.

[Appropedia](#), with 31, 784 pages, “the site for collaborative solutions in sustainability, poverty reduction and international development through the use of sound principles and appropriate technology and the sharing of wisdom and project information. Oversight of Appropedia is provided by The Appropedia Foundation, which has a global focus and an international board of directors. It is registered in California as a non-profit organization and has 501(c)(3) (tax-exempt) status.”

[Wikiadvocacy](#), a site for “advocacy” in the American sense of community and support groups, activism and the like. It is “a free, reader-built guide, as well as a community for advocacy. It covers every aspect of founding and growing an advocacy organization from fundraising to detailed explanations of issues, skills, and the elements of creating a registry and samples repository.” It was created by [Genetic Alliance](#), “the world’s leading nonprofit health advocacy organization committed to transforming health through genetics and promoting an environment of openness centered on the health of individuals, families, and communities”, [95% of whose funding](#) comes from US Federal agencies.

[Grand Rapids Public Library Wiki](#) , a typical public service wiki on a smaller scale.

[AcaWiki](#), an example of a charity that apparently exists only to provide a wiki site, which runs on MediaWiki software. AcaWiki is “designed to collect summaries and literature reviews of peer-reviewed academic research, and make them available to the general public. AcaWiki is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with seed funding from the Hewlett Foundation.”

12.3 Finally under this heading, we attach as Annex 3 a letter from Dr [Mark Graham](#), Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, which covers his experience of the public benefit of both MediaWiki and Wikipedia in the developing world, which is his area of research.

13. **Balance of benefits and detriments or harm**

13.1 **Accuracy**

13.1.1 We are aware that the issue of accuracy is an important one for the projects, especially Wikipedia, and a potential detriment. We would firstly suggest that the accuracy of the

information has improved very considerably in the 10 years of Wikipedia's existence, and continues to do so. Several of the independent sources used in this letter refer to this. A range of measures introduced since around 2005 have made it easier to remove vandalism, and the continual process of improvement of articles has removed or improved much inaccurate material.

13.1.2 We accept that, as a result of the "crowdsourcing" model, the level of inaccuracy in Wikipedia is higher than in the best comparable published specialized reference works (assuming these are being used in their most up to date edition). This affects Wikipedia particularly out of all the projects, as though, for example, the information accompanying an image on Wikimedia Commons may be incomplete or inaccurate, the image itself has its own integrity.

13.1.3 We would like to emphasize again that the level of accuracy of Wikipedia has improved enormously since the first years after the project was founded in 2001, and continues to do so. There were step changes in roughly 2005-07, and in the last two years. Like the Guardian, which continued to be the butt of jokes long after editorial software had eliminated its famous typos, we continue to live somewhat under the shadow of earlier problems.

13.1.4 We would also like to comment on the term "vandalism", which is very widely used in relation to Wikipedia, both internally and externally. Vandalism on Wikipedia is defined by [a Wikipedia policy](#) as follows:

"**Vandalism** is any addition, removal, or change of content in a *deliberate* attempt to compromise the integrity of Wikipedia. Examples of typical vandalism are adding irrelevant obscenities and crude humor to a page, illegitimately blanking pages, and inserting patent nonsense into a page."

13.1.5 That this initial definition does not include the deliberate *falsification* of information reflects the realities, as this is far rarer, though it is covered further down. Increasingly sophisticated "bot" programmes now ensure that most obscenity (even if misspelled), repeating characters, page blanking and other crude forms of vandalism are either reverted within seconds by the bot, or highlighted for human checking. The great majority of inaccuracy in Wikipedia is introduced by well-meaning editors who believe what they add to be appropriate. Some inaccuracy is introduced by information that was originally correct becoming incorrect by being outdated, though as we have said above, Wikipedia is in an inherently better position to maintain accuracy here than printed publications, and makes considerable efforts to do.

13.1.6 For example, in the [“Death anomalies” project](#) dates of death in modern biographies are now compared by a computer programme across 14 (currently) of the main language versions of Wikipedia, so that we do not miss the deaths of for example a long retired Spanish politician or Serbian Olympic athlete. These would often not be reported in the English-speaking media, but would be recorded in their own countries; the computer-generated reports show up “anomalies where someone is dead in one language and alive in another”, which can then be fixed manually by volunteers working in the various languages. Accidental or deliberate mistakes or typos are also shown up by the reports.

13.1.7 It may be useful to refer to the remarks of the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, speaking this January in Bristol, [when asked about vandalism](#) (see the “index point” 1.01.59 (2nd icon)). His comments when asked about Wikipedia use by students (at index point 1.09.15) are also relevant to the issues discussed here.

13.1.8 There have been a number of independent studies of the reliability of the information on Wikipedia; many of these are summarized [in this Wikipedia article](#). The most famous is a study by *Nature* in 2005 which asked experts to compare the articles in Wikipedia and *Encyclopædia Britannica* on over 40 mostly scientific topics, and [concluded that](#) “the accuracy of science in Wikipedia is surprisingly good: the number of errors in a typical Wikipedia science article is not substantially more than in Encyclopaedia Britannica”. Similar exercises have been repeated by the press a number of times, some of the varied results [may be found here](#).

13.1.9 An experiment repeated several times is to deliberately insert mistakes into Wikipedia and see what happens. In early 2008 a professor of philosophy inserted plausible “fibs” such as, of Boethius :“It is known that he lost two fingers on his left hand in a childhood accident, although there is no record of how exactly it occurred” into the biographies of 28 philosophers. He found that “About one third to one half of the fibs were corrected within 48 hours”, after which the remainder were removed by the experimenter.

“Early response to false claims in Wikipedia”, by P.D. Magnus, First Monday, Volume 13 Number 9 - 1 September 2008, <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/2115/2027>

13.1.10 In 2007 the magazine PC Pro tried a similar exercise: “two PC Pro operatives introduced deliberate errors into ten entries, ranging from composer Edward Elgar to the GeForce 8 Series to West Ham Utd FC. The errors varied between bleeding obvious and deftly subtle, ... Impressively, all but one of our efforts were thwarted within an hour. So we raised our game. We picked ten more articles for treatment and spread them between five different members of the PC Pro team, so that our IP addresses wouldn't be so easily tracked. We also made our deliberate errors far more subtle than before - changing the launch date of a Centrino chip and the name of Jesse James' mother's first

husband, for example. And to make our errors even harder to detect, we left the edit summaries blank, so there'd be no obvious clues for editors.

Despite our stealth attempts, the vast majority of errors were discovered remarkably quickly. The ridiculously minor Jesse James error was corrected within a minute, and a very slight change to Queen Anne's entry was put right within two. Eight out of the ten errors were corrected within 17 hours. ... The lessons? It seems Wikipedia corrects the vast majority of errors within minutes, but if they're not spotted within the first day the chances of them being corrected dwindle, as you're then relying on someone to spot the mistake while reading the article rather than reviewing the edits."

"How quickly are errors corrected?" by Stuart Andrews, PC Pro, 12 Jul 2007 <http://www.pcpro.co.uk/features/119641/how-quickly-are-errors-corrected>

- 13.1.11 Of course, in traditional media, once an error enters the information, even if it is spotted it can normally only be corrected in an (increasingly rare) erratum slip, or in a subsequent edition, whereas on Wikipedia any reader can normally correct it themselves, or add a note to the talk page pointing it out.
- 13.1.12 Accuracy is especially vital in the biographies of living persons, which Wikipedia could be said to have been slow to recognise before [the John Siegenthaler incident](#) in 2005, when very serious, if wholly implausible, defamatory claims were added to the biography of a retired American journalist, apparently as a "prank", and remained there for some four months before a friend of the subject saw and removed them. After this a new policy on [Biographies of living persons](#) was created, and an evolving array of special measures and campaigns address this specific issue.
- 13.1.13 As reported by Robert Fisk [in The Independent](#), [Taner Akcam](#), a Turkish historian who had outraged nationalist opinion by his open approach to the subject of the Armenian Massacres, was threatened with criminal prosecution in Turkey in January 2007. When he left the country in February, he was detained for a while in Montreal Airport, apparently because of material claiming he was a terrorist added to his Wikipedia biography by Turkish nationalists (and already removed long before), and then also detained by Homeland Security at the American border, perhaps for the same reason.
- 13.1.14 WMUK believe that such material cannot now be added to the biography of a living person without either very reliable sourcing or being rapidly removed. Like many pages liable to vandalism, Mr Ackam's biography is now [indefinitely "semi-protected"](#) so that only established registered users can edit it.

13.1.15 On a further point concerning accuracy, and relevant to a comparison with libraries, Wikipedia maintains the [Wikipedia Reference Desk](#), where individual readers may ask for help in researching topics. [A study](#) published in the *Journal of Documentation* in 2009 concluded that (quoting the abstract): “The study reports that on all three SERVQUAL measures quality of answers produced by the Wikipedia Reference Desk is comparable with that of library reference services. ... The collaborative social reference model matched or outperformed the [dyadic](#) reference interview ...”

13.2 Economic impact

13.2.1 One potential area of harm arising from open access to information resources is the economic impact to commercial providers of similar resources. This may include publishers, journalists, photographers, and creators of internet sites, if their products and services try to meet the exact same need as the Wikimedia resources.

13.2.2 Analogous economic harm can arise from any activity which gives something to the public freely and without discrimination. For example, someone who reads a book for free in their public library might, as a result, not buy the book. WMUK argues that its activities, just like those of a library, 1) serve a wider public benefit that offsets any negative impact on specific commercial activities; and 2) are broadly complementary to commercial activities, rather than competing against them. Although the success of Wikipedia was widely held responsible in the media (for example [this article in the New York Times](#)) for the demise of Microsoft’s Encarta in 2009, Microsoft themselves did not mention Wikipedia.

13.2.3 Because of their distinctive publishing model, Wikimedia resources fulfil a different need from most other information resources. A distinction exists in the literature between "research" and "pre-research" usage of information resources. Professionally vetted resources answer a research need, while Wikipedia facilitates the pre-research process by which readers decide which reference resources to consult.

13.2.4 Wikimedia text resources contain citations or hyperlinks to other sources, whether online, paper, video or in other media. All the content, whether textual or not, is associated with information about its provenance, including any collections from which it has been drawn. Being popular and openly accessible, Wikimedia resources stimulate interest in the cited or linked resources, or in the individuals or collections who have provided content. In some cases, this interest will translate into demand for products and services external to the Wikimedia resources and to WMUK's activities. The British Museum, quoted at 9.2 above, is typical in finding Wikipedia one of the largest sources of “referral” traffic to its own website via links – we believe the figure for the Tate is of the order of 25%.

13.2.5 So any economic harm to specific publishing activities has to be balanced against 1) the benefit of public access to information resources, and 2) greater demand for related publishing activities.

13.3 Control over the facility

13.3.1 The actual direct efforts of WMUK are concerned with promoting, improving and supporting “the facility”; WMUK itself may act to encourage the improvement of the content in a particular subject area, but does not itself directly control the content. However comprehensive controls do exist to ensure that the content of the Wikimedia projects remains consistent with exclusively charitable purposes, some of which we mentioned in our last letter: the policies of Verifiability, Neutrality and No Original Research, as well as the Recent Changes Patrol, which monitors new edits.

There are many other aspects of control, of which we would like to mention a few more:

13.3.2 On Wikipedia there is [Wikipedia:What Wikipedia is not](#), a policy which defines the scope of the encyclopedia by excluding a long list of types of articles. It explains that Wikipedia is not a dictionary, a soapbox or means of promotion, a repository of links, images, or media files, a blog, webspace provider, social network, or memorial site, a directory, manual, guidebook, textbook, or scientific journal, a newspaper, crystal ball (for coverage of unconfirmed plans), or an indiscriminate collection of information, among other things excluded.

13.3.3 Another important method of controlling content is the [Notability policy](#), with its many sub-policies for particular areas. This defines which subjects are appropriate for their own article and which are not, with sub-pages giving more detailed guidelines for areas such as [academics](#), politicians, [athletes](#), companies, films, books and even [numbers](#) (which in the absence of other reasons for notability must be “mathematically interesting” in terms that are defined at length).

13.3.4 These and other policies controlling content are enforced by a number of means, notably the deletion processes by which whole articles, image files, categories and other content are removed from the visible content (“deleted”), usually after a special discussion, of which dozens are launched and concluded [every day](#).

- 13.3.5 The Wikipedia policies on ["Due and undue weight"](#) and [Fringe theories](#) should also be mentioned. These cover how much coverage and prominence it is appropriate to give in articles to different or contested views in a subject, including fringe and minority theories and viewpoints. One example is a theory, supported by papers published by reputable scholarly journals but admitted to be a minority viewpoint, that prehistoric [Venus figurines](#) were formed in the shapes of psychedelic mushrooms.
- 13.3.6 There are also a number of controls on material which does not live up to the basic editorial principles that include Verifiability, Neutrality and No Original Research. Each registered editor (currently about 144,000 of these are active each month) has a "watchlist" of articles that they have previously edited or elected to watch (and not removed from their list). Apart from the general scrutiny given by the Recent Changes Patrol, editors with a more specific interest in an article are aware of changes by means of their watchlist, and very many changes are simply reverted in this way, with an explanation in the "edit summary". In other cases it is more appropriate to enter a discussion on the talk page, which may become very protracted, and spill on to the personal talk pages of several editors, or the ["WikiProjects"](#) within Wikipedia that serve as noticeboards and areas for discussion among editors interested in a particular area.
- 13.3.7 If a consensus is not formed by this stage, or if an editor is unhappy with the consensus, there are more general forums where the matter can be taken, including launching a "request for comment", which will be advertised at a central page. Editors may also request an "uninvolved admin", that is a [Wikipedia Administrator](#) who has not edited the article or taken a stance on the general subject area, to look at the dispute and comment or act. Administrators are [selected](#) by the community and given the ability to perform various actions that ordinary editors are not, including the ability to remove edits from the visible history (for example if they might be defamatory), to likewise delete whole articles, and to block editors from editing Wikipedia. This may be done either by registered account or by ISP account, and for a given period or permanently. There are currently over 1,500 administrators on the English Wikipedia.
- 13.3.8 There is also ["CheckUser"](#) software that enables a small number of selected and vetted volunteers to establish, in many cases, whether two editors are from the same ISP, and often where that ISP is located. This information is mostly used to detect blocked editors who try to return under a different account name.
- 13.3.9 On Wikimedia Commons control and the deletion process is typically concerned with copyright issues, and sometimes obscenity and privacy. The community takes such issues very seriously, although US (currently Florida) law applies to the content, based on the location of the servers. This means, for example, that the projects rely on the decision in

[Bridgeman Art Library v. Corel Corp.](#) (1999) in respect of photographic copies of out of copyright images.

13.3.10 A paper this year has analysed the 55,000 deletions on Wikipedia in 2010 in which administrators permanently removed content from sight (content removed in a normal edit remains accessible in the page history) and found that they were “most often hiding content exhibiting the characteristics of libel, copyright infringements, and privacy violations” and that “Wikipedia seems to be winning the content battle” and that only 0.007% of the page-views seen in 2010 “contained content that has since been redacted”, and that “dangerous content is usually inactive within two minutes, with formal deletion within two hours”, but that suspected copyright violations took longer than the other types.

A.G. West and I. Lee (2011). “What Wikipedia Deletes: Characterizing Dangerous Collaborative Content”. In WikiSym 2011: Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on Wikis. [PDF](#)

13.3.11 In the case of information about living persons or organizations, there is the [OTRS team](#), a special group of trusted volunteers exists who are able to discuss issues directly and confidentially with those with a personal involvement, as for example the subject of a biography, or those who wish to release their copyrights over material or complain that material in copyright has been used without permission. After the identity of their contact has been verified, they are able to handle the matter, and verify any edits they make with an OTRS “ticket” reference, without explaining any private information they have received.

13.3.12 In a [story this month](#), the *New York Times* discusses the common concern that the processes controlling the information on Wikipedia may have gone too far, noting that fringe views and conspiracy theories are rigorously excluded from the main article on the [September 11 attacks](#), though covered in many other articles: “Over the last 10 years, the site has developed elaborate rules and standards, including creating the arbitration committee, a 17-member supreme court of sorts for Wikipedia”.

13.3.13 The *Independent* put it more colourfully [in 2009](#): “To click “edit” to muck in on an entry, or “history” just to examine the palimpsest on which it has been created, is like lopping off the top of an anthill, revealing the extraordinary industry inside. It looks anarchic, but it is governed by a vast array of rules and conventions and manipulated by a hierarchy of editors and administrators, elected to their posts on the basis of their work. They wield significant power to delete revisions and whole articles, and to block users. Every single change to every single article is recorded and can be debated.”

13.3.14 That the restrictions on editing, deletions of material, and insensitive rejection of edits have become a problem that puts off new editors, has been widely accepted within the Wikipedia community, and ways to mitigate this without compromising standards are being widely discussed internally.

13.3.15 [Nicholas Carr](#) is a well-known American author and blogger, and former executive editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, who has been a long-standing critic of Wikipedia (and much of the contemporary computer and internet industry). In July 2006, well before many of the controls mentioned above were introduced, he was already commenting:

“What a disappointing species we are. Stick us in a virgin paradise, and we create great honeycombed bureaucracies, vast bramble-fields of rules and regulations, ornate politburos filled with policymaking politicians, and, above all, tangled webs of power. Freed from history, freed from distance, freed even from our own miserable bodies, we just dig deeper holes in the mire. We fall short of our own expectations.

Witness Wikipedia. For some of us, the popular online encyclopedia has become more interesting as an experiment in emergent bureaucracy than in emergent content. Slashdot today points to Dirk Riehle's fascinating interview with three high-ranking Wikipedians, Angela Beesley, Elisabeth "Elia" Bauer, and Kizu Naoko. They describe Wikipedia's increasingly complex governance structure, from its proliferation of hierarchical roles to its "career paths" to its regulatory committees and processes to its arcane content templates. ... For anyone who still thinks of Wikipedia as a decentralized populist collective, the interview will be particularly enlightening. Wikipedia is beginning to look something like a post-revolutionary Bolshevik Soviet, with an inscrutable central power structure wielding control over a legion of workers.

[“Emergent bureaucracy”](#), by Nicholas Carr, his *Rough Type* blog, July 10, 2006

13.3.16 That the projects “are not seen to be simply representing the views of the users” (your email September 5th) is ensured by the policies of neutrality and verifiability, enforced by the range of controls mentioned. In contentious areas, such as coverage of the Middle East or Climate Change, the aim is to cover fairly the views of both, or all, sides and views, in the light of the treatment found in external reliable sources, without giving undue weight to either side. This balance is certainly not easily obtained in some areas, and these are some of the areas where talk page arguments can reach notorious length, and the other remedies mentioned above have been invoked. After disputes running back for some years, in 2010 [18 editors](#) were “topic-banned”, that is forbidden to edit articles relating to (in this case) Climate change, following [findings](#) of breaches of the rules on editor conduct by the Arbitration Committee. The Arbitration Committee does not take positions on “content disputes” as such, but examines and rules on the conduct of editors involved; the 18 editors came from both sides of the argument. The creation of different articles to express different attitudes to

the same subject, known as "[POV forks](#)" (POV = point of view), is forbidden: "Articles should not be split into multiple articles just so each can advocate a different stance on the subject".

14. **Exercise of trustees' discretion**

- 14.1 As regards the independence of the trustees' (currently directors) decisions, the minutes of the meetings of the directors are [are available on the WMUK website](#), minus "in camera" sensitive sections, which need passwords only the directors have. It should be noted that the minutes are not sent to WMF in the US, who can of course see them online like everyone else, and that they have never asked to see the "in camera" sections and that such a request would normally be refused.
- 14.2 Although there is communication at many levels between the board and membership of WMUK and WMF and its employees, WMUK does not need or seek confirmation or approval from WMF before making decisions, nor has there been pressure from WMF over areas or items of expenditure in the UK. None of the directors are connected to the WMF other than through being on the board of WMUK, and as contributors to the projects. The board has a [Conflict of Interest policy](#) in place.
- 14.3 There have been some arguments, which have tended to align the WMF on one side and the national chapters on the other, with the larger European chapters in the lead, such as Germany, the UK, France and the Netherlands. A proposal by WMF in 2010 to revise the Chapter agreement (which is essentially standard for all chapters) was opposed by most chapters, including WMUK, and the WMF backed down, after much discussion on the "Chapters mailing list", where such discussions are largely conducted, and elsewhere. The matter was discussed, and WMUK's position decided, in WMUK board meetings, but these sections are in the "in camera" sections.
- 14.4 The directors control expenditure carefully and are always mindful of the need to act in accordance with the Objects. Though in future employee and office costs are anticipated to become more significant, at present the charitable expenditure of WMUK, other than administrative costs, is mainly on grants made to WMF, the cost of events, some payments to individuals for work with institutions, and travel costs of individuals (often, but by no means always, members of WMUK) to meetings, events and conferences with charitable purposes. Several examples of such events organized and attended were given in our last letter, so we will not repeat them here.
- 14.5 The grants made to the US are those to which WMUK has committed under its Fundraising Agreement with WMF, plus amounts that WMUK considers best spent on its charitable

purposes by WMF, and which of course currently would otherwise potentially be subject to Corporation Tax if retained by WMUK. WMUK's first permanent full-time staff member, the CEO, has been recruited and will start employment on October 1st 2011, and from 2012 WMUK will have the human resources necessary to organize a fuller programme, which has been a constraint while it has been run almost entirely by volunteer work.

14.6 The grants made to WMF in the US are exclusively for charitable purposes; WMF is a US non-profit under comparable obligations to those in UK law, and its main areas of expenditure are on running the servers that host the projects, software development for the projects, and staffing the WMF office, which serves many vital functions in co-ordinating the projects.

15. **Annexes, testimonials and other supplementary material**

We have provided a number of annexes to this letter containing supplementary material to expand on or support the points made above, including testimonials from those with experience of WMUK's work. We have chosen a small selection that are simply intended to provide a representative picture: we could of course provide the Commission with very much more similar material, if that would be helpful.

We trust that the information now provided is sufficient to help you come to a decision. Thank you for your patience and helpful comments in this matter.

Yours faithfully

Roger Bamkin,

Chairman, Wikimedia UK

Annexes 2 and 4 are at the end of this document file

Annex 1: Letter from Andrew Cates, CEO of SOS Children – PDF Note: Mr Cates is a Wikipedia editor and administrator

Annex 2: Text of "[Wikipedia Comes of Age](#)", By Casper Grathwohl, January 7, 2011, The Chronicle Review, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* - below

Annex 3: Letter from Dr [Mark Graham](#), Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute – PDF

Annex 4: Selection from the [statements from individual](#) donors collected as a part of the annual Wikimedia Fundraiser in 2010; examples mentioning public health issues - below

Annex 5: Letter from [Cory Doctorow](#), author, academic and columnist – PDF

Annex 6: Letter from Steven Hilton, Service Director, Bristol Futures, Bristol City Council – PDF

ANNEX 2

[“Wikipedia Comes of Age”](#), By Casper Grathwohl, January 7, 2011, *The Chronicle Review*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Casper Grathwohl is vice president and publisher of digital and reference content for Oxford University Press.

It seems like a lifetime ago when I would stop into a Barnes and Noble to look up a fact in one of the books in the reference section. Or call a film-buff friend to settle some disagreement about who starred in a movie. But what seems like a lifetime was actually only a short time ago.

The pre-Internet "phone a friend" world that marked those days faded with the rise of the Internet and, more specifically, with the spectacular success of Wikipedia, which marks its 10-year anniversary this month. In the decade since its launch, we have struggled as a culture to keep up with the changes resulting from the enormous paradigm shift Wikipedia has created. But 10 years of perspective is not without its advantages. I would argue that we are now in a position to catch our breath and break old molds to take advantage of Wikipedia's greater potential.

We all acknowledge that the Internet is evolving at a dizzying pace. From the point of view of information delivery, it is fascinating to watch the way in which layers of authority have begun to emerge. That development should come as no surprise—a natural progression in any new knowledge system is for it to divide into layers of information authority. Not all information is created equal. The bottom layers (the most ubiquitous, whose sources are the most ephemeral, and with the least amount of validation) lead to layers with greater dependability, all the way to the highest layers, made up mostly of academic resources maintained and validated by academic publishers that use multiple peer reviews, trained editors, and scholarly reviewers. When the system is effective, the layers serve to reinforce one another through clear pathways that allow queries to move from one layer to another with little resistance.

The rapid evolution of Wikipedia in relation to academic research demonstrates that phenomenon. Not long ago, publishers like myself would groan when someone talked about how Wikipedia was effectively replacing reference publishing, especially for students. But my perspective has changed. As Wikipedia has grown, it has become increasingly clear that it functions as a necessary layer in the Internet knowledge system, a layer that was not needed in the analog age. A study carried out by Alison Head and Michael Eisenberg, published in a March 2010 edition of the Web journal *First Monday*, surveyed university students about their research habits and, in particular, how they begin research projects. Most of the nearly 2,500 students who responded said they consult Wikipedia, but when questioned more deeply, it became clear that they use it for, as one student put it, "pre-research." In other words, to gain context on a topic, to orient themselves, students start with Wikipedia.

That makes perfect sense. Through user-generated efforts, Wikipedia is comprehensive, current, and far and away the most trustworthy Web resource of its kind. It is not the bottom layer of authority, nor the top, but in fact the highest layer without formal vetting. In this unique role, it therefore serves as an ideal bridge between the validated and unvalidated Web.

Some are concerned that students and researchers are confused about the authority of Wikipedia, using it interchangeably with peer-reviewed scholarly material, but I would argue that just the opposite is happening. That such a high percentage of students in the study indicated they do not cite Wikipedia as a formal source, or admit to their professors they use it, confirms that they are very aware of the link it represents in the information-authority chain.

That last fact is critical. For a knowledge system to function effectively, its users must have an intuitive understanding of the layers it contains. Today, when starting a serious research project, students are faced with an exponentially larger store of information than previous generations, and they need new tools to cut through the noise. Intuitively they are using Wikipedia as one of those tools, creating a new layer of information-filtering to help orient them in the early stages of serious research. As a result, Wikipedia's role as a bridge to the next layer of academic resources is growing stronger.

How is that happening? Take the case of a project undertaken by the academic music community. In 2006 a large group of musicologists began discussing, on an academic listserv, their students' use of Wikipedia. One scholar issued a challenge: Wikipedia is where students are starting research, whether we like it or not, so we need to improve its music entries. That call to arms resonated, and music scholars worked hard to improve the

quality of Wikipedia entries and make sure that bibliographies and citations pointed to the most reliable resources. As a result, Oxford University Press experienced a tenfold increase in Wikipedia-referred traffic on its music-research site Grove Music Online. Research that began on Wikipedia led to (the more advanced and peer-validated) Grove Music, for researchers who were going on to do in-depth scholarly work. The rise in Grove traffic alerted me to the music Wikipedia project, but I assume that other such projects that have passed me by yielded similar positive results.

My opinion of Wikipedia, like the tool itself, has radically evolved over time. Not only am I now supportive of Wikipedia, but I feel that it can play a vital role in formal educational settings—something that five years ago I never would have imagined saying. To go further, while I do agree that teaching information literacy is important, I do not agree with those who argue that the core challenge is to educate students and researchers about *how* to use Wikipedia. As we have seen, students intuitively understand much of that already.

The key challenge for the scholarly community, in which I include academic publishers such as Oxford University Press, is to work actively with Wikipedia to strengthen its role in "pre-research." We need to build stronger links from its entries to more advanced resources that have been created and maintained by the academy.

It is not an easy task to overcome the prejudices against Wikipedia in academic circles, but accomplishing that will serve us all and solidify an important new layer of knowledge in the online-information ecosystem. Wikipedia's first decade was marked by its meteoric rise. Let's mark its second decade by its integration into the formal research process.

ANNEX 3

Selection from the [statements from individual](#) donors collected online as a part of the annual Wikimedia Fundraiser in 2010; examples mentioning public health issues:

- 1) "I have a rare chronic disease, [Sheehan's Syndrome](#). Since most doctors never have had a Sheehan's patient I have used your web site information to obtain additional information. Most doctors have read a one line statement in same outdated medical book about Sheehan's Syndrome. And, of course these outdated medical books all state that with replacement medication a Sheehan's individual can lead a, "Normal Life". I belong to an incredible Sheehan's online group and none of us have yet to find a Sheehan's Syndrome person that leads a normal life.

Unfortunately, there is not a sufficient amount of research or information on my disease. I sincerely appreciate Wikipedia's efforts and maintain such a wonderful informative web site."

- 2) "The information Wikipedia provided at our finger tips helped our family navigate through the medical jargon when my nephew's vehicle was struck by a drunk driver. Being able to research and comprehend various parts of the brain allowed us to understand his Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) as well as his many broken bones and nerve damage. It offered an invaluable aid in asking doctors specific question on his injuries.

I had no knowledge of TBI or peroneal nerve before his accident, but after researching Wikipedia, I had gained enough information for doctors to ask me if I had a medical background since my questions on the injuries were very specific. The knowledge I gained allowed me to find the proper treatment for my nephew.

Wikipedia allows people to easily gain knowledge on subjects and make intelligent decisions based on what they've learned. It empowers people."

- 3) "Wikipedia lets me be a more effective advocate for the health care of my elderly mother--being able to read about medical conditions, medications, symptoms, treatments, etc. in clear English, makes me able to ask better questions and feel comfortable that we are considering all options."

- 4) "I teach "brain fitness" classes for institutionalized disabled and older adults. The idea is to keep them thinking, analyzing, discussing, learning, remembering and involved in our changing world. Wikipedia allows me to be responsive to their questions for free. I work for the State of California, and our budget has been slashed so severely that we have no resources at all for lesson planning. It's up to me, the instructor, to find and prepare everything for class with my hourly pay or for free. Wikipedia provides invaluable, up-to-the-minute, verifiable information for free. Thank you!

Also, each time I explain to my students what Wikipedia is, we launch into discussion about the changes in encyclopedias since their youth, the new technology, publishing history, timing and societal expectations for services, communications, and more. My older students are amazed that Wikipedia exists, and very, very grateful that it does! They have learned to ask me to look things up for them and report back next class! :)

If you don't use it, you lose it! You keep us all thinking. I am grateful too! Thank you all--everyone around the world--for contributing to Wikipedia, and to those who started it all!"

- 5) “Whenever somebody says, well, I don't think I know that, in my environment, the person with the fastest data connection is usually the one who utters "Wikipedia!". And out comes the smartphone, and most of the time, even if you go through Google, it is the Wikipedia answer that is one of the first in the results. And it is the one we know to represent the most peer reviewers for any article, and thus many times the most reliable.

And when I tell you this even happens in the E.R., where I work, you know this means something. As we speak, the Wikipedia answer to many medical questions or problems, is one that, even if sometimes not complete, most often reflects true facts and contains valuable basic (and often advanced) information, on which we can rely in special cases or anything we're not used to see everyday. From the bottom of my heart, I say thank you Wikipedia. I'm pretty sure you saved a number of lives...”

- 6) “As a health advocate and writer, I find Wikipedia to be an outstanding source of pretty darned objective information in an area that is otherwise dominated by drug company propaganda and supplement sales literature. It's usually well annotated as well. There is simply no other reference tool as accessible, reliable and comprehensive. By helping us think for ourselves about medicine -- and dealing evenly in its treatment of mainstream and alternative solutions -- I believe Wikipedia is saving lives.”

- 7) “In the fall of 2009 I was diagnosed with Dermatomyositis. DM is an auto immune disease that is rare and physically debilitating with no known cause or cure. Besides the Myositis Association, Wikipedia was the one source I could rely on for complete information about my illness. When I needed to better understand what my physicians were telling me about symptoms or side effects from medication, I went to Wikipedia. The information was straight forward and accurate with references that helped me to better understand what I was dealing with.

Today I am in remission and my outlook is more positive. I will be forever thankful that I had Wikipedia as a resource that helped me through a trying time.”

- 8) “My wife is allergic to Sulphur. She had a cystitis resistant to treatment. She took a lot of Ranitidin and Omeprazol for gastric reflux. Through Wikipedia I could see the structural formula of these antacids [sic] and discovered that all of them have Sulphur. These medicines were suspended and the chronic recurrent cystitis disappeared.”