



# Evidence Counts - Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue - Report

## Introduction

The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre (Sciencewise-ERC) aims to create excellence in public dialogue and to inspire and inform better policy in science and technology by helping policy makers commission and use public dialogue in emerging areas of science and technology. The Sciencewise-ERC is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Sciencewise-ERC provides practical support to policy makers and over the past year has undertaken innovative research into six key strategic issues in public dialogue.

This report is one of a series of six covering research undertaken by Sciencewise-ERC. The research was carried out by Diane Warburton, Sciencewise-ERC Evaluation Manager.

### Others in the series:

- Enabling and Sustaining Citizen Involvement (Diane Beddoes)
- Widening Public Involvement in Dialogue (Pippa Hyam)
- The Use of Experts in Public Dialogue (Suzannah Lansdell)
- Departmental Dialogue Index (Lindsey Colbourne)
- Working with the Media (Melanie Smallman)

Other reports in the series are available at [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

# **EVIDENCE COUNTS: Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue**

**by Diane Warburton**

## **Contents**

1	Introduction .....	3
2	What is value?.....	4
3	Counting the costs .....	5
3.1	Why so little data on costs?.....	8
3.2	What are the costs likely to be? .....	8
3.3	What are the risks? .....	9
4	Understanding the benefits and impacts.....	10
4.1	Measuring the benefits and impacts on public policy .....	11
4.2	Benefits for policy makers .....	13
4.3	Evidence of impacts on policy .....	16
4.4	Benefits for public participants .....	18
4.5	Evidence of impacts on participants.....	20
4.6	Wider benefits and impacts .....	21
4.7	Trust in Government.....	22
5	Do current benefits meet current needs?.....	24
5.1	Public needs and demands .....	24
5.2	Government and policy makers needs.....	26
6	Pause for thought... ..	29
7	Considering measurement .....	29
8	Existing models for measuring the cost effectiveness of engagement.....	31
8.1	Involve on the 'True Costs' of public participation .....	32
8.2	NICE on community engagement .....	32
8.3	NEF Social Return on Investment (SROI).....	32
8.4	Calculating additional impact.....	33
8.5	Environment Agency .....	34
8.6	CLG Impact Assessments.....	36
8.7	Conclusions on existing models .....	36
9	What can be measured? .....	37
9.1	Asking participants about cost effectiveness.....	38
9.2	Relating cost to quality .....	39
9.3	Comparing public dialogue to other approaches.....	40
10	Measuring the quality and success of dialogue.....	42
10.1	Criteria based on the objectives for the dialogue .....	43
10.2	Criteria based on relevant principles of good practice.....	44
10.3	Criteria based on feedback from participants and others .....	45
10.4	Generic criteria from the academic literature.....	47
10.5	What is wrong with the existing criteria? .....	47
11	A framework for evaluating public dialogue.....	52
11.1	Evaluation stage 1 – Before the engagement starts .....	52
	What is 'evaluation of public engagement'? .....	53
	Why evaluate engagement? .....	54
	What to evaluate? .....	55
	How to evaluate? .....	57

11.2	Evaluation stage 2 – At the beginning of the engagement.....	60
	Setting objectives for the engagement: measuring success .....	60
	Measuring quality: agreeing criteria of good practice.....	62
11.3	Evaluation stage 3 – During the engagement .....	66
11.4	Evaluation stage 4 – At the end of the engagement .....	67
	Assessing whether the objectives have been met .....	68
	Assessing whether the good practice/quality criteria have been met .....	68
	Assessing the satisfaction of those involved.....	69
	Assessing the impacts of engagement .....	69
	Measuring costs and benefits to assess cost effectiveness.....	71
	Lessons for the future .....	79
12	Summary, conclusion and next steps.....	80

# EVIDENCE COUNTS: Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue

"Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted" Albert Einstein<sup>1</sup>

A cynic is "A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing"  
Oscar Wilde<sup>2</sup>

## 1 Introduction

Public engagement is the biggest innovation in democratic public policy-making in the UK in the past 50 years. There are now increasingly sophisticated and numerous local and national Government approaches to ensuring that the public has a say on the issues that affect their lives, and understanding about the real value of these activities is growing fast.

People participate in public life in all sorts of ways<sup>3</sup> - as volunteers, as community activists, as members of campaigning organisations, as voters, as protesters, as elected representatives or in setting up alternatives. Some of these activities have been going on for many years, but public participation in national policy development is a new strand in the field, and is growing fast: in 2006 the UK Government (30 departments) carried out 571 separate consultations<sup>4</sup>. Other European countries now look to the UK as the leading edge of this major shift in how the public can engage in how decisions about public policy are made, and what that means for extending democracy and citizenship<sup>5</sup>.

However, in spite of the growing scale of activity on public engagement, there is a sense that the practice and rhetoric over the past decade has outstripped rigorous social science research and scrutiny of the real 'value' of public engagement. This is rapidly changing, as more practical evaluations of engagement activities are completed and more academic research examines and challenges the continually evolving theory and practice. This is particularly the case in relation to public engagement in national policy on science and technology issues, which is the focus of the Sciencewise-ERC programme.

At the same time, there is more pressure than ever to demonstrate the practical value of public engagement, to justify and account fully for the time, effort and public funding invested, including through the increasing number of parliamentary questions on the costs of public engagement from opposition MPs. Methods to assess the wider value of dialogue continue to be developed but, to date, not one of the major national public policy dialogues in the UK has been evaluated in terms of 'costs and benefits'. Indeed, there is currently no consensus that it is possible, or even desirable, to do so: the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in New Economics Foundation (2004) *Social Return on Investment. Valuing what matters*. Findings and recommendations from a pilot study. New Economics Foundation, London.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *The Citizenship Survey* by DCLG ([www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)), and *The Citizen Audit*, led by Professor Paul Whiteley at University of Essex.

<sup>4</sup> Barnett, Julie (2007) *Making Consultation Meaningful ... putting consultation in its place*. University of Surrey, for Defra.

<sup>5</sup> For example, OECD (2009) *Focus on Citizens. Public engagement for better policy and services*. OECD June 2009. ISBN 978-92-64-04886-7: page 33: Positives in the UK include 'consultation genuinely informing policy - government far better at listening'.

pressure to measure brings its own dangers. Also, there are no comprehensively agreed methods of measuring 'quality' in public dialogue, although numerous principles of good practice and different evaluation criteria have been proposed in recent years.

This paper aims to fill these two gaps in current evaluation practice and provide practical guidance on these issues. It reports the findings from a short piece of research to investigate the extent to which it is useful to consider the costs and benefits of public dialogue and, given that conventional methods of calculation (such as cost benefit analysis) do not seem to be appropriate, how that might be done. It also considers the current sets of criteria for success and quality in public engagement, identifies gaps in those, and proposes a new set of criteria. Finally, the paper considers how to relate costs and benefits to quality in ways that will demonstrate 'value', and that will provide a framework for assessing engagement and gathering valuable evidence for the future.

The paper focuses on public dialogue to inform national public policy decisions, as that is the focus for the Sciencewise-ERC programme. Dialogue has a specific meaning in Sciencewise-ERC (e.g. direct face-to-face interaction between the public, policy makers and experts and scientists), but the term is used here more broadly to reflect the ways in which the wider sources used, and findings shown, relate to the wider field of public engagement in policy more generally.

Public engagement theory and practice is still a new field. The ideas offered here are based on literature and practice reviews (see Annex A for a list of references used), numerous practical evaluations (particularly eight substantial evaluations of national public policy by this author, including three Sciencewise-ERC funded projects, and the evaluation of the GM Debate, all also listed in Annex A), as well as preliminary discussions with peers (including at the Sciencewise-ERC workshops in October 2008 and March 2009). However, the findings presented here remain tentative and exploratory. They are far from the last word and are offered as a contribution to the debate.

## 2 What is value?

Considerations of value tend to focus on three aspects:

- The worth, desirability or utility of something
- The ability of the thing to cause an effect or serve a purpose (e.g. nuisance value)
- Principles or standards, linked to judgements of what is important or valuable in life (e.g. value judgements)

All three of these form part of evaluations of public dialogue; this is the 'value' in evaluation.

Evaluations usually take 'audit' approaches (e.g. testing whether the process has met targets, quality standards and stated objectives), or 'learning' approaches (e.g. building in reflection and identifying lessons for future practice), or - more often - both. Either way, evaluation should involve an **assessment of the value** of the process under review and, increasingly, building the evidence base to show that value.

Both audit and learning approaches require the collection of data for analysis, with varying degrees of formality. It may seem that an audit approach would require quantitative data (collecting numbers to allow for measurement and judgement, from tick-box questionnaires etc), and a learning approach more subjective, qualitative data (collecting descriptive data to allow for interpretation from interviews, stories, observation etc)<sup>6</sup>. However, in practice both approaches almost always need both quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources. Quantitative data can tell the evaluator **what** happened (by showing 'how much' and 'how many'), but qualitative data can provide the basis for understanding **why**.

If public engagement is still new, evaluation of public engagement is newer still. It is only relatively recently that formal evaluations have been undertaken of public engagement processes and, even more recently, of outcomes. Evaluation practice and theory continue to develop but there remains a great deal to do. A recent OECD review of public engagement for better public policy and services concludes that evaluation is a key priority for the future, and recognises that "Evaluating the quality of open and inclusive policy making processes and their impacts is a new frontier for most governments. Countries need to pool their efforts to develop appropriate evaluation frameworks, tools and training"<sup>7</sup>. This report is intended to contribute to the development of such frameworks and tools.

In theory, evaluations would collect and consider data on the inputs (costs), risks, outputs (products and activities) and outcomes (results). In practice, however, even the most thorough evaluations of public engagement to date have tended to focus on:

- A description of the process, to capture what actually happened accurately
- Assessment of benefits and impacts and therefore 'value' of process to different audiences (public participants, policy makers, other stakeholders etc)
- What worked and what didn't, leading to lessons for future practice

All of these are essential elements of evaluating engagement, but more is needed. Inputs (costs) and risks have rarely been covered at all in existing evaluations, so this analysis starts there, and then goes on to consider the (usually better understood) benefits and impacts.

### 3 Counting the costs

Of all the information usually collected for evaluations, the most difficult to collect is data on inputs. Data are only very rarely collected internally by commissioning organisations, let alone made available to evaluators, on the costs of public engagement. There is now some information on the financial costs of public engagement processes although, in many cases, stated costs often only include 'external' costs (such as the consultants' fees). Only very rarely are data on 'internal' costs (especially staff time) collected, let alone made available to evaluators.

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<sup>6</sup> Definitions based on Oakley, Peter (1991). *Projects with People. The practice of participation in rural development.* International Labour Office (via Intermediate Technology Publishing, London), and Spencer, L. et al (2003) *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation. A framework for assessing research evidence.* National Centre for Social Research for Cabinet Office, London.

<sup>7</sup> OECD (2009) *Focus on Citizens. Public engagement for better policy and services.* OECD June 2009. ISBN 978-92-64-04886-7

Where internal costs are known in the examples given below, they are clearly identified. Examples of cost data available on engagement projects include:

- **Sciencewise-ERC.** Information is available on the broad overall costs of all the Sciencewise-ERC projects, as part of the case studies produced on each project<sup>8</sup>. For example:
  - The Nanodialogues project cost £240,000 for four different processes over 26 months to explore nanotechnology and upstream engagement, reaching 100 citizens directly
  - The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) project on the use of hybrid embryos for research cost £140,000 for a nine-month process which involved over 3,000 participants
  - The Drugsfutures project to engage the public in the future of brain science, addiction and drugs cost £300,000 for a process of 27 workshops over six months with 727 citizens

These figures are useful as a general guide but are not sufficiently detailed to provide anything more. They are also useful in identifying what seem to be priority questions in assessing value (e.g. financial costs and numbers of people involved). This reflects the interest of policy makers and commissioners in issues of 'size' and 'numbers reached' in dialogue processes (see also Sciencewise-ERC research paper by Pippa Hyam on 'scale'<sup>9</sup>), although it would be quite wrong to simply calculate a 'per participant' cost as any measure of cost effectiveness. Such an assessment would entirely exclude consideration of the depth of involvement, which can radically affect outcomes. These types of considerations have strongly influenced the frameworks for assessing costs and benefits proposed below.

- **Involve's True Costs work**<sup>10</sup>. This work included 15 case studies of participation projects and examined the actual costs and benefits, and the implications and issues arising, and thus provided some data on specific costs (e.g. staff time, administrative costs, events, participants' time etc). It also identified a couple of evaluations of local participatory activities (neighbourhood wardens in Knowsley and community-based service delivery) that have looked at monetising the benefits. These showed, for example:
  - The Humber Estuary project run by English Nature between 2001-2004 cost approximately £167,000, including about £50,000 of staff time per year but not including monetised costs for stakeholder time which one participant estimated at 100-200 days over the period
  - The Clarence Corner project in Torfaen cost £8,000 for two one-off events (one for residents, one for politicians and landowners) with about 50 people at each
  - Citizens' Jury, Halifax, on science policy development, with two jury events, each with 15 participants, plus another 21 meetings over three months, at a

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk) and look at the case studies.

<sup>9</sup> "Up-scaling Public Involvement Processes", Pippa Hyam, available at [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> Involve (2005) *The True Costs of Public Participation*. Full report. Written by Edward Andersson and Diane Warburton. Involve, London. See [www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk) for details, including on the broader work of Involve.

cost of about £100,000 (including payments of £10 per session to jurors for each evening session)

- **Jeff Bishop's Tale of Two Cities**<sup>11</sup>. This case study describes the development of a parking strategy in response to almost identical parking problems in two local authorities. One involved no community engagement at all, and resulted in an enormous and almost wholly negative reaction to the proposals (including protest groups, letters and complaints flooding the engineer's department). After two and a half years, no scheme had been implemented and there had been little progress, even in deciding how to take things forward.

In the other local authority, community consultation was built in from the beginning, before any proposals had been drawn up, and proposals were generated based on community input and then worked through with a group of stakeholders (local groups and organisations and elected members), followed by a targeted consultation process using leaflets and small, very local exhibitions around the detailed options of implementation (where, costs etc). The final decision (by the council committee) was to go ahead with a scheme in the areas where there was public support and that was supported enthusiastically by elected members. The whole thing took less than ten months from start to committee decision. Consultation here saved time and money, achieved a workable solution, avoided the potential for problems later, and started to establish a positive relationship between the authority and the council. However, no specific figures on costs are provided in the case study.

- **The World Bank study**. The World Bank published a study in 1994<sup>12</sup>, which provided a simple classic cost benefit analysis of the costs and benefits, over time, of participatory and non-participatory programmes funded by the Bank. Its findings showed that, overall, participation by beneficiaries was 'the single most important factor in determining overall quality of implementation', and made a significant contribution to project effectiveness, including resulting in lower operational costs such as maintenance. This study did include some specific costs but, given the passage of time, it is not useful to cite them here.
- **Regeneration**. There have been numerous studies of community engagement in regeneration programmes, often by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which do sometimes articulate the cost benefit relationships. However, these are so specific to the circumstances of neighbourhood regeneration programmes at local level, the different mechanisms for involvement there and the aims of those programmes (e.g. crime reduction), that the lessons are not easily transferable to public involvement in national policy decisions.
- **The Environment Agency** has addressed this issue in two main reports<sup>13</sup>. These have calculated some costs for the participation elements of some specific Environment Agency projects. These projects often involved stakeholder as well as public participation activities. The latest work (2008) found only one example of costs being identified, and that data only covered communication costs (e.g. publications). This work did also identify two examples where the estimated costs

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<sup>11</sup> Bishop, Jeff (2000) *A Tale of Two Cities?* Available from [jeff.bishop@bdor.co.uk](mailto:jeff.bishop@bdor.co.uk)

<sup>12</sup> World Bank (1994) *The World Bank and Participation*. World Bank Learning Group on Participatory Development, Operations Department, September 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Colbourne, Lindsey (2008) *Mainstreaming collaboration with communities and stakeholders for FCERM*. Science Report SC060019 Improving Institutional and Social Responses to Flooding. Environment Agency, Bristol, and Petts, Judith and Leach, Barbara (2000) *Evaluating Methods for Public Participation. Literature Review*. Environment Agency R&D Technical Report E135.

of 'troubled engagement' and conventional approaches to communications (i.e. Decide, Announce, Defend) have resulted in costs that would not have been incurred if good engagement had been achieved. Unsurprisingly, these figures are very much 'guesstimates' rather than accurate figures.

### **3.1 Why so little data on costs?**

All these studies have found some useful information on monetary costs, but these examples remain the exception rather than the rule and this data is still extremely difficult to collect. There seem to be nine main reasons for these difficulties:

- Public engagement is still so new to some organisations that they do not have any way of accounting for it separately in their existing budget frameworks and headings
- The engagement is so bound up in the wider policy-making process that it is very difficult to disentangle the specific costs of the engagement processes alone
- Commercial confidentiality - contractors may not be willing to allow information about their costs to be publicly available
- Different types of engagement are often (quite rightly) mixed together over time on a single issue, and it can be difficult to identify specific costs for specific activities (e.g. information materials may be used across a variety of engagement activities on an issue)
- Some costs are almost never included in formal budgets, such as the costs of participant time, beyond any incentives paid; there is an assumption that participant time is 'free'
- A reluctance by some organisations to admit to what they feel are significant costs for an engagement process because they find such costs hard to justify against what they see as intangible benefits
- The amount of time and effort required to identify all the costs of the engagement processes; it may be possible to identify overall budgets and the costs of external contractors relatively easily (subject to the commercial confidentiality problems mentioned above), but it is extremely time-consuming to identify the staff time, proportion of overheads etc given to these processes alone
- Thinking about accounting for the full costs of public engagement rarely starts before budgets are drawn up for commissioning external contractors, at which point budgets may solidify but by which time significant internal planning will have been done and thus a lot of staff time taken, which is not remembered or recorded
- Identifying costs and benefits requires examination of the whole engagement process, not just a few events; this means that the examination has to continue over a very lengthy period in some cases, even where there is a clear link between idea, process, outcomes and policy change

### **3.2 What are the costs likely to be?**

Although the data may be difficult to collect, the types of costs likely to be incurred in planning and delivering public dialogue are relatively well known and can be summarised as follows:

- Staff time and training (e.g. direct, secondments)

- Consultant/contractor time (e.g. delivering processes, evaluation)
- Stakeholder time (e.g. in helping draft materials for public participants)
- Expert time (e.g. input at meetings)
- Participant time (e.g. at meetings, between meetings reading or answering questions)
- Event costs (e.g. meeting rooms, overnight accommodation, refreshments, incentives to participants, travel and other expenses to participants, fees and expenses to experts, facilities such as creches, audio-visual equipment)
- Materials for public participants (e.g. costs of processes to draft and agree materials including with stakeholders, writing, design, print, distribution)
- Publicity and communications (e.g. press and other media work, design and printing of final reports, newsletters, exhibitions etc, during and after the direct work with the public)

### 3.3 What are the risks?

The financial costs of public dialogue are only part of the story. The costs can also include risks, including risks of potentially negative impacts from poor quality processes. These might include the following:

- Dialogue may be seen as generating uncertainty and delays on decisions (sometimes engagement may even be seen as an unwelcome alternative to actually taking decisions) and on delivery of agreed products
- It may be seen as a 'fig leaf', i.e. minimal cover for taking forward what politicians wanted to do anyway, and thus legitimising potentially controversial decisions
- It may be seen as a threat to representative democratic structures (as Government discussed issues directly with the public rather than through their elected representatives), and this may generate opposition (or simply lack of support) from elected representatives
- There are high expectations from those involved, and thus disappointment in terms of actual impacts
- Once engagement has started to happen, removing the access to influence and involvement can be more damaging than never having started
- There may be emotional pressure on staff from managing and/or delivering engagement processes that are new to them; social processes involving face-to-face contact with the public is often outside professional experience and staff can feel unconfident and anxious about doing these things without appropriate support, and may experience hostility
- Dialogue may be seen as a diversion from conventional career paths, especially for scientists and technical specialists whose work does not normally include work with the public

The risks above may apply to any dialogue process. There are also specific risks and potentially negative impacts from 'poor quality' processes, which will only apply where design and/or delivery has failed. The risks and negative impacts of poor engagement might include:

- It may generate opposition
- It may damage the reputation of the sponsor
- There could be capture of the dialogue process by specific interests (e.g. participants, experts, stakeholders), which renders the results less valuable
- Nothing of value emerges, there are no conclusive results, and there is no change or impact
- Decision makers refuse to accept outcomes without explanation

- The dialogue may undermine trust and existing good relationships with the public and stakeholders, and increased disenchantment with Government and political processes and thus further disengagement and 'consultation fatigue'
- The dialogue may be undermined if expert input is seen to have been used to manipulate results and engineered consent by providing the 'best argument'

Risks turn into costs when they actually happen and are not effectively managed, and the latter set of risks will only arise if the process is of poor quality. Any consideration of costs and benefits therefore has to assess the quality of the process, which is covered below.

## 4 Understanding the benefits and impacts

There is significantly more understanding about the benefits and impacts of public dialogue than about costs. Different 'types' of benefits can be identified:

- Added value benefits and unique benefits<sup>14</sup>. Added value benefits are benefits that have come from engagement that would not have been available without them; unique benefits are those which can only be achieved through engagement
- Developmental benefits and instrumental benefits<sup>15</sup>, or what Tim O'Riordan called transformative and instrumental outcomes<sup>16</sup>. Instrumental benefits include legitimacy of decisions or strengthened democracy, and transformative benefits are around learning, capacity building, empowerment

In this paper we have made a distinction that is more practical for evaluators of public dialogue, and considered 'who' benefits and values the impacts (e.g. participants, policy makers). We have therefore identified the benefits and impacts that have been identified by participants and policy makers, and reviewed the academic literature, to develop the lists below. It is also important to note that the benefits and impacts described have resulted from highly effective dialogue processes; not all benefits will be achieved in all types of engagement processes in all circumstances.

There are overlaps between benefits to and impacts on different groups: for example, if participants gain confidence and enthusiasm for future civic participation, it is a benefit to them but also to society as those individuals may become more active citizens who are more willing to take a larger role in democracy and politics.

The impacts of public dialogue are given different weight by different audiences. Evaluations of public dialogue on national policy issues have found that the most important impacts from dialogues have been as follows:

- For **public participants**, the most important impact of dialogue is whether their views are listened to and/or the process makes a difference to policy

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<sup>14</sup> Colbourne, Lindsey (2008) *Mainstreaming collaboration with communities and stakeholders for FCERM*. Science Report SC060019 Improving Institutional and Social Responses to Flooding. Environment Agency, Bristol.

<sup>15</sup> Richardson (1983) quoted in Burton, Paul (2007) *Conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects in measuring the impact of citizen participation in policy making*. Paper to CINEFOGO Conference, Bristol, 14-15 February 2007.

<sup>16</sup> O'Riordan, Tim; Burgess, Jacqueline and Szersynski, Bron (1999) *Deliberative and Inclusionary Processes. A report from two seminars*. CSERGE Working Paper PA99-06, Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment, University of East Anglia.

- For **policy makers**, the most important impact from dialogue is the extent to which it contributed to their policy development processes. In particular, they tend to value gaining **confidence and reassurance in their decision-making** so that decisions can be taken and policy can be moved on (*political* value), and to meet the need for public input as an essential **part of the evidence base** for policy making (*practical* value)

Other outputs and outcomes will also be important to these two (and other) audiences, and will need to be considered in evaluations. The influence on policy is the crucial test for both these audiences in terms of whether the process was worthwhile.

#### 4.1 Measuring the benefits and impacts on public policy

The identification and assessment of benefits of engagement for different audiences has, to date, been achieved through a mix of aspiration (what we would like to see achieved) and evaluation and other practical research (what has been achieved as shown using methods such as questionnaires, observation, interviews etc with those involved). Using both open and closed questions in this research has allowed for hypothetical benefits to be tested and for those involved to identify benefits in their own words.

Measuring impacts is more difficult. There are often long delays after dialogue processes before policy decisions are taken, and even longer before implementation of policy solutions. Also, changes in policy during its development may result from all sorts of influences, of which, the results of public dialogue may be only one. It is therefore very difficult to show direct cause and effect.

However, we can suggest the following as effective ways to identify the impacts on public policy, based on practical experience. Any evaluation of engagement needs to consider whether the process has resulted in:

- Anything **new being added** to public policy proposals
- Anything **being removed** from public policy proposals
- Anything being **raised** in priority in public policy proposals
- Anything being **lowered** in priority in public policy proposals
- **Greater confidence** in specific proposals that were contentious, and thus going ahead
- **Less confidence** in specific proposals that were contentious, and thus **not** going ahead

A clear audit trail to answer these questions is almost never available. However, data to answer these questions can usually be identified from two main sources:

- **Review of documents**, to compare conclusions from public dialogue with the policy proposals that emerge. This only applies where there are direct policy proposals that follow public dialogue (which is far from universal), and where public dialogue comes to clear conclusions (also not universal). Even if both are clear (which is almost never), the links between the two are unlikely to be sufficiently clear to show direct cause and effect.

Where it is possible to show some sort of trail, usually only a very broad assessment of links is possible as public conclusions are usually quite broad and/or reported rather than agreed at the event, except where there is polling, and even that tends to be on the broad questions rather than on specific recommendations. However, some comparisons between dialogue conclusions and policy proposals can sometimes be done.

- **Interviews with policy makers.** The policy-making process in public bodies (including Government) is often mysterious, with the process of finally coming to policy conclusions rarely being made public. Certainly, who decides what and on what basis is rarely spelt out in any detail. Public dialogue results are usually seen as 'part of the evidence' that is taken into account, rather than being addressed directly when policy conclusions are announced.

However, interviews with policy makers can identify where they have been influenced and where things have changed as a result of public dialogue. In addition, interviews with participants can confirm whether there were issues that they felt had been agreed, or had been important, that had then not been taken into account, which can then be followed up with policy makers. In practice, this author has almost never found that participants have identified issues that have not been reflected in feedback reports and/or final policy proposals. As noted above, the processes evaluated and considered in this process are generally high quality, and this sort of response would be expected from that.

The impacts on, and benefits for, policy makers, participants and others identified in the research to date are summarised below. All the findings identified below are based on evidence from the literature review for this study, and on practical evaluations, including of the following five public dialogue processes:

- **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say**, which aimed to involve the public in developing the White Paper on the future of health and social care<sup>17</sup>
- **Research Councils UK process**, which was designed to test public views on priorities for future research on energy issues<sup>18</sup>
- **HFEA process on hybrid embryos**, which brought the public together to discuss the use of hybrid and chimera embryos for research<sup>19</sup>
- **Drugsfutures**, which was the public engagement element of the Academy of Medical Sciences programme to develop national policy recommendations on brain science, addiction and drugs<sup>20</sup>
- **Defra Summit on climate change**, which aimed to gain public input to feed into the Climate Change Bill, and to explore methods of promoting behaviour change to reduce carbon emissions<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Warburton, D. (2006) *Evaluation of Your Health, Your Care, Your Say*. Department of Health, London, August 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Warburton, D. (2008a) *Evaluation of the Research Councils UK public dialogue on UK energy research*. Research Councils UK/Shared Practice, London/Brighton.

<sup>19</sup> Warburton, D. (2007b) *Evaluation of the HFEA public consultation on hybrid and chimera embryos*. Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority/Shared Practice, London/Brighton.

<sup>20</sup> Warburton, D. (2008c) *Evaluation of the Academy of Medical Sciences' Drugsfutures public engagement programme*. Academy of Medical Sciences/Shared Practice, London/Brighton.

<sup>21</sup> Warburton, D. (2008d) *Evaluation of Defra's public engagement process on climate change*. Defra/Shared Practice, London/Brighton.

All these were 'public dialogue' processes as defined and promoted by Sciencewise-ERC: deliberative public engagement processes on national policy issues which provided time and resources to enable participants to meet and discuss the issues and options together and with relevant 'experts', to consider relevant information, and to develop their thinking before coming to a view (see [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk) for more on definitions of public dialogue). The benefits outlined below flow from effective dialogue processes, and will not result from all forms of public engagement at all times.

It is also important to note that the dialogue processes covered by evaluations cited here were all undertaken with a broadly demographically representative sample of the UK population. In addition, evaluation questionnaires were returned by at least 90% of public participants in these cases, and interviews were based on a sample of participants that also provided reasonable demographic coverage. No evaluation results will be completely comprehensive, but the methodologies used for the dialogues and for the evaluations should allow the findings shown below to be seen as relatively robust.

## 4.2 Benefits for policy makers

In evaluations of national policy public dialogue processes, **policy makers** have identified that the process that they took part in achieved the following benefits and impacts. Achievement of any single one of these benefits has been seen as a positive outcome by policy makers; the list should not therefore be seen as a checklist of benefits to be expected in all cases.

Many of these benefits and impacts have also been identified by experts and stakeholders (especially scientists) who have taken part in public dialogue processes in some way. These respondents have most often mentioned the benefits of learning about public dialogue, talking directly to the public about their work and hearing the views of the public first hand.

For policy makers, the benefits have been:

- **Dialogue provides decision and policy makers with greater confidence in public policy making.** This is the most common benefit from dialogue identified by policy makers. It is about '*political*' confidence and includes the engagement providing public accountability and legitimacy for decision making in the context of public bodies having a duty to test what the public think about new policies, and the spending of public money, before final design and implementation of policy solutions.

Confidence here is about the safety and robustness of decisions, and dialogue provides reassurance from having opened up the issues to public challenge, and extended the boundaries of the normal checks and balances of policy development by including the public in that process. It allows for the testing of assumptions about public views and therefore 'sharpens up' policy-makers' own justification for the policy. For example, dialogue has often shown the public to be more liberal (such as on issues of drug legalisation and enforcement), and more interested in even very complex technical and scientific issues, than policy makers expected.

Dialogue also contributes to better public policy making processes in other ways. For example, policy makers have suggested that:

- **Dialogue creates more open and transparent decision-making.** Public dialogue provides opportunities for listening to the public and being 'seen' to listen, and to open up policy making more effectively to public scrutiny. For some policy makers, this is the 'right thing to do' as well as providing more practical benefits. In some cases, of course, there are legal obligations (e.g. under the Aarhus Convention which provides for rights of participation in environmental decision-making).
- **Dialogue provides a focus for better internal relationships in the sponsoring organisation,** as people from across large organisations have to work together in an outward facing activity, having to present a united and coherent picture and having to understand how their work will be seen from the outside.
- Dialogue enables **better risk management,** by having public input on potential risks, including of conflict, at an early enough stage to better manage (or avoid) those risks.
- Dialogue enables **better media management,** as policy makers and politicians can point to *evidence* of public support for a policy position which may be expected to be unpopular.
- **Dialogue creates better policy.** This is also a very common benefit identified by policy makers. It is about the 'practical' value of dialogue in terms of developing the content of public policy. Dialogue can provide policy makers with access to the knowledge, experience, views, priorities and values of the public. As importantly, it can help policy makers understand 'why' the public have those views. Understanding 'why' needs qualitative approaches to research and engagement, whereas quantitative approaches such as polling tell you what the public thinks but provides less depth and richness on reasons for those views. Some dialogue processes include polling to complement the qualitative findings. Dialogue can also identify what it is that changes views, as public views often change over the course of a dialogue process.

There is particular value for policy makers when they hear public views in person so they see, hear and feel the strength of public views on particular issues. When heard first hand, public views are unmediated by research analysis or media interpretation; the final reports of results from the dialogue can then be understood in context.

Public dialogue is thus seen to strengthen, enrich and underpin the evidence base for policy from other sources (such as expert, scientific and technical views) and fills the gap in evidence-based policy that has existed in the past by including much wider sources of knowledge and experience.

Policy is also likely to be more robust because policy makers have had to think about how the issues will play with the public from even starting to *plan* a public engagement, which can lead to policy makers thinking more widely than they would normally because they are seeing it through the public's eyes, and can prompt joined-up Government by officials thinking more broadly than their specific policy area.

When science is uncertain, there is likely to be a need to switch emphasis from hard facts and soft values to 'hard values and soft facts'<sup>22</sup> as part of decision-making processes.

Policy is seen to be 'better' as a result of dialogue because:

- **Policy is more socially informed**, by including consideration of social and ethical as well as technical and scientific issues. There is also a good likelihood that engagement will **reduce the negative social impacts of policy**, including avoiding policy solutions that unfairly affect certain parts of the population; the public is very good at spotting potential inequities in policy proposals ('not fair').
- **Policy is more publicly acceptable, with more 'stickability'** because policy is developed with an understanding of how and why the public is likely to react, where they will draw the line, where are the issues of conflict and consensus, and what the public suggest will and will not work in practice (from their knowledge, views and experiences).
- **Dialogue saves time and money** in launching and implementing policy decisions. Dialogue helps to avoid unforeseen later conflict by identifying difficult issues early, at a stage where they can be dealt with before becoming entrenched. Also, final decisions are likely to be cheaper, easier and quicker to implement because they are based on the best possible knowledge that includes public knowledge, experience and values as well as scientific and technical input. The evidence for these impacts is currently largely anecdotal, but these benefits are strongly believed by those who have used dialogue processes.
- **Dialogue raises public awareness and understanding of the issues.** Policy makers have often identified benefits from the opportunity to increase public knowledge about the subjects being discussed, the specific policy proposals, and the constraints on policy makers and what they can and cannot do. Dialogue can also be an opportunity for sponsor organisations to clarify the limits to their own specific role with public participants.

Although dialogue reaches relatively limited numbers of people, participants very often talk to others afterwards as a result of having learnt about the subject and developed an interest. In many cases this goes further and dialogue **changes public attitudes, values, behaviour** and a sense of personal responsibility. There are examples of participants then going on to act as 'ambassadors' for the issue and talk to others about the problems that need to be tackled (e.g. evidence from Defra Climate Change public engagement below).

- **Dialogue enables learning.** Some policy makers see dialogue as a learning process, in terms of understanding public views and learning from their knowledge and experience, in terms of learning about public engagement as a way of improving policy and decision making, and in terms of improving policy and decision-making processes.

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<sup>22</sup> Burgess, Jacquelin & Chilvers, Jason (2006) 'Upping the ante: a conceptual framework for designing and evaluating participatory technology assessments' in *Science and Public Policy*, vol 33, no 10, December 2006, 713-728.

### 4.3 Evidence of impacts on policy

Although generic evaluation evidence of impacts on policy is not easy to find, there is some good practice in this area, where Government has clearly identified the findings it has taken from public dialogue and shown how they have been acted on. For example, the **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say** dialogue included numerous innovative approaches to showing how the input from the participants was taken into account, including:

- **During the process**, 'citizens' options' were identified in the regional events leading up to the final Summit, and then explicitly put before the final Summit, which allowed participants to suggest and discuss options that had not been proposed by Government that were then discussed in more detail at the Summit. While the process was continuing, data from the deliberative events were fed directly into the stakeholder task forces (running in parallel), so these task forces could draw on public views throughout their own deliberations.
- **As the White Paper was being drafted**, there was a very careful process to ensure that the points from the public dialogue were taken into account, using a traffic light system: points from the public dialogue were noted as green if they had been fully taken into account, amber if they had mostly been taken into account and red if not seen to be taken into account. This analysis was done by someone from the team leading the dialogue process rather than those responsible for drafting the White Paper. Where a 'red' was noted, further discussions were held between the internal teams to either incorporate these comments (where they had been overlooked) or to clarify why they were not incorporated. In addition, data from 'seldom heard' groups was reported separately, so that the views of these groups could be taken into account without it being 'drowned out' by the weight of numbers of the majority of participants.
- **The specific impacts on policy** were that some issues were given a higher priority in the White Paper than had been expected before the public input (e.g. mental health issues, support for carers, transport to hospitals), and some were reduced in priority or dropped altogether (e.g. option to register with more than one GP). The health MOTs had originally been an option raised by public participants and, although amended into more general 'life checks', were included in the White Paper.
- **A reconvened meeting** was held with 100 of those from the Summit (10%), to review what the findings from the public dialogue had said, and what had been proposed by the Government in the White Paper. The meeting was then asked to consider whether it felt that the proposals in the White Paper reflected what the public had told the Department: 92% agreed they did reflect what the Department had been told; 93% agreed that the Department had listened to what they had been told, and 72% thought the results of the events had been influential (only 1% did not think the results had been influential, and the rest were not sure).

The Department had been advised that it was too risky to hold a reconvened meeting to check public views on whether their input had been used by Government, but it proved to be extremely effective with very positive feedback. At that meeting, the Secretary of State then promised to hold another meeting, in a year's time, so that participants could check whether the Government had delivered on its policy commitments; that meeting also took place but was not covered in the evaluation.

More generally, impacts on policy from existing evaluations show a spectrum of impacts ranging from direct impacts on the way policy is framed to less direct impacts. For example:

- **HFEA dialogue.** Here there was a clear line connecting the outcomes of the public dialogue and the final policy conclusions. Participants in the meeting were polled about the limits of acceptability of research using hybrid and chimera embryos and, although the majority were in favour, participants stressed that this should only be done 'with caution and careful scrutiny' and that any such research should demonstrate that it was 'both necessary and desirable'. This was reflected in the final wording of the Authority's conclusion on the issue.

In addition, the final Authority meeting to come to this decision was held in public, and all the results of the dialogue and the decision were published on the HFEA website, so the process was fully transparent.

Authority members reported that they felt much more 'confident' coming to their conclusion, with the 'reassurance' that they had tested it directly with the public and listened carefully to their concerns and where they drew the line, so they were in a much more 'secure position' in taking their decision.

- **Drugsfutures.** The main impact on the policy process was that it challenged assumptions about the public's views, which were more liberal about drugs issues, and were felt more deeply, than was expected. Some AMS Working Group members reported their surprise at the real curiosity and genuine interest from the public, who were more knowledgeable and more committed to the process than they had expected.

The input from the public was only one of the sources of evidence considered, but the findings from the dialogue were included as inserts throughout the final Working Group report, were taken into account throughout (through presentations from the contractor and the project manager to the Group, as well as Working Group members attending dialogue events). The final findings were 'sharper' and had a different emphasis, and had been influenced by the depth of feeling from the public on certain issues, which reinforced the importance of those issues.

- **Research Councils UK's energy research dialogue.** The conclusions from the public dialogue did not contain any ideas that the Research Councils UK's policy committees had not considered before, but they found the public dialogue particularly valuable in providing 'underpinning' evidence, as part of the checks and balances needed before coming to conclusions about future research budgets. The public input helped 'sharpen up the justification' for those conclusions, and 'enriched' the decision-making process.

There are some overall issues arising from this analysis of impacts on policy:

- There are concerns about the extent to which dialogue is simply a 'rubber stamp' for policy decisions that have already been made behind the scenes. The evidence above suggests that, even when the public dialogue does not result in any ideas that had not already been considered, the strength of feeling, concerns, conditions and caveats that the public express, and where there is acceptance or not, is usually genuinely influential both on the content and confidence of the decision. However, future evaluations may wish to explore this issue more explicitly.

- There are also concerns about dialogue being used to 'sell' ideas to the public, so they are more accepting of science and technology developments. These concerns tend to be based on questioning of the 'deficit model' used in the early days of public understanding of science when it was believed that if only the public understood the issues, they would accept that it was all for the good. Here there is less evidence, although evaluation research has found that public participants were often uncomfortable about saying they had 'changed their views'. It seems that public participants are as wary as anyone that the process may have 'brainwashed' them in any way and are highly aware and resistant to any such attempts. However, again, it may be that future evaluations need to consider this issue more carefully.
- If evidence of how public input has influenced policy is important, there need to be much clearer outputs from the public dialogue processes that can then be traced into policy; possibly some element of the process where participants agree what is going forward to policy makers from the meeting. Many public dialogue processes have avoided seeking consensus from the participants on what should go forward, preferring to leave it to contractors to review the data collected and provide the conclusions from the process in their final report.
- If participants are to be satisfied about what is being taken from their deliberations and used for policy-making, those participants need to be able to see and comment on what is being reported in their names. In many cases, notes are taken on laptops and participants do not see what is being captured and have no opportunity to correct or change what is concluded from what is taken down in notes.

#### 4.4 Benefits for public participants

**Public participants** have identified that the process that they took part in provided them with the following benefits. As with the previous section, these findings are based on questionnaire and interview evidence from the five evaluations of national policy public dialogue processes identified above.

- **Influence.** This is the most important benefit to participants and strongly affects their judgement of the value of the engagement. Participants see benefits in making a difference, and value seeing that something has happened as a result of their collective input. They are pleased to 'have their say' and to be able to raise the issues they want to. They see the opportunity to take part in something important as a real benefit, and they feel more valuable as citizens and as individuals as a result. Part of this comes from the experience of having direct access to policy makers, which they see as access to the people with the power to make decisions.

This is linked to feeling the benefits from being treated with respect because, for example, they were provided with resources (money, expenses), given information and time to think about and talk about the issues, and then asked for their views on the issues which were listened to, written down and fed into decision-making processes.

Feelings of influence are as important to participants as actual evidence that what they said has changed policy. This 'subjective empowerment'<sup>23</sup> comes from perceptions of a 'fair' and 'good' dialogue process including being treated with

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<sup>23</sup> Ipsos MORI (2008) *Searching for the impact of empowerment*. Written by Bobby Duffy, Jessica Vince and Leon Page. Social Research Institute, Ipsos MORI, London.

respect and being listened to. This may be more than whether they agreed with any overall results that emerged (e.g. in favour or not of the proposed policy). Evaluations find that participants do not necessarily expect, or want, the sponsor institution to do what the public say, but they do want them to listen and to consider their views seriously and, if public conclusions are not accepted, to explain why not.

- **Learning.** This is also a very common benefit identified by participants. Participants report learning about the subject and the particular policy issues, about decision-making (including understanding more about the difficulties for decision-makers) and about being involved in policy development. They often report that learning from each other is as valuable to them as learning from expert input and information provided, so group discussions are as important to them as presentations.

Participants often say that taking part has clarified their own thinking, which has helped them 'form' views where they had no views before<sup>24</sup>, and to have more confidence in their own opinions. This is important in stimulating interest, confidence in talking about issues, and willingness to take part in future (potential for future active citizenship).

Participants also often report that they have gained increased confidence and that they have learnt new skills that they could use in other circumstances, such as speaking in public, debating with people different from themselves, presenting and defending their own views in safe circumstances, listening to others, presenting back to the meeting, using computers to summarise material, reading and *using* new information (capacity building).

- **Social benefits.** Public participants report the benefits of meeting and talking to different people. They value sharing their own views and listening to others, and especially debating with a wider range of people than they would normally meet. Some participants meeting in public dialogue processes stay in touch and become friends. The extent to which participants see this as a benefit suggests a real hunger and interest in going beyond normal social circles and mixing with a much more diverse group than they do in their everyday lives.
- **More positive about Government and public bodies.** Where participants have trusted the sponsor to listen and to take account of their views, their involvement in dialogue processes has enhanced their trust in public bodies and Government. However, trust is complex and affected by much more than a single dialogue process; the issue of trust is considered in more detail below.
- **Personal satisfaction.** Although rarely an objective of public dialogue, participants very often report that they simply enjoyed the experience enormously. Many say it is something they have never done before, and feel it is really worthwhile. They often report leaving a public dialogue inspired and enthused, and with a real interest both in the subject and in taking part again. This feedback is very important to assessing the quality of any dialogue, as participant satisfaction reflects on the quality of the design, delivery and impacts of the process. It is also important in achieving wider benefits (such as social cohesion and active citizenship), which often only flow from participants having had a positive experience.

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<sup>24</sup> Burton (2007) op cit.

## 4.5 Evidence of impacts on participants

Evidence from the evaluations shows that participants report that the main impacts of taking part in these dialogues have been around learning, impacts on views and satisfaction. For example, feedback on **learning** and **impacts on views** includes:

- **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say:** 78% of respondents from the Summit said they had learned something new; 28% said they had changed their views; 39% said they had learned about others' experience and views; 37% of respondents from the reconvened event said it had made a difference to how they saw their role as citizens.
- **Research Councils UK process:** 92% of respondents from the Summit said they had learned something new; 92% of respondents from the regional events said it had made a difference to their views.
- **HFEA process on hybrid embryos:** 98% of respondents from the reconvened event said they had learnt something new; 93% said it had clarified their thinking; 70% said it had made a difference to their views; 55% of local group respondents said it had changed their views.
- **Drugsfutures:** 90% said they had learned something new (100% at the Brainbox sessions); 87% said it had helped them think about the issues more clearly (100% at the Brainbox); 34% had changed their views (45% at the Brainbox) and 39% said it had made a difference to their views (50% at the Brainbox).
- **Defra Summit on climate change:** 94% said it had clarified their thinking; 79% said they had learned something new; 71% said they had changed what they *thought* as a result; 78% said they were likely to change what they *did* as a result (especially talking to others about the issues).

It is important to note that none of these processes was designed to *change* people's views; the evaluations used this as a way of measuring the impact of the process based on earlier answers to open questions by participants. As mentioned above, it is also important to note that public participants sometimes seem uncomfortable about reporting that they have changed their views, which is why recent evaluations have tended to focus on asking about whether the process helped them 'clarify their views' or if the process had 'affected their views'.

The impacts on people can go wider than immediate participants. For example:

- **Defra Summit on climate change.** Participants interviewed were asked if they had talked to anyone else about the issues. The 15 people interviewed reported that they had talked to at least 450 people. If all 150 participants had talked to the same number as the randomly selected interviewees, that would mean that the event had reached around 4,500 people directly by word of mouth. This was considered particularly valuable as it is generally recognised that information from peers is more trusted than from many other sources.

There is a lot more that can be done to measure the impacts on participants, especially follow-up research some time after the event to test the extent to which learning remains with people.

One recent study reported on research to follow up, after ten years, the impacts on social learning among participants involved in public engagement processes on

waste management, and found significant impacts had remained even after that length of time. The study concluded that

"social learning is not confined to within the process ... [the process] had shifted people's understanding of resource management issues, directly affected their behaviour and in many cases, the behaviour of people they came into contact with"<sup>25</sup>.

These findings accord with the findings on impacts from the various evaluations above, but with the added interest of the impacts remaining after ten years. Although this evidence comes from a local engagement process, there is no reason to expect that similar results would not emerge from participants in national policy processes.

There are also now numerous evaluations that have tested the **satisfaction of participants** with the dialogue processes in which they have taken part. The feedback has been generally extremely positive:

- **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say:** 100% of respondents at the reconvened event said they had enjoyed the process; 97% said they felt they had had their say
- **Research Councils UK process:** 100% of those at the Summit said they enjoyed the process
- **HFEA process on hybrid embryos:** 97% at the reconvened event said they enjoyed the event
- **Drugsfutures:** 92% of respondents from the regional workshops said they had enjoyed the process (100% at the Brainbox sessions, which was a smaller group, meeting for longer)
- **Defra Summit on climate change:** 96% said they enjoyed the Summit; 91% said they could discuss the issues they wanted to

These figures show that good quality dialogue processes can gain very high satisfaction levels.

## 4.6 Wider benefits and impacts

The wider benefits, including for society as a whole, can be identified by linking findings from practical evaluations to propositions about potential benefits from academic analysis; evaluations to date almost always focus on specific processes rather than considering benefits and value that are wider and may be longer term and cumulative. Some of these wider benefits include:

- **Building social cohesion and social capital** by bringing people together from different backgrounds in a safe environment in which they can exchange views and work together on a joint enterprise, and get to know and better trust people from different sectors of society who they would not normally meet. Research shows that participants became more tolerant of the views of others, even if they disagreed with them, and became more public-spirited citizens<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Bull, R., Petts, J. and Evans, J. (2008) 'Social learning from public engagement: dreaming the impossible?' in *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, Vol 51, No 5, September 2008, 701-716.

<sup>26</sup> Burton (2007) op cit.

- **Strengthening democracy**, by providing new ways that citizens can engage in, and influence, political processes (e.g. the allocation of resources), and new ways that are more equitable as they ensure the involvement of traditionally disenfranchised sectors of society (as long as efforts are made to reach and include them).
- **Building skills and enthusiasm for active citizenship**, or 'social learning', as people gain confidence in their opinions and that someone will listen to and take account of their views, they clearly increase their interest and willingness to take a greater part in society and 'can mature into responsible democratic citizens'<sup>27</sup>, and 'more rounded citizens'<sup>28</sup>.
- **Building trust in Government and public institutions** by opening processes up and showing how decisions are made, to give people greater confidence in decisions and services (see below for more on trust).

Further research is needed to test the extent of these wider, cumulative and longer-term impacts of public dialogue.

## 4.7 Trust in Government

Before leaving this discussion of the wider benefits and impacts of public dialogue it is worth reflecting a little more on the issue of 'trust', as it has become so central to the 'value' given to public engagement by Government. Numerous programmes of engagement have the building (or repairing, or strengthening) of trust between Government and the public as either an explicit or implicit objective.

The first point to address is the nature of the perceived 'crisis of trust'. The latest research suggests that trust in the UK between citizens and Government is low: the UK comes 22nd out of the EU25 in terms of trust in Government<sup>29</sup>. However, Ipsos MORI reports<sup>30</sup> that trust in Government and politicians has actually remained fairly steady since 1983 - about 20% of those asked trusted Government and politicians to tell the truth, with little change since 1983. That is a low level of trust, but demonstrates no real new 'crisis of trust' and Government and politicians are still slightly trusted slightly more than others (e.g. more than journalists) although much less than some others (e.g. doctors trusted by around 80%, police around 60% and civil servants 40%).

Also, trust in scientists has increased since 2000<sup>31</sup>: in 2008, 76% felt that, in general, scientists want to make life better for the average person, compared to 67% in 2000. While it is not possible to say that increased public engagement in science has caused that increase in trust, the two things have happened to coincide.

Although there may be no new 'crisis', there are clearly very strong issues around building trust between Government and citizens which are acting as drivers for investment in public dialogue. Essentially the concern is that 'at the extreme,

<sup>27</sup> Petts, Judith (2008) 'Public Engagement to Build Trust: False Hopes?' in *Journal of Risk Research*, September 2008, vol 11, 821-835.

<sup>28</sup> Burton, Paul (2007) *Conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects in measuring the impact of citizen participation in policy making*. Paper to CINEFOGO Conference, Bristol, 14-15 February 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Parker, Simon, Spire, Phil, Farook, Faizal and Mean, Melissa (2008) *State of Trust. How to build better relationships between councils and the public*. Demos, London.

<sup>30</sup> Ipsos MORI (2008) *Searching for the impact of empowerment*. Written by Bobby Duffy, Jessica Vince and Leon Page. Social Research Institute, Ipsos MORI, London.

<sup>31</sup> Research Councils UK (2008) op cit.

unresolved suspicion could lead to a break down of society and failure to take required decisions<sup>32</sup>. Or, as Demos puts it:

"Trust is one of the most important assets that a governing institution can possess. Its presence helps to foster democratic participation, economic success and public sector efficiency. Its absence can lead to grinding battles between the state and its citizens, and sometimes to an outright refusal to participate in government activities."

There is some evidence that participants are more likely to trust public bodies as a result of engagement<sup>33</sup>, even if it is not absolute but rather 'critical trust'<sup>34</sup>, with some scepticism built in (which may not be a bad thing). There is also evidence from the evaluations reviewed for this paper that trust in the institutions that have engaged in public dialogue is high. The question usually asked for evaluation purposes is whether participants think that the sponsor institution will take the results of the dialogue into account, so it is trust within the specific context of the dialogue rather than generally. Results are often very positive:

- **HFEA dialogue:** 84% of participants thought the HFEA would take the results into account.
- **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say:** 66% at the Summit said they believed that those commissioning the process would take notice of the results of the dialogue, and 60% thought the results of the process would be influential (only 7% disagreed). Then 93% at the reconvened event said the Department of Health had listened to what they had been told by the public, and 72% at the reconvened event said the results of the public dialogue had been influential. This shows a much more positive response from the public when they heard what had been done as a result of their input, than at the end of the main event - so public expectations had not been very high but at the end they did feel they had been listened to.

In this evaluation, a specific question was put to participants about trust: about 45% said that the process had increased their trust in Government; about 37% said it had not made any difference and these responses were mixed between those who had always trusted Government and still did; and those who had never trusted Government and still did not. Overall, this is very positive feedback on the extent to which the dialogue had increased trust in Government.

- **Drugsfutures:** 80% at the regional workshops said they thought the Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS) would take notice of the public's views.

This feedback suggests that those who have been through a process are immediately quite trusting about the extent to which the Government and other public bodies will listen to their views. However, more research is needed on the detail of how these processes affect participants' wider views about Government, and whether public engagement activities make any difference to wider public trust in Government (i.e. non-participants).

The general conclusion on the extent to which public engagement processes build trust is that trust is cumulative and very unlikely to be affected in the long term by a single process, and that trust is not necessarily transferable from one decision to

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<sup>32</sup> Petts (2008) op cit, p11.

<sup>33</sup> Burton (2007) op cit.

<sup>34</sup> Petts (2008) op cit.

another, even within the same institution<sup>35</sup>. Trust is built through the quality of relationships (e.g. honesty and reciprocity), and although 'public engagement has potential to enhance relationships between members of the public and risk decision-makers ... it is performance over many decisions that is more likely to count in terms of raising and maintaining public trust'<sup>36</sup>. So, while poor processes can damage trust, and one public engagement process is not enough to solve the problem alone, each process can make some contribution to strengthening trust between Government, other public bodies and citizens.

## 5 Do current benefits meet current needs?

It is one thing to identify and list the benefits and impacts of public dialogue, but these only have real value if they meet actual needs. The development of public dialogue in science and technology has resulted from a number of drivers for Government, partly in relation to its own internal needs and partly in response to perceived and actual demands from the public to be involved.

In order to understand whether dialogue is meeting those needs (and can thus be considered 'effective', as part of cost effective), it is necessary first to understand the needs and demands of the public and of policy makers as clearly as possible.

### 5.1 Public needs and demands

There are four main sources of data that can be used to examine public needs and demands for engagement:

- **The public attitude survey by Research Councils UK and the former Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS)<sup>37</sup>**. The survey shows that:
  - only 21% of the public agree that 'the public is sufficiently involved in decisions about science and technology'
  - 78% of the public agreed that 'we ought to hear about potential new areas of science and technology before they happen, not afterwards'
  - 79% of the public felt that the Government should act in accordance with public concerns about science and technology
  - 74% felt that scientists should listen more to what ordinary people think
  - 47% felt that 'for people like me it is important to be involved in decisions about science and technology'; only 23% disagreed

These statistics show a real demand among the general public for more public engagement in science and technology. The last statistic is particularly interesting. Although this does not look like a very strong endorsement of public engagement or willingness to engage, this is actually almost half of the respondents saying that public engagement is important for 'people like them', not just the general public or

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<sup>35</sup> Petts (2008) op cit.

<sup>36</sup> Petts (2008) op cit, p11.

<sup>37</sup> Research Councils UK/DIUS (2008) *Public Attitudes to Science 2008. A Guide*. Prepared by People Science & Policy/TNS for Research Councils UK and DIUS, March 2008.

'someone else'. This can certainly be interpreted as significant levels of personal enthusiasm.

- **Recent MORI research on empowerment**<sup>38</sup> found that 63% preferred the idea of participating through 'regular nationwide consultation between elections on key issues to explain the issues which the Government faces, setting out the choices, listening to the results and then ensuring policy reflects these views', compared to only 33% who preferred participating through 'regular elections every four years'.
- **Practical evaluations of whether public participants say they want to be involved more in future**, as a result of being involved in the process being evaluated. Although used partly as a way of testing satisfaction with the specific process, this evaluation data also gives an indication of the extent to which those participants would like personally to participate again (always recognising that feedback immediately after an event is often euphorically positive, and that what people say and do may be quite different).

In spite of all the caveats, the findings from existing evaluations are remarkably positive, and do indicate a real desire for engagement among those who have experienced engagement<sup>39</sup>. For example:

- **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say process on health and social care:** 96% of respondents said they were willing to take part again after the main Summit meeting; 99% of respondents said the same thing after the reconvened event
- **HFEA process on the use of hybrid embryos for research:** 95% of respondents at the reconvened event said they were more likely to get involved in future
- **Research Councils UK process on energy research:** 91% of respondents said they were more willing to get involved in future
- **Drugsfutures process on brain science, addiction and drugs:** 90% said they were more willing to get involved in these sorts of events in future
- **Defra Summit on climate change:** 92% of respondents said they were more willing to get involved in these sorts of events in future
- **Practical evaluations of whether public participants think public engagement is a good idea.** The findings from these evaluations suggest that those who have been involved in engagement processes think it is a very good idea. Findings include:
  - **Your Health, Your Care, Your Say:** 98% of respondents after the Summit agreed it was important for the public to be involved in these decisions, of which 81% thought it very important. It is interesting to note that this view was not restricted to participants at the event: a telephone survey was carried out to provide a 'control group' of the public who had not attended any events: of those, 99% thought it was important for the public to be involved, of which 60% thought it very important.

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<sup>38</sup> Ipsos MORI (2008) *Searching for the impact of empowerment*. Written by Bobby Duffy, Jessica Vince and Leon Page. Social Research Institute, Ipsos MORI, London.

<sup>39</sup> The sources for all the figures here are the specific evaluation reports by Diane Warburton listed in Annex A. It is also worth noting that these figures are based on very high response rates from participants; again details are in the individual evaluation reports.

- **Research Councils UK:** 95% of respondents from initial regional workshops said it is important to involve the public in discussing these sorts of issues, of which 79% thought it very important.
- **Drugsfutures:** 98% of respondents from regional workshops said it was important to involve the public in discussing these sorts of issues, of which 84% thought it very important. In addition, 96% said there should be more events for the public to discuss these sorts of issues.
- **Defra Summit on climate change:** 99% of respondents said they thought public engagement in these issues is important, of which 89% thought it very important.

These figures suggest two things. First, that members of the public who take part in engagement processes are almost universally more willing to take part in future as a result of their experience. Second, there is a real sense among these participants that public engagement is a good thing that needs to be done more often. As mentioned above, these dialogue processes were carried out with a broad demographically representative sample of the UK population, and questionnaire results cover at least 90% of participants, so these are good robust results in terms of public motivations.

As more public engagement processes are run, this enthusiasm is likely to continue to grow, quite apart from the general public mood for more say on the issues that affect people's lives. This suggests that it will take an increasing amount of high quality public dialogue processes to meet public needs.

## 5.2 Government and policy makers needs

The main source of data used here to identify the needs of Government and policy makers from dialogue is the report of a Sciencewise-ERC seminar in October 2007. This event attracted around 50 policy makers from across Government to consider the findings from the Sciencehorizons and WIST (Wider Implications of Science and Technology) projects that had consulted the public and stakeholders on future issues for science and technology. The seminar identified some key motivations for these participants to carry out dialogue.

The drivers identified at that seminar, together with findings from the literature review for this paper<sup>40</sup>, suggest that the main drivers for Government to carry out public dialogue are:

- To counter perceived public distrust of Government secrecy and refusal to discuss issues around new science and technology, and cynicism about how Government regulates science and technology. Engagement is therefore seen as an opportunity for Government to explain policies directly and early.
- To avoid the sort of 'bad' decisions and decision-making processes that have been made on 'risky' science and technology in the past because of lack of appropriate evidence and understanding of the deeper issues involved (e.g. GM, foot and mouth disease (FMD), BSE). Engagement is therefore seen as ensuring greater public input to help avoid future bad decisions.
- That decisions on complex modern technological issues need to take account of both 'facts' and 'values', from as wide a range of sources as possible - including

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<sup>40</sup> Particularly Burgess and Chilvers (2006), op cit.

the public, which has tended to have been excluded thus far. Engagement is seen as ensuring that public policy decisions, particularly around science and technology, are not just based solely on technical and scientific issues but also consider the political issues of resource investment, safety, risk management, values and ethics, public acceptability, etc. Engagement ensures that evidence feeding in to decision-making covers all those issues from a wider range of sources than has been the case in the past.

- To tackle perceived public lack of knowledge about science and technology, and thus public fear and distrust about decisions on these issues. Engagement is therefore seen as a way of increasing public knowledge about science and technology.
- To tackle perceived lack of public knowledge about the challenges facing Government and other public bodies. Engagement is seen as a way of increasing public knowledge about how decisions are made, the difficulties that policy makers face and the compromises that have to be made.
- To tackle inequalities of access for disadvantaged sectors of society to decision-making on issues that concern them. Public engagement is thus a way of bringing in these often excluded groups (sometimes called 'hard to reach').
- To counter perceived public dislike of some Government decisions, disagreement with which slows or stops implementation of new policies; and therefore a desire to get early warning of potential negative public reactions and potential obstacles to policy implementation ('no surprises'). Engagement is seen as a way of identifying potential consensus and conflict early, to enable policy to be changed or plans made to manage negative reactions.
- To gain public buy-in to decisions so they share the responsibility for success, e.g. individuals taking responsibility for improving their own health; or developing a shared sense of responsibility for tackling climate change through behaviour change.
- To avoid any more legal challenges to decisions as a result of poor consultation (following the judicial review initiated by Greenpeace on new build nuclear).
- An ethical and political belief that the public should have more say in the decisions that affect them, and have the chance to have their say directly to Government.
- To manage the expectations of public and stakeholders in terms of what Government can and cannot do to tackle a particular issue.
- To start to open up debates on issues that may be a long time coming to a formal decision but on which the deeper values, knowledge and experience the public have can be taken into account.
- To gain evidence of public support for policies to strengthen Government 'courage' to make what would otherwise be difficult decisions for it to justify. The aim here includes wishing to counter reactions from what is seen to be a hostile media that is likely to challenge and attack new policies. Engagement is therefore seen as able to test issues with the public and see their response directly, which can better enable Government to prepare effective communications strategies later (e.g. actually, the public thinks this...).

- To gain evidence that can challenge messages from the media about the inherent conservatism and selfishness of the public on certain issues, as feedback from dialogue suggests that the public is actually more likely to be liberal in terms of regulation (e.g. on drugs), to challenge private ownership of public assets and public services, and to be concerned about the dangers of inequity of access to the future benefits of science and technology.

As a result, the workshop suggested that the key outcomes being sought by policy makers in central Government from dialogue tend to be:

- Just 'doing dialogue', and being seen to do it, almost irrespective of valuable outputs and outcomes.
- Building greater trust between Government and the public through more transparency, openness, accountability, legitimacy of decision-making processes.
- 'Market research' to test new policy proposals and ideas.
- Finding out the 'soft values' of public attitudes to supplement the 'hard facts' of scientific and technical evidence to support policy development, agreement and implementation, and finding ways to access the knowledge and values of the public quickly and not mediated by the media.
- Public education and awareness through early communications of policy themes and difficulties of public policy decision-making, to build knowledge and side-step potentially hostile media reactions.
- Developing shared responsibility with public participants for achieving social change as a result of new policies (e.g. on health, climate change).

Comparing these findings with the benefits and impacts identified from dialogue processes (as outlined above) suggests that the current types of processes are broadly meeting the needs of Government and policy makers. However, this could be because Government and policy makers now know what to expect from dialogue as it currently works. There could be value in exploring these issues in much more depth with policy makers to more fully examine what dialogue *could* provide if done in various different ways. The issue of trust has been covered above.

There is less information about the views of scientists, researchers etc in terms of how important public engagement is to their work. However, one recent source<sup>41</sup> does show that 73% of researchers surveyed 'would like more scientists to discuss research and its social and ethical implications with the general public'. This suggests a real demand in the scientific community for more public dialogue.

All these findings suggest that the benefits from current dialogue processes do broadly meet the needs of the public, Government and policy makers, and that public engagement is very important to the public, to Government and policy makers, and to scientists. However, more research is needed to investigate the extent to which this level of satisfaction is a result of low expectations, and whether higher aspirations could act as a prompt to further innovation and development in engagement methods.

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<sup>41</sup> Research Councils UK/DIUS (2008) *Public Attitudes to Science 2008. A Guide*. Prepared by People Science & Policy/TNS for Research Councils UK and DIUS, March 2008.

## 6 Pause for thought...

So far this paper has looked at the lack of consideration of costs (although there is now some knowledge of benefits and impacts) in terms of establishing the 'value' of public engagement, spent some time identifying what the costs and benefits are from a number of perspectives, and considered how the identified benefits seem to meet the expressed needs of Government and the public.

The next step is to relate these reflections directly to assessing cost effectiveness. Before addressing that in detail, it is worth reflecting on the nature of measurement, what it can offer and the dangers.

The remainder of the paper will then propose a simple four step evaluation process that includes new approaches to **measuring the value** of public dialogue and some new criteria for **assessing the quality and success** of dialogue.

## 7 Considering measurement

There are significant dangers in attempting to measure the cost effectiveness of public dialogue, including:

- It is very hard to *prove* direct cause and effect in complex social situations (including public dialogue in policy making), as so many other factors affect the final outcomes.
- Measuring can corrupt outcomes, especially if measuring against targets. Targets can drive activity in certain directions in order to meet those targets.
- Who is the measuring being done for? Focusing on measuring for particular audiences risks skewing the conclusions to showing what those particular interests want to know and excluding those issues that are of less interest to those audiences, but which may be very important to others.
- There are dangers in counting what can be counted, because that is the easiest thing to do, rather than what counts, which can result in measurement focusing on those things (e.g. how many people, what social groups represented etc). Such approaches risk missing the most important and valuable elements, and simplifying even those things that can be counted in ways that do not reflect the complex processes and outcomes and that limit the development of knowledge from evaluations.
- The outcome of a public engagement process may be 'no change' in terms of policy, and that might be the conclusion that everyone agreed with; but no change could be seen as no impact - such a conclusion would not reflect the other benefits that may have been achieved and the significant value from increasing confidence in the original policy proposal.
- The benefits of public engagement are not always apparent to those who are most closely involved, and measuring tends to focus on feedback (and existing statistics provided by those involved) because that is the data that is available.

- There is often a long time lag between public dialogue and a decision, let alone before policy implementation. It is only at that point that any final impacts and effects can be identified.
- There are dangers in looking for 'extra' or 'unanticipated' outcomes as value added, as the result is likely to be that sponsors will reduce the level of 'expected' outcomes so that they will score higher on 'extra' outcomes (as has happened in some target-driven assessments).
- There are complex negatives to consider, beyond the simple costs and benefits (e.g. costs saved, reducing negative social impacts, risks averted).
- Measurement can be very resource intensive and complex, and public dialogue projects rarely include sufficient resources for complex measurement. Measurement can also require a lot of input from those who are already giving a lot to the processes (including public participants).
- In the current climate, value for money can be used as a euphemism for efficiency savings which in turn is intended only to save costs with no consideration of the potential loss of highly positive benefits. Suspicion therefore arises in any exercise to measure value or cost effectiveness.

A further problem is that, to measure, a 'unit of measurement' is needed<sup>42</sup>. For example, if measuring improvements in fundraising, it is possible to measure all sorts of things such as total amount raised before and after the new intervention, percentage of repeat donors etc. The difficulty for measuring public dialogue is that there are no simple measures of performance.

However, there are also arguments in favour of measurement, including:

- It is important to account fully for public money (accountability) by demonstrating the benefits of public dialogue to ensure that future public dialogue processes make best use of scarce resources, and to achieve the best quality processes possible for the resources available. This means considering costs as well as innovation, raising aspirations for benefits, and raising quality. It is important to learn about what were costly mistakes, so they can be avoided in future, and what was valuable investment, so that scarce resources are not wasted. Such accountability is also essential to ensure that investment is continued, and that good quality dialogue processes continue to be designed and delivered.
- Dialogue is not necessary or appropriate in all national policy development contexts. Measurement of cost effectiveness may help contribute to better decisions about how and when it is crucial to undertaken dialogue, and when *not* to do it.
- Numbers are compelling, effective and convincing; key audiences (including the public, media, scientists and politicians) want to know **how much** and **how many**, as well as **how good**.
- The issues of cost effectiveness will not go away. The question continues to be asked (including through recent parliamentary questions) and needs to be answered, even if there are some practitioners and academics who see it as an inappropriate intrusion of vulgar material considerations in work of such social and

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<sup>42</sup> Wing, Kennard T. 'Assessing the Effectiveness of Capacity-Building Initiatives: Seven Issues for the Field', in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol 33, no 1, March 2004, 153-160.

political importance. Not having any answer can appear unprofessional and unnecessarily defensive.

- Many practitioners and academics do believe that public engagement is valuable and highly cost effective, given the benefits that are now being more fully understood. Indeed, many believe that engagement saves time and money in the long term. Measurement of some kind would help to demonstrate that.

In practice, it seems that there are as many risks in not measuring as in measuring the cost effectiveness of dialogue, and that it is worth attempting to find a way of avoiding the pitfalls in order to find some evidence of the costs and benefits of public dialogue that does demonstrate value and that helps future planning. Public dialogue does have a cost, and does require financial investment, so it is reasonable to assess whether it is of value in those terms.

Given the dangers, any measurement system used for public dialogue needs to be:

- **Proportionate**, in terms of the time and resources needed to use it
- **Convincing**, to key audiences across a range of interests and levels of knowledge
- **Meaningful**, in that it makes sense to all those involved and can be easily understood
- **Relevant**, in that it answers the important questions in people's minds

In terms of the evidence that is needed from assessments of cost effectiveness, it does seem that the climate is changing as dialogue increasingly becomes a core part of policy development and decision-making processes at national Government level. This shift is moving the need for evidence from 'prove to me this works and is cost effective before I decide it is worthwhile' to 'we've got to do this so let's do it well and cost-effectively'.

This is a fundamental change in the nature of the evidence required, and in some ways removes the pressure from measuring cost effectiveness. The burden of waiting for cost effectiveness to be demonstrated before investment can happen has largely been lifted, and the focus now is on getting a good quality process in a cost effective way: a shift from thinking about 'audit' to focusing on 'effective planning'.

It is also now recognised that evidence alone does not win arguments or prove cases. Evidence needs to be used within a structure which ensures it is listened to, accepted as valid and taken account of. However, the need to improve and increase advocacy that uses evidence from research and evaluations only increases the need for sound evidence from those sources.

## 8 Existing models for measuring the cost effectiveness of engagement

Previous research has looked at various economic models in order to assess cost effectiveness of engagement. The findings from some key research sources are summarised below.

## 8.1 Involve on the 'True Costs' of public participation<sup>43</sup>

The first attempt to consider the cost effectiveness of public engagement was by Involve, which investigated various economic tools for assessing the costs and benefits of participation, including cost benefit analysis and its extensions such as contingent valuation (estimating non-market values) and hedonistic pricing (using existing market choices to estimate non-market values, such as estimating the costs of noise by comparing the costs of houses near (and not near) motorways. However, these were found to be too complicated for non-economists to understand, and provided only limited conclusions.

## 8.2 NICE on community engagement<sup>44</sup>

NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) has proposed that it is possible to use a conventional cost effectiveness modelling analysis on community engagement if there is a careful and detailed description of the activity, a comparator (so can do a before and after assessment), one or more validated outcome measures, a careful and comprehensive account of costs/resources used and a sufficiently long follow-up time.

NICE therefore constructed a cost effectiveness model for community engagement but this was then discarded because the 'results were not informative'. NICE found it was hard to find comparators for engagement, attribution of effect was hard or impossible to define, and there was a lack of data on costs.

Also, NICE concluded that the outcomes from engagement can take months or years to take effect, it was difficult to know which aspect of the engagement was responsible for the benefits, it was difficult to predict what would have happened if the engagement had not taken place, and it was hard to translate outcomes into data that could be measured or translated into forms that could be monetised.

NICE also suggests that supplementary economic modelling is very problematic because if one parameter is changed (e.g. length of time effect lasts), the results would alter dramatically and the result may no longer be 'cost effective'. NICE concluded, in its Quick Guide to Community Engagement, that the focus in evaluation should include ensuring that 'outcomes match the resources available and the time invested in the activity', and that 'where there is no additional cost for conducting better practice, recommendations for such practice will be cost effective'. These are useful pointers for defining cost effectiveness.

## 8.3 NEF Social Return on Investment (SROI)<sup>45</sup>

The SROI model is designed as a measure that 'captures the value of social benefits' of investment, especially of public funds. SROI aims to 'explain' an organisation's social impact, including financial measures as part of the picture but is not intended to provide a 'one number answer'.

SROI is designed to go beyond cost benefit analysis as a way of translating social objectives into financial measures (generally gains and losses to public expenditure). However, the pilot study found only returns of 1.3:1, and 1.8:1, which is fairly low and not conclusive about the cost effectiveness of the interventions assessed.

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<sup>43</sup> Involve (2005) *The True Costs of Public Participation. Full report*. Written by Edward Andersson and Diane Warburton. Involve, London.

<sup>44</sup> NICE (2008) *Community engagement to improve health*. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, London. [www.nice.org.uk/PH009](http://www.nice.org.uk/PH009)

<sup>45</sup> New Economics Foundation (2004) *Social Return on Investment. Valuing what matters*. Findings and recommendations from a pilot study. New Economics Foundation, London.

There were also numerous caveats to the model identified during the pilot phase, including the need to develop standard proxy measures and standard monetary values to be assigned to value/benefits, and to articulate assumptions through a 'sensitivity analysis' so simple results could not be seen as definitive. Finally, feedback from the pilots suggested that any such model needed to mean something to non-economists and be simple to administer: even those organisations that took part in the NEF pilot had difficulty implementing the model.

More recently, the SROI model has been further developed, and is now being used more widely in a range of local projects. For example, Contact Now (a Belfast-based disability training workshop enterprise) used SROI to calculate that for every £1 invested in its service, a further £3.70 was generated in social benefit<sup>46</sup>. Contact Now is quoted as saying that the use of the SROI analysis had enabled the organisation to "prove to funding bodies we were better than our competitors" but suggested "do not hang yourself on the figures, it's the journey that counts". The Fab Pad project for young homeless people showed that for every £1 invested by Government, £8.38 of social return was achieved in terms of reduced healthcare costs, reduced welfare benefits expenditure and reduced costs of repeat homelessness<sup>47</sup>.

A new programme (announced November 2008) has been established by the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office, to be run by a consortium including New Economics Foundation and SROI UK. This project will look further at impact measurement during the project which is due to run over 2008-2011.

SROI is based on a more conventional Return on Investment model. ROI does result in a 'one number answer', from the equation:

$$\frac{\text{total benefit} - \text{total costs}}{\text{total costs}} \times 100 = \text{ROI}$$

However, this model suffers from the same limitations as the SROI model and the NICE models in that the data on total costs is not available, without which the calculation is no more than a guesstimate.

## 8.4 Calculating additional impact

A model was constructed in order to measure the impacts and outcomes of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund<sup>48</sup>, responding to the desire to come up with financial calculations and a 'one number answer'. The formula for this was as follows:

$$AI = [GI \times (I - L) \times (I - (Dp + S)/2) / (I - D)]$$

In this equation, AI is the net additional local impact, GI is gross impact (100%), L is leakage (i.e. benefits beyond the target area), Dp is displacement (i.e. reduced outcomes elsewhere as a result), S is substitution (as displacement), and D is deadweight (what would have happened anyway).

In this case, the researchers did come up with 'one number answers', but the calculations were so complex it was impossible for non-economists to understand the

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<sup>46</sup> Butler, Patrick (2009). 'Businesses to be assessed on wider social value' in The Guardian, 18 February 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Background on SROI on the Office of the Third Sector homepage:  
[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector)

<sup>48</sup> Communities and Local Government (2008) *Impacts and Outcomes of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund*. Written by Georgina Cowen and Matt Wilton, York Consulting, with Graham Russell and Peter Stowe, Amion Consulting. Department of Communities and Local Government, London.

logic. Moreover, the conclusions were largely qualitative and around levels of savings possible (from very low to very high) and cost effectiveness ranging from highly effective to not at all effective. The conclusions are therefore general, from very specific (but difficult to understand) numbers.

The questions raised by economic analyses of this type are around the extent to which the conclusions of the evaluation are more powerful for having done them (which probably depends on the economic literacy of the audience), and what additional benefits all the calculations have over other methods of presenting evidence, especially given the high levels of data required and the large resources needed to do the analysis.

## 8.5 Environment Agency

The Environment Agency<sup>49</sup> has recently attempted to analyse the cost-benefits of collaborative approaches, with a focus on collaborating with communities and stakeholders around flooding. This work provides some very useful frameworks for planning collaborative working, and distinguishes between 'value added benefits' (what extra benefits does working collaboratively add) and 'unique benefits' (what can only be achieved by working with others). It also identifies some of the key monetary and non-monetary costs, and risks, of collaboration.

The report suggests a framework for integrating costs and benefits using a case study as an example to allow specific costs and benefits to be identified. The results of the analysis are presented in a table which has two columns:

- **Costs:** staff/consultant time, volunteer time on the liaison group, materials and venue costs for events, other costs such as stress for staff doing things differently, costs related to this being a pilot, and moving costs earlier in the project.
- **Outcomes/benefits:** an acceptable flood defence scheme, successful resolution of surface/sewerage flooding, increased community resilience (e.g. because of awareness of flood risks), more appropriate scheme design, reduced staff stress/time on complaints, improved future working relationships between institutions, health benefits from the scheme being completed successfully, reduced costs of flooding, and benefits from this being a pilot project.

This approach is useful in providing a framework for summarising likely costs and benefits, although the presentation in two columns encourages the user to read across and directly compare a specific cost with a specific benefit, which is not intended.

Overall, this work for the Environment Agency is particularly helpful in differentiating between processes that do not use engagement to come to decisions (Decide, Announce, Defend - DAD) and schemes that do use engagement (Engage, Deliberate, Decide - EDD). It then considers the costs and benefits of collaboration in different contexts, making the point that the crucial element to achieving success is to design a process that is appropriate to the circumstances. Here, three different scenarios are identified which are, very briefly summarised:

- Type A contexts, where there is relatively low controversy and few options
- Type B contexts, where there are more options, and more uncertainty and more interests to take into account

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<sup>49</sup> Colbourne, Lindsey (2008) *Mainstreaming collaboration with communities and stakeholders for FCERM*. Science Report SC060019 Improving Institutional and Social Responses to Flooding. Environment Agency, Bristol.

- Type C contexts, where there are yet more interests to involve, a lot of uncertainty and complexity, and a strong likelihood of conflict and resistance

The analysis is done to support some indicative budgeting, by identifying potential costs and benefits of collaborative approaches, as shown in the following table. This table separates added value benefits from unique benefits, and shows in more detail the sorts of benefits that might be found in these examples quoting examples from Environment Agency flood defence schemes.

	<b>Potential added value benefits of collaborative approach (above minimum required by statutory consultation)</b>	<b>Potential unique benefits of collaborative approach (couldn't be achieved through statutory consultation)</b>	<b>Potential costs of NOT adopting appropriate collaborative approach for this decision</b>	<b>Typical cost of adopting collaborative approach</b>
<b>Type A context and process</b>	More widely informed individuals, communities, and partners. Improved reputation.		Risk that those who need to know are not informed and so unable to act.	Up to £20,000 over 6 months (e.g. flood management programme for River Medway).
<b>Type B context and process</b>	As for Type A plus better understanding by stakeholders; better design; reduced risk of going back to drawing board at late stage.	Ability to design joined-up solutions.	Risk of having to redesign scheme/adding engagement later on (Bideford: £120,000).	Up to £60,000 over 2 years (e.g. Humber Estuary FDS).
<b>Type C context and process</b>	As for Type A and B plus reduced risk of scheme being thrown out.	Co-delivery through multiple 'actors' beyond remit of Environment Agency.	Risk of scheme being thrown out (Teignmouth up to £150,000).	Up to £100,000 over three years (e.g. Shaldon).

This framework is clearly transferable to planning for public dialogue on national policy issues, although it is less useful for evaluation. An evaluation framework would need to compare EDD schemes (the first two columns) with DAD schemes (the third column) alongside identifying the typical (ideally actual) costs of each. The basic comparison of schemes that do engage the public and those that do not is a useful way forward.

However, as in the other frameworks examined, this work concluded that 'Due to the difficulties of conceptualising the benefits/costs set out above, as well as the lack of data available from the Environment Agency, this project was unable to conclusively demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of collaboration. In future, a framework for doing so needs to be established ...'<sup>50</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Colbourne (2008) op cit, p26.

## 8.6 CLG Impact Assessments

The Department for Communities and Local Government has its own impact assessments, and these have been developed for use on the 'Duty to Involve'<sup>51</sup>. This has the potential to provide the sort of framework we were seeking. Unfortunately, the published versions of these particular impact assessments give no monetised benefits at all, and focus only on non-monetised benefits.

## 8.7 Conclusions on existing models

All the examples summarised above show the difficulties of measuring the cost effectiveness of engagement and, although some provide some very useful frameworks that can be used as part of such measurement, not even those involved in developing each one feel they provide a complete answer. The number of such attempts recently does, however, also indicate the importance of this issue and the need to find a workable solution.

We can conclude from this analysis that there is no existing economic analysis tool that will work to create a simple cost effectiveness model that will assign monetary values to the benefits of public engagement so that such benefits can be compared to actual costs and come to conclusions about value in any meaningful way.

Also, there is not (and probably never will be) sufficient or appropriate hard data on costs available to enable any conventional economic analysis tool that could be identified to work fully, even if that was felt to be desirable in terms of the costs of such calculations. No public engagement process has ever been able to provide all this data, and is unlikely ever to do so given the costs of this sort of data collection and monitoring and the limited budgets (and timescales) almost always accorded to public engagement activities and their evaluation.

As the economist John Maynard Keynes said<sup>52</sup>, the flaws in classical economic theory were the: 'attempts to apply highly precise and mathematical methods to material which is itself much too vague to support such treatment'. In assessing dialogue, the material on costs is likely to continue to be too vague to support such analysis (and it would be too expensive to do more), and the material on benefits is qualitative and would also be inappropriate for such analysis.

There are other problems. The cost of measurement can become disproportionate. In addition, there are real dangers with focusing too much on measurement at the expense of accepting the richness and diversity of the qualitative evidence now being collected on the benefits and impacts of public dialogue: recognising that if you measure the wrong thing, you can end up encouraging the wrong action<sup>53</sup>. David Boyle argues that 'ever more unmeasurable aspects of life get inaccurately transformed into numerical indicators', and that 'too much measuring undermines our intuition and judgement, and makes us bland and unimaginative ... we forget what numbers *can't* do. They won't interpret, they won't inspire. And they won't tell us what causes what'.

However, it is important that there is some attempt to understand and demonstrate the value of public engagement, in terms of the benefits and impacts it achieves but also in relation to the costs. Questions continue to be asked, rightly, about spending

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<sup>51</sup> Communities and Local Government (2008) *Duty to Promote Democracy. Impact assessment*. Department of Communities and Local Government, London.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Skidelsky, R. (2008) 'John Maynard Keynes. A thinker for our times', in *New Statesman*, 22 December 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Boyle, David (2001) 'A world of too many numbers', in *Town and Country Planning*, February 2001.

public money on something that currently cannot show either the extent of the costs or the value of the benefits. The remainder of this paper attempts to meet the need for such measurement.

## 9 What can be measured?

The dangers of only counting what can be counted, and therefore not considering the full picture, remain. The temptation to 'measure' assumes numerical answers, and all the work examined for this research has failed to identify any frameworks which provide simple numerical conclusions on the complex activities involved in public engagement.

Measurement is all about 'quantity': how much and how many. Demonstrating 'value' in public engagement is much more elusive than measurement can provide and implies 'quality' as well as 'quantity'. It seems that using a simple 'measurement' approach to demonstrate the value of engagement is neither feasible nor desirable.

However, we have also found that it is possible to provide **some** numbers (e.g. statistics from participant feedback). The first consideration is around the relationship between costs and benefits and value, with costs including inputs (money, staff etc) and negative impacts, and benefits including positive impacts. The relationships being considered here can be summarised as:

$$(\text{Benefits and positive impacts}) - (\text{Costs and negative impacts}) = \text{value}$$

Based on this, it could be argued that the calculation of cost effectiveness is about the **balance** between costs and benefits:

High benefits - low costs = good value

High benefits - high costs = reasonable value

Low benefits - low costs = reasonable value

Low benefits - high costs = poor value

However, this very simplistic equation does not include any consideration of 'quality', which is integral to 'value'. Possibly the most important aspect of using this equation is in demonstrating:

- that value is about much more than balancing costs and benefits; in practice a process can have real value (and be cost effective) even if the costs are very high
- how many assumptions are made in this approach (including who bears the costs or enjoys the benefits), and
- how subjective any judgement is going to be, and therefore
- how unlikely it is that numerical or monetary values (or a single number answer: how valuable = 9) can easily be assigned to the costs and benefits of engagement.

In any analysis of value, numbers will only ever be part of the conclusions, and are often less important and less resonant than the description and interpretation of the

benefits. It would seem that the way forward in demonstrating value and cost effectiveness is to find some way of bringing numbers and description (quantitative and qualitative analysis) together. This section explores how that might be done.

Two key challenges in assessing cost effectiveness were summarised in the evaluation of the GM Debate<sup>54</sup>, both of which are addressed below:

- 'it did not seem sensible to ask participants to assess this aspect of the debate', and
- 'cost effectiveness could not be related in any simple way to the quality of the enactment of the participation process'.

## 9.1 Asking participants about cost effectiveness

We would agree that it is not sensible to ask participants to do a complicated cost benefit analysis or calculation of cost effectiveness. However, it is entirely sensible - indeed essential - to ask participants for their *perceptions* of whether the exercise represented money well spent.

The dilemma about asking participants for their views on cost effectiveness illustrates the difficulties of devising a framework for assessing cost effectiveness more generally: particularly that assessing cost effectiveness assumes a mathematical calculation, using detailed data and based on economic models that would be beyond participants' knowledge.

However, it is our view that *perceptions* of cost effectiveness are in fact a core part of any assessment (the subjective, informal and qualitative part), and that participants' views are central to that assessment.

A number of recent evaluations by this author have explored in follow-up interviews whether policy makers and public participants felt that the engagement process had been 'money well spent'. The question was carefully framed to avoid conventional language of cost effectiveness, value for money or balancing costs and benefits, and to focus particularly on stressing the fact that money *had* been spent, and that we are asking for their *perceptions* not a *calculation*<sup>55</sup>.

The feedback to these questions has been almost universally positive: that for both participants and policy makers, money spent on public engagement has been 'money well spent'. There is often considerable enthusiasm for such spending among those who have been involved personally, with remarks such as it being a drop in the ocean compared to the costs of implementing the policies being discussed.

However, strong caveats to whether it is money well spent have also emerged:

- For **public participants**, it is only money well spent if their views are listened to/the process makes a difference. This is almost the only caveat given by the public in their views on the issue, and across a range of subjects and processes.

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<sup>54</sup> Horlick-Jones, T., Walls, J., Rowe, G., Pidgeon, N., Poortinga, W., Murdock, G. & O'Riordan, T. (2007) *The GM Debate. Risk, politics and public engagement*. Routledge, Oxon; p25.

<sup>55</sup> The question was "Public engagement obviously has financial costs. Do you think it is money well spent, or not?" or a variation on this wording. In most cases, the overall rough costs were common knowledge; if interviewees asked, they were told the rough overall budget, e.g. £1 million for Your Health, Your Care, Your Say.

- For **policy makers**, it is only money well spent if they have got something useful out of it in terms of their policy development processes. However, their responses are more complex. Some are looking for results which give them the confidence to make the decision by having their assumptions tested and confirmed; in this case they are looking less for content than absence of opposition. Others are looking for more 'content', they want to see the details of all the comments and views from the public, and see dialogue as part of the evidence gathering process that feeds into policy development and decision-making.

This suggests that, while all the benefits and impacts listed above are part of the value, the crucial outcomes and benefits for these two audiences are **influence** for the public, and **reassurance in decision-making** and **strengthening/enriching the evidence base** for policy makers.

## 9.2 Relating cost to quality

This is the central problem for assessing the cost effectiveness of public engagement, because it is the old problem of relating quality to quantity. However, this is much more a problem in theory than it is in practice; people relate quality to quantity all the time in making judgements every day about whether to buy one bar of chocolate or another, or a million other decisions.

Indeed, part of the value of public engagement is that it provides different ways of thinking about problems based on practical lay knowledge and experience, which is often very different from technical or scientific logic. It could be argued that assessment of public engagement should use the same principles as apply to public engagement: valuing the input from the public, the personal and subjective, the intuitive and experiential.

Taking this view leads to the proposal that assessing the value of public engagement is an art rather than a science. However, arts also require techniques and skill and we can go further than just 'feelings' of value by bringing together subjective judgement and evidence using conventional approaches to qualitative research<sup>56</sup>.

The evidence used to assess the value of public engagement needs to be valid and reliable:

- Reliable evidence = would get the same results in different circumstances (which can be tested by doing it twice, or more than one researcher doing the analysis and comparing results)
- Valid evidence = measures what is intended to be measured (e.g. cannot measure 'fairness' with data on 'enjoyment')

Given valid and reliable evidence on which to base an assessment (which will be an aspiration even if not easily done in present circumstances), it may then be possible to relate cost to quality in a two-stage process which considers cost effectiveness first, then relates that to value. The summaries below are intended to illustrate the main elements of these relationships; they are not mathematical and are not intended to generate any numbers:

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<sup>56</sup> Cabinet Office (2003) Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence. Written by Liz Spencer, Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis and Lucy Dillon, National Centre for Social Research. Government Chief Social Researcher's Office, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office, London.

(Benefits + positive impacts) - (Costs + negative impacts) = Cost effectiveness

Then

Cost effectiveness + Quality of process = Value

These summaries illustrate the relationships between how consideration of costs and benefits leads to conclusions about cost effectiveness; and consideration of the relationship between cost effectiveness and quality of process leads to conclusions about value.

The question then becomes: how to define quality. As already mentioned, there are no widely agreed criteria for success or quality in public engagement. Indeed, generic criteria are often rejected by practitioners (and some evaluators) who argue that each process is entirely different, with different purposes and different circumstances, and that there are therefore no criteria that could possibly apply universally. Indeed, most of the evaluations cited in this work have not used generic quality criteria but have focused on criteria developed for the purpose from the stated objectives and whatever quality standards have been most appropriate.

The absence of widely accepted generic criteria is a real gap because the audiences for evaluation want quick and simple answers to questions about the quality of the process. We therefore turn in the next section to the issue of generic criteria, but first address the potential for using comparators to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of public engagement.

### **9.3 Comparing public dialogue to other approaches**

The issue of comparing public dialogue to other approaches that meet the needs of the public and policy makers was not raised in the GM debate evaluation but it is one that recurs in discussions about the value of public engagement. Lindsey Colbourne addresses it in her work for the Environment Agency<sup>57</sup> in comparing Decide, Announce, Defend approaches (DAD) which have no public engagement, and Engage, Deliberate, Decide approaches (EDD), which do.

Comparative data could be very useful. NICE has argued that health treatment is 'cost effective if treatment gives greater health gain than could be achieved by using the resources in other ways'<sup>58</sup>. NICE suggests that an alternative analysis of cost effectiveness is to use the incremental cost-effective ratio (ICER), which looks at the cost of an intervention compared to the next best alternative (which could be no action). In considering the cost effectiveness of public engagement, it would be extremely useful to gain new research data comparing similar problems in similar contexts and assessing the costs and benefits of doing, and not doing, public engagement. Unfortunately, at present, such comparative data is not available.

However, considering comparators in the way NICE suggests does begin to open another avenue of investigation for cost effectiveness which looks at whether more or similar benefits could have been gained (for similar costs) by using alternative approaches. Taking some of the motivations for engagement among policy makers, and looking at some alternative approaches, we can begin to see how the benefits and cost effectiveness of public engagement can be demonstrated by comparison with alternatives. For example:

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<sup>57</sup> Colbourne, Lindsey (2008) op cit.

<sup>58</sup> NICE (2008) op cit.

- **Behaviour change/social marketing campaigns.** Several Government departments are investing heavily in social marketing campaigns with the aims of changing behaviour (healthy eating, exercise, reducing carbon footprint etc). From the evidence already available, we can demonstrate how public engagement has resulted in specific numbers of people who have clarified their views and changed their minds, decided to change (and have changed) what they do, and who have an increased sense of personal responsibility for tackling the issues (e.g. climate change).
- **Social science research.** Social scientific methods can be used to review and consider public values and attitudes, knowledge and experience, using established theoretical frameworks and qualitative and quantitative research methods. Participatory social research and action research methods are increasingly in use but remain relatively rare. Dialogue processes can create a deeper level of participation so that participants are much closer to the formulation of findings, and to the influence of those findings on policy makers. There is evidence that dialogue therefore creates a greater sense of public ownership over the results, and in the resulting policy decisions.
- **Raising public awareness.** Government is increasingly creating messages to the public via media launches of new policies. There is now evidence showing how public engagement has raised awareness among participants (e.g. renewable energy, tidal power, climate change, reducing emissions), and also evidence of the extent to which those participants have talked to others and spread the messages further and through more trusted sources than Government media campaigns (e.g. the Defra public dialogue from which there is evidence that suggests that the 150 participants were likely to have gone on to talk to 4,500 people).
- **Market research.** While market research (including polling) can provide useful numbers on public opinions, deliberative public engagement can provide immediate, powerful and usable results for policy makers through direct contact between policy makers and public (unmediated by researchers or media). Results from deliberative research exercises provide much greater richness of data, showing depth of feeling and understanding of 'why' people hold the views they do (and thus identifying their real concerns and underlying values). Polling (including using electronic keypads) can be integrated into dialogue processes to provide a quantitative element. This has been done by creating a 'control' sample of views (separate from the dialogue process), and to 'take the temperature' within a dialogue meeting by polling on a particular question.
- **Active citizenship/citizenship education/capacity-building programmes.** There are views that citizens need to have their capacity built before they can fully participate, and investment is made in such programmes. There is now clear evidence that deliberative public engagement enables participants to develop a wide range of skills and confidence through active participation, as well as evidence on the extent to which they are then inspired to go and do more (given the opportunities, which is another issue), and therefore the extent to which public engagement itself results in capacity building and can create a more aware and thus more engaged set of citizens.
- **Other methods of democratic engagement such as elections.** It is a guiding premise of the promotion of public dialogue that it is complementary to, and does not in any way replace, representative democracy. However, there appears to be a growing sense that elections do not provide the depth of democratic

engagement that people want: Ipsos MORI says<sup>59</sup> that 63% would prefer 'regular nationwide consultation between elections over key issues to explain the issues which the government faces, setting out the choices, listening to the results and then ensuring policy reflects these views', compared to 33% who would prefer more elections. And feedback to these polls was evenly split between giving views (50% prefer consultation) and more active involvement (e.g. 48% interested in shaping priorities). About 25% said they would be interested in getting involved personally (in this case, in community partnerships).

These comparisons are not intended to suggest that other methods of achieving these outcomes are not appropriate; in many cases they are appropriate, valuable and even vital. However, there is already evidence to show that public engagement can be a very effective part of the set of approaches that Government can use to achieve these outcomes, and that the outcomes from public engagement are often deeper, richer and more sustainable. There is also anecdotal evidence that dialogue may also be less expensive than some of the alternatives.

It is important that full evaluations are completed of the cost effectiveness, success, quality and value of these alternatives to dialogue. Such data would allow for full comparative analysis to be undertaken to clarify exactly how well dialogue compares to these other approaches.

## 10 Measuring the quality and success of dialogue

It has been stressed throughout this paper that the full range of benefits that can result from public engagement can only be achieved with good quality processes. This section addresses how an evaluation of quality can be achieved.

It is usually expected that an evaluation will assess practice against criteria but, as has been pointed out in the evaluation of the GM debate:<sup>60</sup> 'There is no widely accepted evaluation framework and associated criteria' for evaluating public dialogue. Without criteria of some sort, against which to assess practice, rigorous evaluation is impossible.

Existing evaluations have used criteria drawn from various sources, primarily:

- Criteria based on the objectives identified for the dialogue
- Criteria based on relevant principles of good practice
- Criteria drawn from the feedback from participants and others (their views of success)
- Generic criteria for public engagement from the academic literature

These sets of criteria are far from mutually exclusive, and can overlap significantly. They are each addressed in turn below.

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<sup>59</sup> Ipsos MORI (2008), op cit.

<sup>60</sup> Horlick-Jones, T., Walls, J., Rowe, G., Pidgeon, N., Poortinga, W., Murdock, G. & O'Riordan, T. (2007) *The GM Debate. Risk, politics and public engagement*. Routledge, Oxon; p 176.

## 10.1 Criteria based on the objectives for the dialogue

The extent to which the stated objectives of any process can be used to evaluate an engagement process varies considerably, depending largely on how clear and specific the objectives are. Also, in addition to the stated objectives, the sponsoring organisation may actually expect all sorts of other benefits to result ('implicit' objectives such as increased public awareness of climate change, or increased trust in Government). Implicit objectives may or may not be reflected in the design of the process and it may or may not therefore be possible to test achievements against them in the evaluation.

In terms of assessment and analysis, the Logical Framework Analysis<sup>61</sup> ('logframe') table provides a useful basic template that can be adjusted to allow for the objectives to be disassembled into their constituent parts, identifying indicators that will show whether the objective has been achieved, and what the evidence can be identified to show achievement. An example of how this might work is given below<sup>62</sup>:

Objectives	Indicators of success	How each objective has been met
<p>Objective 1: To engage stakeholders in the scoping and development of the dialogue process in collaboration with the Authority and in line with the wider written and web consultation process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders engaged</li> <li>• Clarity of their role</li> <li>• Satisfaction of stakeholders with their role</li> <li>• Links to written and web consultation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders engaged through the Stakeholder Advisory Group</li> <li>• There was some lack of clarity about the role of the Group, but it did operate quite effectively</li> <li>• The stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation were largely positive in their feedback on the process and their role in it. Some did have some criticisms (about short deadlines, their engagement coming too late in the design of the dialogue process and a desire for deeper involvement)</li> <li>• The questions developed for the dialogue process were closely linked to the questions in the wider written and web consultation process</li> </ul>

It is always important that evaluations are also sensitive to unexpected outcomes, and record and report those, as well as the expected and hoped for results which can be identified by evaluating against objectives.

<sup>61</sup> BOND (2003) Logical Framework Analysis. BOND Guidance Notes No 4. BOND, London.

<sup>62</sup> From Warburton, D. (2007) *Evaluation of the HFEA public consultation on hybrid and chimera embryos*. HFEA/Shared Practice, London/Brighton.

## 10.2 Criteria based on relevant principles of good practice

There is growing understanding of good practice in deliberative public engagement, and in public dialogue of the sort promoted by Sciencewise-ERC. The two main sets of principles used in the UK in this context are the Sciencewise-ERC principles<sup>63</sup>, and the National Consumer Council/Involve principles of deliberative public engagement<sup>64</sup>. More recently, international sets of principles and criteria have been published by the OECD<sup>65</sup> and by a coalition of non-government organisations in the US building on President Obama's memorandum on open and transparent government<sup>66</sup>.

Other criteria of good practice used for evaluations include the Government Code of Practice on Consultation<sup>67</sup>, published by the Better Regulation Executive (in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills) in July 2008 (this replaces the earlier Cabinet Office Code on Consultation).

The logframe table can also be adapted to provide a template for analysis against good practice principles (here using the Sciencewise-ERC principles), as shown in the example below<sup>68</sup>:

Key principles of good practice	Indicators of success (quoted from detailed principles)	How each principle has been met
<b>1 Context</b> The conditions leading to the dialogue process are conducive to the best outcomes.	Be clear in the purposes and objectives from the outset.	The purpose and objectives of the public engagement programme were agreed by the Working Group at the beginning of the process. The objectives were explained to public participants and expert speakers at each engagement event. This evaluation report shows that public participants and others involved were generally clear about the purpose of the process.
	Be well-timed in relation to public and political concerns, and start as early as possible in the policy decision process.	The context for the public engagement programme is described in section 2.5; this engagement process was timed to be fully integrated with the work of the AMS Working Group on brain science, addiction and drugs, which in turn responded to the publication of the Government Foresight report <i>Drugs Futures 2025?</i> . The public engagement was therefore timed to link to policy concerns.
	Feed into public policy, with commitment and buy-in from policy actors.	The public engagement programme started early in the project, alongside wider stakeholder engagement led by the AMS. The aim was to run these two engagement strands simultaneously in order to facilitate progression towards a robust set of recommendations that were supported and informed by scientific evidence, stakeholder input and public concerns and aspirations.

<sup>63</sup> See [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk) for full and summary principles.

<sup>64</sup> Involve/National Consumer Council (2008) *Deliberative public engagement: nine principles*. Involve & National Consumer Council, London. [www.involve.org.uk/nine-principles/](http://www.involve.org.uk/nine-principles/)

<sup>65</sup> OECD 2009, op cit.

<sup>66</sup> NCDD, IAP2 et al (2009) *Core principles for public engagement*. A collaborative project led by the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), the Co-Intelligence Institute and others. May 2009. [www.ncdd.org/pep](http://www.ncdd.org/pep)

<sup>67</sup> Available at <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> From Warburton, D. (2008) *Evaluation of the Academy of Medical Sciences' Drugsfutures public engagement programme*. Academy of Medical Sciences/Shared Practice, London/Brighton.

### 10.3 Criteria based on feedback from participants and others

Developing criteria based on the views of sponsors and participants is an accepted approach<sup>69</sup>. An analysis for this paper of the feedback from participants in the evaluations covered has identified the criteria used by policy makers and public participants to assess success, and these are given below. These are based directly on feedback to open questions in evaluation interviews and questionnaires about what was most valuable, provided greatest benefits, were the best aspects and the worst aspects. The criteria below are not the same as the 'benefits' identified from the same sources earlier in this paper, although there are overlaps.

- **Feedback from policy makers** suggests that they consider the process was successful if it had the following characteristics:
  - **Sufficient scale:** sufficient numbers to provide a good research sample, to represent the diversity of views, and to provide views that can be taken to be representative of the population of the affected public. Market research sampling guidelines suggest that a sample of 1,100 people is needed to provide a demographically representative sample of public opinion. While the purpose of public dialogue, and its processes, are very different from market research and there is no particular reason to use this measure, it has become stuck in the minds of some policy makers. In addition, involving a large number of public participants is often seen as giving higher 'status' to the process and to the results (with the media, politicians etc).
  - **Participants are representative:** to provide views that could be taken to be representative of the population of the affected public (e.g. demographically representative sample of UK population).
  - **Participants are general public**, and not vested interests.
  - **Provided accountability and legitimacy for decision-making**, in the sense that public bodies have a duty to test what the public think about new policy proposals including the spending of public money; engagement can achieve this and therefore provide a public mandate.
  - **Increased transparency in policy and decision making**, by providing an opportunity to listen to the public, and be 'seen' to listen. Also, opening up decision and policy-making processes more widely to public scrutiny.
  - **Provided information on, and detailed understanding of, public views**, priorities, values, why they had those views and the strength of feeling on particular issues to feed into, enrich and underpin the evidence base on which policy and decisions could be based.
  - **Provided opportunity to test policy assumptions**, and for the public to challenge those assumptions, about public views (e.g. found the public more liberal, and more interested, than expected).
  - **Results of public engagement presented in a form they could use** to take into account in policy formulation.

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<sup>69</sup> Horlick-Jones, T., Walls, J., Rowe, G., Pidgeon, N., Poortinga, W. & O'Riordan, T. (2006) 'On evaluating the *GM Nation?* Public debate about the commercialisation of transgenic crops in Britain' in *New Genetics and Society*, Vol 25, No 3, December 2006.

- **Provided public education and awareness** of the topic, and of policy proposals.
- **Gained participant buy-in** to the policy proposals.
- **Provided opportunity to learn about public engagement**, and how the public can be committed, enthusiastic and curious about subjects outside their usual sphere of interest.
- **Changed public attitudes, values, behaviour.**
- **Quality process design and delivery** that enhanced sponsor's reputation with all those involved (including public, other stakeholders, experts etc).
- **Increased public trust in the institution/Government** as a result of a good process, and being seen to listen.
- **Reassurance/confidence in taking decisions** because these are based on direct and detailed understanding of public views, and where the public drew the line between what was (and was not) acceptable; 'sharpened up' the justification for the decision.
- **Took place**; had to be done to enable policy to move forward; step that had to be taken/hurdle cleared in order for progress to be made on policy.
- **Identified key areas of consensus and conflict**, to aid future planning.
- **Opportunity to test boundaries of public acceptance** of policy proposals, and policy makers' assumptions about this.
- **Feedback from public participants** suggests that they consider the process was successful if it had the following characteristics.
  - **Made a difference**: something happened as a result.
  - **Scale**: enough people involved, so feel the process has credibility and status.
  - **Diversity of participants**: involving people from a wide range of backgrounds that they would not normally meet.
  - **Hearing views of other participants**, dialogue, debate.
  - **Had influence, had a say, and raised the issues** they wanted to.
  - **Reports on their input** reflected their conclusions accurately, and they were kept in touch with what had happened to their input.
  - **Learned something new**: from experts, scientists, policy makers, other participants, about the topic, about participating, and about decision-making processes (including understanding the difficulties of decision-making).
  - **Quality process design and delivery**, which showed respect and enabled them to take part fully.
  - **Enjoyable/worthwhile experience**, which inspired them to get involved again in future.

- **Opportunity to take part in something important.**
- **Felt they were shown respect** because, for example, they were provided with resources (money, expenses), given information and time to think about and talk about the issues, and then asked for their views on the issues.
- **Trusted sponsoring institution to listen and take account of their views;** evaluation evidence suggests that this affects how satisfied people are with the process more than whether they agreed with any overall results that emerged (e.g. in favour or not of the proposed policy); they did not necessarily expect, or want, the institution to do what they said, but they did want them to consider their views seriously.

Some of these criteria relate to specific processes (e.g. criteria around behaviour change), but many recur in feedback from numerous evaluation processes.

## 10.4 Generic criteria from the academic literature

The academic literature has been an integral part of the development of principles and criteria for assessing good practice for several decades, with mutual sharing and reinforcement between theoretical literature from practice and from social science (and other academic disciplines including psychology and political science).

The key criteria for evaluation from this source are fairness and competency, drawn originally from Thomas Webler in 1995<sup>70</sup>, and these have been used and adapted extensively since (e.g. by Judith Petts (1995)<sup>71</sup>, Rowe and Frewer (2000)<sup>72</sup> and the GM Nation? evaluation (2007)<sup>73</sup>.

Other academic sources have commented on and made proposals for further adaptation<sup>74</sup> and others have produced revised versions based on Rowe and Frewer's original list<sup>75</sup>. However, at present there is still no universally agreed set of criteria that can be applied to all public engagement processes. While there can never be a 'one size fits all' model, a robust and shared set of criteria would help guide design, implementation and evaluation of dialogue.

## 10.5 What is wrong with the existing criteria?

All the criteria identified above have been very useful in practical evaluations of public engagement processes, and have taken the debate forward about how to measure the success of these processes. However, criteria for success are more important than a simple practical tool - vital though that is. Establishing criteria creates a statement about what is most important about these processes, about what

<sup>70</sup> Webler, T. (1995) 'Right discourse' in citizen participation: an evaluative yardstick, in O Renn, T Webler & P Wiedemann (eds) *Fairness and Competence in Citizen Participation: Evaluating Models for Environmental Discourse*, pp. 35-86 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic).

<sup>71</sup> Petts, J (1995) Waste management strategy development: a case study of community involvement and consensus-building in Hampshire, *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 38(4), pp 519-536.

<sup>72</sup> Rowe, G. and Frewer, L.J. (2000) 'Public participation methods: a framework for evaluation', in *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 25 (1), 3-29.

<sup>73</sup> Horlick-Jones et al (2007) op cit.

<sup>74</sup> For example, Burgess, Jacquelin & Chilvers, Jason (2006) 'Upping the ante: a conceptual framework for designing and evaluating participatory technology assessments' in *Science and Public Policy*, vol 33, no 10, December 2006, 713-728.

<sup>75</sup> For example, Burton, Paul (2007) *Conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects in measuring the impact of citizen participation in policy making*. Paper to CINEFOGO Conference, Bristol, 14-15 February 2007.

we should expect from them. At present, the criteria available are not comprehensive.

The main difficulty is that the generic criteria are so high level that they are very open to interpretation and therefore slightly vague about what they mean in practice and what is really important. By contrast, the specific criteria taken from objectives and good practice are too specific to be applied generally.

In addition, there are some specific criticisms of the existing criteria that we review briefly below because they point to what a generic set of criteria *should* cover. The missing elements are around translation, framing, representativeness and participant satisfaction.

- **Translation.** The issue of how the results of engagement are 'translated' for and by policy makers is not currently covered by any of the existing criteria, but is vitally important in assessing the quality of the process<sup>76</sup>. There are also related issues of how views from the public are or should be 'weighted' against other evidence sources, or indeed how the specific issues within a report of public views should be weighted or prioritised to show strength of feeling.

There are issues around the ways that public views are captured and reported from public dialogue processes, in that public views are often recorded in ways that the participants cannot see (on laptops) and there is no feedback to them about what is going forward to policy makers as the representation of their views, let alone any opportunity to challenge those conclusions.

There are added dangers of 'weighting' data resulting from public dialogue, either within public views or between public views and other evidence sources for two reasons. First, it imposes a quantitative system on to qualitative data, which presents real challenges. Second, the weighting, and thus the judgement about priorities, is not done by the public participants but by researchers/contractors, which also raises challenges and dangers.

In practice, one approach to solving the issues around weighting in the analysis of the results of public dialogue may be to focus more on developing the design and delivery of dialogue processes rather than finding new models to analyse the results. This would enable participants themselves to weight or prioritise the elements of their discussions (using well-established methods such as dots, or other prioritisation techniques), rather than this being done by external researchers or contractors.

However it is done, this is clearly an issue that is vitally important to assessing the quality and success of the process, as the quality of the capturing and reporting of results is crucial to the value of the exercise to participants and to policy makers.

- **Framing.** It has become increasingly important in evaluating public dialogue to consider the issue of 'framing'. This relates to two main issues: the limits or boundaries of the dialogue in terms of what is up for discussion and potential change, and how those boundaries are set; and following from that, what the formal objectives are for the dialogue, how those are set and then how main questions to be considered in the dialogue are agreed. This then links to how materials to inform participants (often called 'stimulus' materials) are developed, and what they cover.

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<sup>76</sup> Horlick-Jones et al (2007) op cit, p128.

Some argue that it is vital that the public participants are involved in framing the dialogue so they can say what the process is going to address and how. For others, the framing comes from the sponsor (e.g. Government) because they have specific questions they want to explore with the public. In some cases, the framing may be affected by decisions outside the control of the sponsor (e.g. the Government has already announced that it has 'taken a view' on the issue, or that it has not even started to consider policy options). Others again argue the framing should come from the sponsor but should include input from stakeholders and the public.

In practice, given the continuing debate on who should 'frame' the dialogue, it seems that the crucial thing for a 'quality process' is likely to be that the scope (including limits to influence and issues to be covered) is clear and that the public understand that and agree that they are willing to take part on that basis.

The issue of framing is linked to 'levels of participation', and an assumption that the higher on the ladder of participation<sup>77</sup>, the 'better' the process. However, recent analyses are much more likely to recognise that different levels of engagement are appropriate in different circumstances, and 'higher' is not necessarily better - in the same way as 'more' dialogue is not necessarily 'better'<sup>78</sup>. Again, in terms of practical assessment, the crucial thing for a quality process is that the level of participation is clear and that the public participants understand that and agree to take part on that basis.

Finally, the issue of framing is linked to the materials produced to provide briefing for the participants. From experience, the key issues here seem to be that the materials meet the following criteria:

- research for stimulus materials used by the public needs to be 'authoritative' (e.g. by recognised institutions), and any 'facts' used in stimulus materials need to show sources so users of the materials know where the information has come from
- ideally, stimulus materials should go through a consultation process with stakeholders to test bias, relevance and adequate coverage of key issues
- stimulus materials must be accessible and understandable by participants
- materials need to be relevant and relate closely to the task the participants are being asked to do, and to enable them to fulfil their brief.

Further work is needed on this so that better ways of assessing these things can be developed. In the meantime, the 'resource accessibility' criterion identified by Rowe and Frewer provides a useful marker in that it focuses on the materials being sufficient to enable participants to fulfil their brief, which is the key issue in practice.

- **Representativeness.** The issue of whether the 'public' in public dialogue is 'representative' is probably the focus of the most frequent question in evaluating public engagement: were the right people there? (and, often, were there enough people there to represent public views?).

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<sup>77</sup> The main frameworks for considering 'levels' of participation are Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein 1968) and the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of participation ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

<sup>78</sup> Involve (2005) *People and Participation. How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*. Written by Richard Wilson, Diane Warburton and Edward Andersson. Involve, London.

Rowe and Frewer propose that the criterion for representativeness should be that 'public participants should comprise a broadly representative sample of the population of the affected public', which is useful for certain types of public dialogue but does not apply to all public dialogue processes, let alone all public engagement. In some cases, it will be more important to have a broad representation of interests<sup>79</sup>. Representativeness raises numerous complex questions including the following<sup>80</sup>:

- The public is more concerned that there should be a 'diverse' mix of participants than strict demographic statistical representation, and they do comment if, for example, they feel there are no 'young' people, or people from black and minority ethnic communities. The public particularly value talking with people different from themselves, that they may not normally meet in their everyday lives and it is this testing and sharing of views with different people that is important to them.

Burgess and Chilvers suggest that a 'social' rather than statistical representation should be sought (i.e. a mix of ages, gender, etc). This focus on a basic level of social representation is what has been measured in many evaluations, covering only age, gender and ethnicity. A further test could cover 'social group' quite simply by identifying levels of educational achievement (as Your Health, Your Care, Your Say did).

- The mix of participants depends to some extent on the issue. It may be that the issues covered in the dialogue affect certain groups disproportionately, and there becomes a need to ensure they are present. For example, a dialogue about health services needs to include people with long-term illnesses or disabilities, and older people, as they use health services more than anyone else.
- Different levels of knowledge and interest in the subject may be as important a criterion as demographic representation. This was an issue for the GM debate as it was felt that many of the people who took part were those with a particular interest. In some cases, however, it may be important to have people with a particular interest; for example, if participants are being asked to take the issue forward in some way.
- Many policy makers only want to consult the 'virgin public' rather than those with an existing interest or knowledge of the subject or with previous experience of engagement. This is linked to the concern to avoid those with an existing axe to grind, as with the familiar desire to exclude the 'usual suspects', as well as wanting to reach 'ordinary people', based on the assumption that ordinary people have no knowledge or interest.

The danger is that this can appear to be simply a desire to avoid the problems of dealing with people experienced in articulating the arguments and who understand engagement processes. Such a view can be challenged as an attempt to manipulate inexperienced people who know nothing of the complexities of the subject. In practice, recruitment of public participants will usually include questions about existing knowledge and views, so that an appropriate mix can be found.

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<sup>79</sup> Petts (1995) op cit.

<sup>80</sup> These points are based largely on the evaluations by the author, a paper by Carl Reynolds for InterAct, and Burgess and Chilvers (2006) op cit.

- Including the 'hard to reach' which, as has been said elsewhere<sup>81</sup>, is often simply the 'more expensive to reach'. As with 'affected public', the 'hard to reach' may be different depending on the subject and the purpose of the dialogue but usually includes those who do not traditionally take part in public dialogue unless extra effort is made, particularly younger people, older people, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic communities (particularly women).
- Much of the debate on representativeness and demographic sampling reflects the genesis of some public dialogue work (largely research related work) in market research, and the guidelines for sampling from that field. This also applies to the magic number of 1,100 people, which market research guidelines suggest is the number needed to gain a representative sample of public views. Public dialogue is not market research, and new principles are needed to reflect the important differences.
- All the issues above are based on the assumption that there will be special recruitment for dialogue. In some circumstances, self-selection can be valuable (e.g. to reach the 'interested' public as the Sciencehorizons project did with some strands of the project, with a recruited sample for another strand). Numerous processes have included an 'open' strand so that recruited samples for dialogue processes can be complemented by, for example, an open website, a written consultation around a consultation paper and/or open public events to which anyone with an interest can contribute their views (e.g. the HFEA dialogue on hybrid embryos included all of these alongside deliberative events with the public).

In general, a strictly demographically representative sample of the population is likely to require a large number of people, which is not always possible or desirable. Public dialogue is not market research and is not representative democracy, and so cannot be evaluated in the same terms. In some cases, representation may be important when the engagement is primarily to *research* and understand public views; diversity may be important for *engagement*, to ensure no-one is excluded and the main focus is building relationships with those willing and able to participate in the longer term.

In all cases, the key criteria for a quality process will be to achieve a diverse group (covering the basic sectors of society in terms of age, gender and ethnicity) and to ensure there is no accidental exclusion by making the effort to include key sectors of the affected population, and to ensure that the mix includes a mix of views as well as a mix of demographic characteristics.

- **Participant satisfaction.** The satisfaction of participants with the dialogue process is sometimes dismissed as a criterion of quality and success because it is assumed that participants will only be satisfied with a dialogue that has come up with a result they agree with. In practice, evaluations have found that participants can, and do, differentiate between providing feedback on the dialogue process (and how they were involved), and what the final decision was.

Participants' views on the dialogue process depend largely on whether they felt their views were respected, they were listened to and responded too, and that they were taken seriously, and much less on whether they agreed with the final

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<sup>81</sup> Pippa Hyam, in various forums.

decision. This view is shared by Judith Petts<sup>82</sup> who argues that 'participants don't believe everything they have asked for could or should be achieved. Impacts may not always be tangible but the public should be clear which elements of the debate they have been involved in have been taken on board, and which have not and (most importantly) why'.

A criterion of participant satisfaction is important for three reasons. First, the participants' views on the process are as valid as their views on the subject being discussed, and need to be considered seriously in any assessment of quality; their views are as important as anyone else's. Second, including participants' views in the assessment means that their feelings about the process are considered from the start, and efforts made to make sure they are treated with sensitivity and respect. Thirdly, participants are often very perceptive about the strengths and weaknesses of the process, and what needs to be changed to improve practice, and any development of practice will be much richer for having included their views.

Taking all these issues into account, a new list of criteria for a quality public dialogue process is proposed as part of the next section of this report. These criteria have been tested in a small peer review of this paper, and at the Sciencewise-ERC workshop in March 2009.

## **11 A framework for evaluating public dialogue**

This section outlines a new framework for evaluating public dialogue, based on the research and analysis provided throughout this report. The framework has four basic stages:

- Stage 1: Before the engagement process starts
- Stage 2: At the beginning of the engagement
- Stage 3: During the engagement
- Stage 4: At the end of the engagement.

Not all stages will be necessary in all cases; the framework is intended to provide a complete picture of an ideal evaluation, and a set of questions and checklists that can help in whichever element of evaluation are chosen.

These four steps, and the questions asked in each, are likely to be relevant to many different forms of public and stakeholder engagement - although not all. However, the examples and criteria of good practice given are specific to the forms of deliberative public dialogue promoted by Sciencewise-ERC. This type of engagement is described in more detail below, where the criteria are introduced (in Stage 2). The terms dialogue and engagement are used interchangeably throughout this framework.

### **11.1 Evaluation stage 1 – Before the engagement starts**

All planning for evaluating engagement starts with understanding what evaluation is and what it can and cannot do, consideration of 'why' you want to do the evaluation, identifying 'what' is going to be evaluated (scope of evaluation) and planning 'how' to do the evaluation (methods).

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<sup>82</sup> Petts, Judith (2008) 'Public Engagement to Build Trust: False Hopes?' in *Journal of Risk Research*, September 2008, vol 11, 821-835.

## What is 'evaluation of public engagement'?

Evaluating engagement is a process that assesses the **quality and effectiveness** of a project or programme. In evaluating engagement:

- **Quality** is generally about the process meeting relevant **standards**; standards may be set by the commissioning body internally, or evaluation may be based on broader criteria and standards of good practice.
- **Effectiveness** is generally about the **success** of the process. This will include assessing impacts on policy, policy-makers, participants etc, whether the objectives of the engagement were met, and considering the balance of overall costs and benefits.

The focus of evaluating engagement should be on the **project or programme**, and not the **person**. It is not about individual performance measurement, or personal appraisal. It is not a threat and should not distribute blame.

Evaluation should aim to be positive, and to contribute to improvement and learning. It does not have to be complicated, and is often something that is done as a matter of course in well-managed projects and programmes - to check 'how it is going?', 'what has been achieved?' and 'how can we do better next time?'.

In more abstract terms, evaluations of engagement usually take either 'audit' or 'learning' approaches. The audit approach can be summarised as asking questions such as:

- Have we done what we said we were going to do?
- Have we met our targets (e.g. numbers of participants; reaching a representative sample of the population)?

The learning approach is more likely to ask questions such as:

- Were the objectives we set ourselves the right ones?
- What have the impacts been on the participants, policy outcomes, our decision-making processes, etc?
- What have we learnt for the future?

The **methods** used for evaluation should be tailored to the **purpose** of the evaluation:

- **For audit purposes**, to show whether the engagement process met objectives and targets, *quantitative* methods and data (stats) will be needed (e.g. numbers of people at events, questionnaire tick box responses).
- **For learning purposes**, *qualitative* methods and data will be needed from, for example:
  - reflection (e.g. among the delivery team, participants, stakeholders)
  - interviews (group or individual)
  - observation (e.g. at participatory events, policy making meetings)
  - story collection (e.g. case studies, individual personal histories).

The basic elements in qualitative and quantitative evaluation research are as follows:

- **Quantitative research** is about counting numbers - how much and how many; using statistics to show how many participants, events etc from, for example, tick box questions in questionnaires.
- **Qualitative research** is about description and interpretation - why and how outputs (products and activities) and outcomes (results) are achieved; using methods such as open questions in questionnaires, interviews, personal stories, observation.

It is important that evaluation conforms to the highest research standards, so evidence considered will need to be both

- **Reliable**, so researchers are confident that the same results would be obtained in different circumstances or the evaluation is done by different people; tested by, for example, having some of the methods and analysis double-checked or checked by a third party.
- **Valid**, so that measures of success relate to what the evaluation is actually intended to measure, such as agreed criteria and objectives. Such agreements should be made early in the evaluation process.

One way of establishing reliability and validity is through **triangulation**, which is simply using a multi-method approach to the research; for example, a mix of participant questionnaires, observation, interviews, document analysis to cross-check the results by using different methods to collect data.

Most evaluations will need both quantitative and qualitative methods and data, as most will have both audit and learning purposes. Newer interactive, creative, participatory evaluation methods are now being developed to add to these basic methods.

## Why evaluate engagement?

The three main reasons people usually evaluate engagement are to achieve the following:

- **Improving engagement practice - to do it better next time:**
  - review and reflection on the engagement
  - understanding what worked and what did not work in the project, so that future engagement activities are designed and delivered more effectively (sometimes done throughout the project to support continuous development).
- **Awareness and understanding of engagement - spreading knowledge:**
  - generating evidence to increase wider understanding and awareness of the value of engagement
  - telling the story of what happened
  - showing what difference the engagement made.
- **Accountability and legitimacy of the engagement - accountability:**
  - demonstrating the **credibility, quality** (good practice) and the **success** of the project (achievement of objectives and good practice), and the **cost effectiveness** (balance of costs and benefits) of the engagement.

In practical terms, well-planned evaluation can also:

- Help set the **objectives** for engagement that will help guide and frame the engagement process. An evaluation perspective can help those commissioning and designing engagement processes to avoid setting vague and unrealistic objectives.
- Help monitor the **progress** of the engagement through regular reflection and assessment of what is working and what is not, what is being achieved and what are the costs and benefits as work progresses.
- Help gain **support** for engagement by identifying evidence of benefits and impacts, and lessons from practice.

Evaluation is often expected to achieve other practical outcomes that it cannot in practice deliver:

- Evaluation *alone* cannot usually deliver learning, although it can identify lessons from what works well and less well; evaluations can be designed that explicitly build in learning from the start, but often evaluations simply identify lessons and the ways in which those lessons are embedded in new and improved practice is usually a separate process.
- Evaluation *alone* cannot win arguments (e.g. about the value of engagement), although good evaluation research can provide evidence for arguments through robust and thorough research.

Essentially, evaluation is the start of learning, and can help build future improvements.

It is really only worth investing in evaluation if the results will be used to improve future policy and practice of public engagement.

## What to evaluate?

Evaluations of engagement often focus on the *process* - the mechanics of the interactions (the workshops, the meetings etc). However, more recently there has been growing interest in also evaluating the *outcomes* - the results of engagement. In addition, it is important for evaluations to consider the purpose of the dialogue (to show, for example, whether the process was fit for purpose), and the wider context (surrounding relevant events that affected the outcomes).

In summary, most evaluations will want to cover all the following four elements:

<b>Purpose</b>	+	<b>Process</b>	+	<b>Context</b>	=	<b>RESULTS</b>
(why)		(how + who)		(when and what else)		(products + impacts)

Scoping the evaluation in this way immediately shows the sorts of information that will need to be collected to do the evaluation, as outlined below:

- **Evaluating the purpose of engagement:** identifying stated and implicit objectives, and considering whether the methods used were appropriate to the objectives.
- **Evaluating the process:** describing and assessing the quality of the process e.g. whether it met agreed criteria, what worked well or less well, as well as evaluating who was involved (e.g. how many people involved, why and how chosen, what sort of people according to demographic data, stakeholder analysis etc).

- **Evaluating the context:** considering where this engagement fits in the policy cycle, what other relevant engagement has happened to date, other developments that may affect the engagement and the decision-making process, media coverage etc.
- **Evaluating the results:** immediate, longer term and cumulative products and impacts.

The evaluator would therefore expect to collect and consider information on the following:

- **Inputs:** a summary of the funding, time, staff resources etc used in the engagement including costs of events, staff time (rough costs), consultant costs (e.g. for design and delivery of engagement, analysis of findings, final reports), participants' time and expenses, stakeholder guidance, expert input to events or materials, design and print costs for materials etc.
- **Risks:** from the way the engagement is done, including risks of not doing it at all, and risks of doing it badly - to reputation, to existing policy views, to timescales and specific opportunities that may be lost by the engagement that is done or not done (opportunity costs).
- **Outputs:** products such as meetings, workshops and other face-to-face events, online processes, websites, DVDs, consultation documents, briefing documents for deliberative events, reports on events, reports to participants, reports to policy makers on participants' views, agreed recommendations from participants.
- **Outcomes:** results such as whether the objectives have been met; impacts on policy, policy makers and policy-making processes including better policy (through first hand understanding of public knowledge, views, priorities and values as part of the evidence base for policy-making), empowerment and capacity building for participants (e.g. learning, awareness, skills and confidence, awakened political and social interest and enthusiasm for future engagement), and strengthened democracy (through practical opportunities for the public to take part in public policy-making).

Essentially, evaluation is a process that assesses the success and value of a project or programme, and identifies lessons for the future. The six main questions in any evaluation of engagement are:

- Has the engagement met its objectives?
- Has the engagement met standards of good practice?
- Have those involved been satisfied with the engagement?
- What difference/impact has the engagement made?
- What was the balance overall of the costs and benefits of the engagement?
- What are the lessons for the future (for practice, in terms of what worked and what did not, and more widely for future planning of engagement activities)?

Answering these six questions will provide a picture of the success, quality, costs and benefits of the engagement work.

Within those questions, there are many specific issues to explore depending on the project.

Evaluations have two specific outcomes that make it different from normal review sessions within regular planning meetings:

- Recording of all reviews and reflections, some analysis and summary of conclusions.
- Some form of written output - a report. Sharing the experience through team reflections is important, but so is writing it down for others to learn from.

## How to evaluate?

In conventional evaluations, the main methods are:

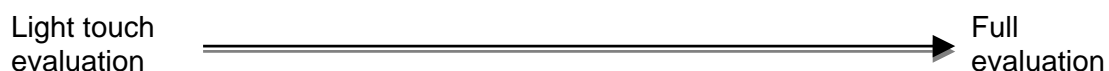
- review and reflection sessions
- questionnaires (distributed at events, or in other ways)
- observation (of public dialogue events, and other meetings)
- interviews
- analysis
- report writing
- sharing/using the results.

The appropriate methods for evaluation will depend on the level of evaluation which will, in turn, depend on three things:

- the **purpose of the evaluation** (e.g. improving practice, spreading wider awareness and understanding, cost effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy), which in turn will depend on
- the **context** for the project overall (e.g. how contentious and how much scrutiny the engagement process and the project will face), and
- the **time and resources available**.

These three factors will influence where on the spectrum of depth and detail the evaluation should be, from light touch to full evaluation.

For example, a highly contentious project with a high level of scrutiny is likely to need a full evaluation of the engagement process so that answers to any complaints about the design, delivery and reporting of the engagement can be easily and quickly provided using data already collated and analysed. The spectrum is simply illustrated as follows:



The level of evaluation should be proportionate and appropriate. The table below shows the connections between different levels of evaluation and likely methods needed.

Level of evaluation	Activities necessary
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<p><b>Light touch evaluation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear purpose for the evaluation: what do you want the evaluation to achieve?</li> <li>• Clear objectives for the engagement process, and how you will assess whether they have been met</li> <li>• Regular discussions within the team to review what is working, what is not and needs to be changed, what is being achieved etc</li> <li>• At the end, a short discussion within the team to assess whether the objectives were met, the engagement met standards of good practice, what the impacts have been, what were the costs and benefits, and lessons for the future</li> <li>• Short report with a brief description of activities, numbers and types of participants and events, whether the objectives and key criteria were met, and lessons for the future</li> </ul>
<p><b>Medium level evaluation</b></p>	<p>All the above, in more depth, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some review of documents to identify what was supposed to happen from the beginning</li> <li>• Regular review and reflection sessions as part of team meetings, including basic monitoring of costs and emerging benefits</li> <li>• Some feedback from participants to provide their views on how the engagement worked for them; could include questionnaires at events, followed by analysis of those</li> <li>• Interviews with a small sample of participants and those commissioning the engagement, plus short analysis of interviews</li> <li>• Fuller report covering some qualitative analysis as well as facts, figures and lessons</li> </ul>
<p><b>Full evaluation</b></p>	<p>All the above, in more depth, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreeing and publishing the objectives of the engagement</li> <li>• Full review of relevant documents, and summary of findings</li> <li>• Questionnaires for participants at all events and to a wider range of those involved; could include observers, stakeholders, scientific and technical experts etc; then full quantitative and qualitative analysis of questionnaire responses</li> <li>• Interviews with a sample of people from all aspects of the project (as above), followed by full qualitative analysis of interview responses</li> <li>• Full analysis of costs and benefits, impacts and influences, and of what worked well and less well</li> <li>• Full report covering all analysis and conclusions, and lessons for the future</li> </ul>

The basic principles of good practice in *evaluating* engagement are:

- **Starting early:** starting before activities with participants, and continuing throughout and until after the engagement has been completed, ideally until after the final decision is made
- **Clarity:** of the purpose, scope, approach and limits of the evaluation
- **Rigour:** of methods used
- **Appropriate level of participation:** of those involved
- **Proportionate:** with sufficient resources to meet the evaluation objectives
- **Transparency:** so the approach, methods and results of the evaluation can be and are explained to all those involved, including ideally by publishing the evaluation report
- **Practicality:** data can be collected, assessed and reported within budget and on time
- **Utility:** so evaluation results are useable and useful
- **Independence:** from commissioners, funders, delivery team and participants
- **Credibility:** including of methods, and the status and reputation of evaluator

Evaluation of engagement can be done in-house or by an external evaluator. Each has strengths and weaknesses:

- In-house evaluation can be better if the purpose is internal learning; and it can be cheaper and quicker
- External evaluation can be better if the purpose is legitimacy and accountability; the ideal budget is said to be 10 - 20% of the budget of the main project; in practice, budgets are usually around 1 - 5%

Whoever carries out the evaluation, it is important that it is a separate role and set of activities, with appropriate separation from responsibility for design and delivery. It is also important that evaluation plans are made at the beginning of the project, and allocated an appropriate budget of time and funds.

It is also important, at the very earliest planning stages of the evaluation, to consider how the results will be disseminated and used, and to therefore identify:

- Key audiences for the evaluation, and how they are best involved in the evaluation as it proceeds
- What those audiences want to know, so that key questions for the evaluation are identified early on and (ideally) with the involvement of those audiences in some way
- How the results will be used to demonstrate value and impact, so that useful, credible evidence is collected

## 11.2 Evaluation stage 2 – At the beginning of the engagement

The two main evaluation activities at this stage are:

- First, helping the commissioning body to set appropriate **objectives for the engagement**, to ensure they can be evaluated against. This stage also involves deciding what evidence you will need to demonstrate that the objectives have been met, and how you will get that evidence. These types of questions help clarify objectives.
- Second, agreeing **criteria for good practice** (quality control) for the engagement, against which practice can be evaluated. Again, this stage involves deciding what evidence you will need to demonstrate that these criteria have been met, and how you will get that evidence.

### Setting objectives for the engagement: measuring success

This stage focuses on setting measurable objectives, and how to gather evidence of whether those objectives have been met. Evaluators can have a key role at the beginning of any engagement process in helping clarify objectives that can be evaluated against.

Two examples of objectives for public engagement are given in the box below.

#### Examples of objectives for public engagement

##### Objectives for the Academy of Medical Sciences Drugfutures programme

The aim of the Drugfutures public engagement programme was:

- To engage the public in a national conversation on the issues raised by the current and future use of drugs that affect mental well-being

The objectives of the public engagement work were to:

- Provide opportunities for members of the public to discuss and explore their aspirations and concerns about current and future issues related to brain science, addiction and drugs
- Identify areas of consensus, disagreement or uncertainty on a broad range of issues raised by current and possible future scientific developments, and explore both initial views and changes in opinion
- Inform the final recommendations made by the AMS for public policy and research needs

An important secondary objective of the work was to:

- Enable the AMS and the wider science community to increase their knowledge and understanding of public engagement and its potential for future application

##### Objectives for the Defra Climate Change public consultation

- To help government design policy to maximise positive individuals' behaviour on climate change
- To drive awareness, information and debate on climate change

Additional objectives (not widely publicised)

- To explore a 'living version' of the environmental contract in the Climate Change Bill within the Summit
- To understand the 'customer journey' in terms of behaviour change to tackle climate change
- To provide an opportunity for democratic engagement
- To create an event that would stimulate further interest and action by participants<sup>60</sup>
- To identify lessons for future engagement practice by Defra

The agreed objectives of the engagement should be made available to everyone involved. Good objectives are:

- **SMART:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-limited. The definitions of SMART are variable, with some taking the R to stand for Realistic rather than Relevant. In addition, the A can be taken to stand for Agreed rather than Achievable, and that can often be important in setting shared objectives for engagement.

It has been suggested in consultations on this framework that the acronym should read BE SMART, with the BE standing for Beneficial - to cover the idea that the engagement should result in improvements/benefits, and thus make the situation Better.

- **Public.** Publishing the objectives of the engagement helps ensure the scope and limits of the engagement are available to and, hopefully, understood by all those involved.
- **Used consistently.** It is important that, once the objectives are agreed, the same wording is used each time the aims and objectives of the engagement are described. If this does not happen, there can be a lack of clarity over time.
- **Ambitious** enough to motivate those involved so they want to take part, without being unrealistic. Setting objectives that are written in a way that is designed to make them easy to achieve is pointless. Objectives should provide a sense of a target to be reached; an end to be achieved.
- Focus on **results/impacts/outcomes** as well as on **process**. It is important that objectives are not just a list of 'activities'.
- **Clear about the scope and boundaries** of the work, particularly what can and cannot be changed as a result of the engagement.

As mentioned above, evaluators can help clarify and articulate objectives by asking questions about how the team will know if the engagement is successful (indicators) and where the evidence to assess achievement will be found.

Evaluators can draw up a table to spell out the objectives, indicators and sources of evidence, as follows:

Objectives <sup>1</sup>	How will we know if the objectives have been achieved (success criteria)? <sup>2</sup>	Evidence to be used <sup>3</sup>
Objective 1		
Objective 2		
Objective 3		
Objective 4		

Notes

1 This column should spell out the objectives as published: what it is hoped that the engagement process will achieve - the purpose of the engagement.

- 2 This column should identify the indicators/success criteria that will be used to show the specific ways in which you will know whether the engagement has been successful (e.g. briefing was provided; participants had opportunities to comment).

In developing indicators, it is worth thinking about how these will be perceived by wider audiences. It may be useful to think about indicators that will really *mean* something to those who will be looking at and judging the engagement processes from outside.

- 3 This column needs to show how and where you will get the evidence you will need to test whether the indicators have been met (e.g. questionnaires with participants and staff, interviews with participants, observation at engagement events, review of documents showing changes made as a result of engagement).

It is important that evaluations are also sensitive to unexpected outcomes, and record and report those, as well as the expected and hoped for results which can be identified by evaluating against objectives.

## Measuring quality: agreeing criteria of good practice

**Evaluating quality** needs a set of criteria of good practice that are relevant to public dialogue processes.

The following 12 criteria have been developed during the course of this research. They are largely based on the academic criteria identified above, the Sciencewise-ERC and NCC/Involve principles<sup>83</sup>, the discussion on various criteria in the academic literature, and discussions with practitioners and participants, including through various evaluations and Sciencewise-ERC workshops (including a workshop of academics and practitioners held in March 2009).

These criteria may not be suitable for every type of public engagement process but should be sufficient for public dialogue processes as defined by Sciencewise-ERC:

Public dialogue involves deliberative processes that provide the time and resources to enable the public participants to discuss the issues in depth among themselves and with appropriate experts/scientists, to consider new information (in writing and from experts with an appropriate range of views) and come to considered views that they are willing to have taken forward on their behalf to influence policy.

Further specific criteria may sometimes be needed, but these 12 standard criteria should be sufficient for most evaluations. The criteria are split to focus on process and outcomes separately. A good quality process would meet all 12 criteria fully.

### Process criteria:

- 1 **Clearly articulated and agreed objectives, scope and limits for the engagement:** public statements about the engagement are clear about what can and cannot be changed as a result of the engagement (in terms of policy or other decisions); clear about the objectives, issues and questions to be covered, the scope, opportunities and limits of the process; clear about the roles and tasks for

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<sup>83</sup> Involve/National Consumer Council (2008) *Deliberative public engagement: nine principles*. Involve & National Consumer Council, London. [www.involve.org.uk/nine-principles/](http://www.involve.org.uk/nine-principles/)

participants including that these roles and tasks are understood by, and agreed with, public participants

- 2 **Appropriate timing:** dialogue processes take place as early as possible in the decision and/or policy-making cycle so that they can influence policy, decisions and decision makers; are timed to build on and not duplicate but link to other relevant public and stakeholder engagement activities; and there is sufficient time within the process for participants to discuss the issues
- 3 **Appropriate diversity and scale of participation:** public participants comprise an appropriately diverse mix of social groups and interests to meet the objectives of the dialogue (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity and specific types of participants where a sector of society is disproportionately affected by the issues); efforts are made to ensure that 'seldom heard' groups are not excluded; and there is a sufficient number of participants for the results to be credible to policy audiences
- 4 **Design, methods and delivery are appropriate to the objectives and are delivered competently and professionally:** the design, methods and delivery of the engagement are appropriate to the objectives (including operating at the right 'level' of participation<sup>84</sup>) and enable participants to contribute fully and to successfully do what is asked of them; information materials provided are accessible, relevant and authoritative; public, expert and stakeholder input is integrated and mutually beneficial; and event facilitation etc is well managed
- 5 **Transparent recording and reporting:** the recording, reporting, methods of analysis and use of the results of dialogue and impacts on policy (or not) are transparent to and shared with participants so they are clear about what is going forward in their name; results are presented in a form that can be understood and used by a range of audiences (e.g. policy makers); and there is feedback to participants, experts and stakeholders after dialogue events to explain what has gone forward as policy recommendations based on their input, and what the final decision is when that happens
- 6 **Neutrality:** the process is not intended to be biased or directive, it provides a neutral space for discussion; no faction or set of views is allowed to dominate; expert input covers a range of perspectives; and all participants are treated equally
- 7 **Commitment and honesty:** commissioners and target policy makers are sincere in their willingness to be open-minded, to make the process work well, and to listen to, take account of and respond to the results of the dialogue
- 8 **Effective evaluation:** the process and outcomes are evaluated to ensure accountability and legitimacy, and to identify lessons for future practice and knowledge
- 9 **Cost effective:** there is an appropriate investment of time and resources to make the engagement work effectively, and an appropriate balance between costs and benefits

#### **Outcome criteria:**

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<sup>84</sup> Using, for example, Arnstein's ladder (Arnstein 1969) or the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of participation ([www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)).

**10 Participant satisfaction:** public participants are satisfied with the process leading up to, during and after deliberative events, including information provided, having opportunities to 'have their say', ask questions and raise their own issues, being treated respectfully, and having impacts on policy and decisions

**11 Impacts and influence:** the results of the dialogue are directed to clear policy targets (policy issues and decisions); the process has a demonstrable impact on policy, decision makers, scientists and other experts involved, and participants; and the potential for better policy solutions and easier policy implementation based on the dialogue results is identified

**12 Learning:** the process is a learning experience for all those involved, including increased knowledge and awareness about the subject and issues addressed, and about public engagement; and increased individual understanding from having had the opportunity to clarify thinking and develop views

These 12 criteria will be reviewed and tested within Sciencewise-ERC, and with any partner initiatives that are willing to test and review them, over the coming months.

In addition, evaluations may also want to look at benchmarks, to test the performance of the process being evaluated against other similar processes, using data from existing evaluations. Some examples of good practice and benchmarks are given in the table below.

Criteria of good practice	Evidence that criteria are met
<p><b>1. Clearly articulated and agreed the objectives, scope and limits to the engagement,</b> especially what can and cannot be changed as a result</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objectives are clear, measurable and published</li> <li>• Feedback from sample of participants that they understood the objectives, scope and limits of the engagement</li> <li>• Roles and tasks for participants are clearly set out and agreed with participants</li> <li>• Low level of complaints about lack of clarity</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Appropriate timing,</b> as early as possible to have the necessary influence on decision making, and to build on, not duplicate and link with other relevant engagement activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project plan has detailed timeline of where engagement takes place (with dates), and how and when input from participants will be used in planning the engagement and in policy development and decision making</li> <li>• Plan identifies links to previous engagement activities, including plans to ensure that there is co-ordination and communication with other relevant initiatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Appropriate diversity and scale of engagement,</b> with sufficient diversity to cover all relevant social groups and interests, plus special efforts to ensure 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach' groups are not excluded; plus sufficient numbers so that the engagement is credible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder analysis completed, to identify target audiences</li> <li>• Evidence of who invited/engaged</li> <li>• Statement of how 'hard to reach' groups have been encouraged to participate</li> <li>• Details of numbers of events and numbers of participants, and their role</li> <li>• Review of whether these were the appropriate participants, whether any were missing etc</li> <li>• Feedback from those using the results that the scale was appropriate</li> </ul>

<p><b>4. Design and methods are appropriate to the objectives and delivery is competent and professional</b>, ensuring that the process enables participants to contribute fully, individually and collectively, and can do what is asked of them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The methods provide the right 'level' of engagement for the objectives (e.g. inform, gather information, involve, shared decision-making)</li> <li>• Information provided to participants is accessible, relevant and authoritative</li> <li>• The mix of methods is appropriate (including mix of face to face and online)</li> <li>• Feedback from participants that they could contribute fully and do what was asked of them</li> <li>• Feedback from others about the quality of design, methods and delivery (e.g. observers)</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Transparent recording and reporting of the engagement</b>, so that participants are clear about what is going forward in their name, staff are clear about what has emerged from the engagement, and participants are kept informed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of how engagement processes have been recorded and reported, and how that is shared with all participants</li> <li>• Feedback from participants on extent to which they are clear about how the results of the dialogue will be used, including timescales</li> <li>• Evidence to show that a summary of the results of engagement activities circulated to all those involved</li> <li>• Review of information disseminated to all participants about final decisions, and how their input was used (e.g. impacts on final decisions or policy)</li> <li>• Media coverage managed appropriately</li> <li>• Plans developed for maintaining communications with participants and other stakeholders</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Neutrality.</b> The engagement was not biased or directive, provided a neutral space for discussion with no set of views allowed to dominate, expert input provided a range of viewpoints, and all participants were treated equally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of who gave expert input and how this provided an appropriate range of viewpoints</li> <li>• Evidence from observation, questionnaires and interviews with all those involved to show extent to which process was not biased or directive, no single view dominated, and all participants were treated equally</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Commitment and honesty from project staff</b>, who were willing to make the engagement work well, and were open-minded and listened to, took account of and responded to the results of the engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of how the results of the engagement have been used, especially how they have been taken into account in final decision (as specific as possible)</li> <li>• Feedback from project staff on their role</li> <li>• Feedback from participants on their views on the willingness of project staff to listen and take account of what was said</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Effective evaluation</b>, to assess the process and outcomes to ensure accountability and legitimacy, and that objectives and standards of good practice are met</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written report of the evaluation research methodology and findings</li> <li>• Evidence that the evaluation has covered both process and outcomes</li> <li>• Identification of how the results of the evaluation will be reported and used</li> <li>• Evidence of extent to which objectives and standards of good practice have been met</li> </ul>
<p><b>9. Cost effective</b>, showing an appropriate investment of time and resources to make</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of major costs (including negative impacts) and benefits (including financial</li> </ul>

the process work well, and an appropriate balance between costs and benefits in the short and longer term	benefits) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of extent to which there has been sufficient investment of time and money to make the dialogue work effectively</li> <li>• Assessment of overall balance of costs and benefits</li> </ul>
<b>10. Participant satisfaction</b> with the engagement up to, during and after interactive events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from participants on their overall satisfaction with the engagement and whether they were able to have their say, were able to ask questions and raise their own issues, were treated respectfully; a target of 90% satisfaction would be appropriate (covering participant responses that they have been 'quite' and 'very' satisfied)</li> </ul>
<b>11. Impacts and influence on policy, decisions and those involved</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of impacts on all participants, decision makers, experts and technical specialists etc involved</li> <li>• Evidence of exactly how the results of the engagement made a difference to decisions (e.g. added new ideas, removed certain ideas, changed the priority of certain activities)</li> <li>• Feedback from participants on whether they were satisfied with their impact/influence on decisions</li> </ul>
<b>12. Learning for all involved, both about engagement processes and about the issues covered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from the project team/decision makers about what they have learned</li> <li>• Feedback from scientists and other experts involved, and any observers, about what they have learned</li> <li>• Feedback from other participants about what they have learned</li> <li>• Identification of any skills or knowledge gaps revealed, and plans for filling these gaps</li> </ul>

The appropriate criteria of good practice can be agreed at this early stage, and tables set up to analyse how these will be measured and evidence found as above. Then the information needed to demonstrate that they have been met can be collected throughout the process using the methods identified above (questionnaires, review of documents, interviews, etc).

These tables can also provide a simple checklist for planning, and for assessing progress in Stage 3 of the evaluation.

### 11.3 Evaluation stage 3 – During the engagement

The main evaluation activities during the engagement are around monitoring progress, collecting data (especially keeping notes), and reflections on progress to allow appropriate adjustments to be made to plans - and changes to objectives if the original objectives become unworkable as things progress.

During projects it is likely to be appropriate to:

- Review who has been involved/invited to be involved so far, to check that all relevant social groups and stakeholder interests are covered

- Review the various engagement methods used or planned to check there is enough of a mix to enable all relevant social groups and interests to engage in different ways
- Review the wider context, to make sure all relevant links and relationships are made
- Set up a framework for monitoring the budget for engagement, within the overall project budget. Start to keep basic records on staff time spent on engagement from the start (number of days at xx grade = £xx). If this is not done throughout, it will not be possible to do the analysis of costs and benefits at the end
- Review the engagement objectives, check they are still relevant, and change if necessary
- Establish when and how monitoring and evaluation will take place as the project proceeds (e.g. 15 minutes at the end of each planning meeting; and/or specific meetings for reflection and learning at specific key points in the process)

At whatever stages of the project that monitoring and evaluation take place, and whether it is an entirely internal process or involves an external evaluator facilitating and recording the discussion, you will want to consider the following questions:

- What is working well and we need to continue/do more of?
- What is working less well and we need to change it to ...?
- What are the main costs of the engagement so far, how much expense has been incurred, what does that mean for the budget?
- What are the main benefits of the engagement so far, and what can we identify as potentially long term benefits (especially financial benefits such as cost savings later)?

It is important to keep a record of all this as the project progresses, so all the information is available for the final assessment at the end.

#### **11.4 Evaluation stage 4 – At the end of the engagement**

The first question is *when* to do the final evaluation as it is not always obvious when the engagement is 'finished'.

The ideal is that evaluation does not stop until the whole engagement process is completed; it is not usually enough to simply evaluate the 'process' in isolation. Evaluations should also consider the impacts of the engagement on any final decisions, and possibly on plans for implementation. We therefore suggest the following:

- A summary review when all the interactive engagement activities are complete (meetings etc), just to review what has worked well and what has worked less well in terms of the first six criteria of good practice above, and what lessons there are for future practice.

- A further review when the final policy is published/decisions are made, to evaluate what difference the engagement has made to the content of those decisions. At this stage it will be possible to evaluate against the remaining criteria, including costs and benefits.
- A final review when the project or programme has been completed, to evaluate what difference the engagement made to the ease, speed and quality of the delivery of the project, in terms of costs and benefits.

At this final stage, we can return to the original six questions for evaluating engagement that were identified in Stage 1 above: whether the objectives were met, whether the standards of good practice were met, whether those involved were satisfied with the engagement, what impacts the engagement has made, what were the costs and benefits, and what are the lessons for the future. Each of those is covered in turn below.

### Assessing whether the objectives have been met

Objectives <sup>1</sup>	Indicators/success criteria <sup>2</sup>	Evidence that objectives have been met <sup>3</sup>
Objective 1		
Objective 2		
Objective 3		
Objective 4		

#### Notes

- 1 This column should repeat the objectives identified in Stage 2 of the evaluation (or as finally agreed, if different from the original objectives)
- 2 This column should repeat the indicators identified in Stage 2 of the evaluation
- 3 This column should summarise the evidence showing that the objective has been met

### Assessing whether the good practice/quality criteria have been met

Good practice criteria <sup>1</sup>	Indicators/success criteria <sup>2</sup>	Evidence that criteria have been met <sup>3</sup>
Criteria 1		
Criteria 2		
Criteria 3		
Criteria 4		

#### Notes

- 1 This column should repeat the main criteria agreed in Stage 2 of the evaluation
- 2 This column should repeat the main indicators agreed in Stage 2 of the evaluation
- 3 This column should summarise the evidence showing that the criteria have been met, such as specific feedback from participants, observation, documentary

review (e.g. 80% of participants said they had read and understood the information provided; examples of how and where the engagement made a difference)

## Assessing the satisfaction of those involved

This stage is designed to analyse the feedback from those involved - participants, stakeholders, members of the project team, technical teams, engagement contractors etc.

The feedback analysed will depend on the data collected which will, in turn, depend on the evaluation research methods used. It could be based on questionnaires and interviews, or it could just be notes from the project team.

The types of data that will be useful are summarised in the following table; these are just examples of the types of questions and data that could be used as each engagement will be different.

Questions	Answers
How satisfied were the participants in the engagement (with activities, materials etc before, during and after the engagement)?	<i>Statistics from questionnaires and other feedback forms, based on direct questions about 'how satisfied' they were - very, fairly, OK, not very, not at all satisfied.</i>
How satisfied were those using the data from the engagement to make decisions?	<i>Informal/qualitative feedback from discussions/interviews with those involved.</i>
How satisfied were other stakeholders/scientists/observers/technical experts involved?	<i>Informal/qualitative feedback from discussions/interviews with those involved.</i>
How satisfied were the project team with the whole process, design, delivery etc?	<i>Informal/qualitative feedback from discussions/interviews with those involved; and notes from team reflections and reviews.</i>
How satisfied were the contractors delivering the engagement?	<i>Questionnaire feedback at end of contract, and also possible additional informal/qualitative feedback from discussions/interviews with those involved at the end of the project.</i>

It may be useful to set targets for satisfaction. This is more easily done after several evaluations have been completed by the commissioning organisation, so that benchmarks can be identified and realistic targets set for the future.

## Assessing the impacts of engagement

For many people interested in evaluation results, this will be the key question. The focus here is to assess the particular contribution of the engagement, and to consider what may have been lost - or not achieved - without the engagement.

There may, of course, be some negative impacts of the specific engagement. However, at this stage it is most effective to focus on positive impacts as that is the question that is most often asked. Where there is evidence of negative impacts, that

should be recorded (see section on identifying costs below) and will be used as part of the overall evaluation analysis.

As with the previous stage (14.3), the data for this analysis will come from questionnaires, interviews, conversations, reflections within the team etc.

Questions	Answers
What have the impacts of the engagement been on the participants?	<i>Qualitative feedback from participants in open questions in questionnaires and interviews. May include: learnt about the commissioning body and its role; became more willing to be involved in future in activities by the commissioning body/public life; became more confident about the future because engagement put the risks into perspective; learnt new personal skills through engagement.</i>
What have the impacts of the engagement been on the project team and other staff?	<i>Feedback from team reflections, interviews and informal conversations. May include: learnt about participants' concerns and priorities; enabled us to take braver and wiser decisions.</i>
What have the impacts of the engagement been on scientists, experts and other interested stakeholders?	<i>Feedback from questionnaires, interviews and informal conversations. May include: more understanding of the role of the commissioning body so can work better together in future - creating opportunities for future partnerships; more understanding of relevance of public dialogue to own work; strengthened existing relationships; enabled a partnership approach to be developed for the first time.</i>
What have the impacts of the engagement been on the design and delivery of the project/policy?	<i>Review of final policy and decision documents, and feedback from those designing and delivering the project/policy. May include: what has changed; what was dropped as an idea; what new ideas added; what became a higher or lower priority.</i>
What have the impacts of the engagement been on the reputation of the commissioning body?	<i>Feedback from participants, stakeholders and observers. May include: improved reputation for the commissioning body in listening and responding to public concerns; improved reputation for willingness to work in partnership.</i>
What impacts would have been lost if the engagement had not happened?	<i>In considering what could have been achieved without engagement, the answer may be that 'all' could have been achieved, 'some', 'not many', 'none'. This analysis would also want to list specific impacts that would have been lost, or reduced, without engagement (see below for more details on this).</i>

## Measuring costs and benefits to assess cost effectiveness

Cost effectiveness is one of the criteria of good practice. It has been included here as a separate step in evaluation because it is new and therefore merits particular consideration. The reasons for focusing on cost effectiveness now include:

- **Accountability for public funds:** in the current economic climate, there will be greater scrutiny than ever on public spending, and most public dialogue is funded through public spending; there is therefore greater pressure on financial accountability.
- **Gaining appropriate resources and demonstrating sound financial management:** in the current economic climate, it is also increasingly important to be able to benchmark costs, to give an idea of roughly how much a dialogue project will cost, as well as the projected benefits, to enable projects to gain the resources necessary to go ahead.
- **Evidence of costs saved by engagement:** there is significant anecdotal evidence that public engagement saves time and money for public policy and projects in the long term; evaluating cost effectiveness should create more hard evidence in future.
- **To plan more cost effective engagement in future:** good practice in public dialogue includes making dialogue projects more cost effective; hard evidence of the best uses of resources, and ensuring that dialogue is the most cost effective option for achieving the objectives in the circumstances, will help planning for dialogue and the development of good practice in future.

Cost effectiveness is about the **balance** between costs and benefits. Benefits include positive impacts; costs include negative impacts and risks. Full checklists of potential costs, risks, benefits and impacts have been identified earlier in this paper. The basic approach to thinking about cost effectiveness can be illustrated as follows:

$$\text{Cost effectiveness} = \frac{\text{Costs}}{\text{Benefits}}$$


The aim of the approach presented here is to create a broad *picture* of cost effectiveness, not to produce detailed figures. Nor is the aim to directly *compare* costs and benefits, not least because the sorts of benefits that come from public engagement cannot sensibly be turned into monetary values ('monetised') as in a traditional cost benefit analysis. The benefits of engagement are complex, rarely result directly or only from a single engagement process, and may be both long term and cumulative (the result of many activities over time).

Essentially, an assessment of the cost effectiveness of public dialogue can perhaps only ever be about *judgement* not *measurement*. It is therefore a *qualitative* analysis and not quantitative. Accepting this approach allows the analysis to focus on the total costs and the total benefits and come to a conclusion about the overall balance between costs and benefits and thus the cost effectiveness of the engagement process.

The framework below is proposed as a *qualitative* approach to assessing costs and benefits by considering what are perceived to be the most *important* benefits and the *biggest* costs. The overall costs and benefits also need to be seen in relation to

issues such as the context within which the costs are incurred (e.g. scale of the programme overall), and the importance of the benefits.

The steps outlined below are designed for the commissioning team for a public dialogue to work through with an evaluator, although the analysis could also be done within the commissioning team.

There will be costs and benefits to all those involved in a public dialogue (including participants, scientists or other interested parties) and some of these are covered but, here, the main focus in the examples given is on costs and benefits for the commissioning body.

Four basic steps are suggested below as a practical approach to measuring costs and benefits:

- 1 Identify all the costs and negative impacts, and how to minimise those without any negative impact on the quality of the dialogue process or results
- 2 Identify all the benefits and positive impacts, including potential for cost savings later as a result of using public engagement, and costs of not engaging but using alternative approaches to achieving the same objectives
- 3 Gain feedback from others on the extent to which they felt the engagement was money well spent
- 4 Compare costs and benefits to assess the overall cost effectiveness of the dialogue process

Each of these is covered in turn below.

### Identify all the costs

First, identify and list all the costs and negative impacts. Then assign monetary values to all those costs and negative impacts.

Then consider how the actual spend could have been minimised, **without any negative effects on quality of process or outcomes.**

The table below summarises how this analysis of costs and negative impacts can be done.

<b>Costs and negative impacts</b> <i>(the costs listed below are <b>examples</b> only)</i>	<b>£ spent</b>	<b>How could spending have been minimised</b>
Staff costs (xx days at xx salary level)		
Contractor costs for design and delivery of engagement		
Participant and stakeholder time (e.g. incentives and expenses for participants, costs for stakeholder input etc)		
Costs of workshops etc (venues, refreshments, transport, incentives etc)		

Costs of information materials for participants (research, editing, design, printing)		
Bad PR/damage to reputation from a poor engagement process		
Staff stress from poorly managed engagement process		

Once these data have been collected, there are a number of further questions that may be helpful to address, as in the table below:

Questions	Answers
What <b>efficiency savings</b> could have been made/ <b>costs saved</b> in the design and delivery of the engagement overall without sacrificing important benefits?	<i>For example, different venues, or two workshops held on the same day, or less expensive design and printing of materials.</i>
How could we have achieved significantly <b>more benefits/impacts</b> for the same or only slightly higher costs?	<i>Ideas for <b>increasing benefits next time</b> for only slightly higher costs (e.g. more participants at workshops would have provided more credible results; would have cost £xx but the process would have gained xx).</i>
What was the <b>total budget</b> for the project overall (including implementation) and what proportion was spent on engagement?	<i>For example, the total budget from initial policy development costs through to all implementation costs (e.g. construction, new programme costs, publicity: total programme cost may be £25 million, of which £1 million was spent on public engagement).</i>

## Identify and assess the importance of all the benefits and positive impacts

There are three elements to considering the benefits and positive impacts of public engagement:

- Potential costs saved by engagement
- What would be lost if there was no engagement, and what would be the costs of achieving the same/similar results through different methods (not engagement)
- Listing all the potential benefits and positive impacts

Each of these is covered in turn below.

### • Identifying potential costs saved by engagement

Any analysis of benefits will want to start with an analysis of the potential of the engagement to save costs in project or programme implementation later.

The table below summarises how potential future cost savings could be identified. This can be quite a quick exercise and should focus on identifying very specific ways that engagement would or could save time and costs later, compared to DAD approaches (Decide, Announce, Defend); that is, compared non-engagement approaches.

<b>List of costs saved by doing engagement</b> <i>(the cost savings listed below are examples only; it will be useful to identify really specific cost savings relevant to the specific project)</i>	<b>Amount potentially saved (£)</b>
Lower costs (time and money) for implementation because potential conflict and protest identified early enough to minimise those risks	
Lower costs for marketing because less need for generic communications materials with their high costs for design, print and dissemination	
Lower costs for communications because new networks built, which can minimise costs and maximise effectiveness	
Lower costs for monitoring because local people share responsibility	
Lower costs on implementation because certain activities not seen as essential or priorities and therefore dropped from the plan, reducing costs	
Less staff time needed to deal with individual questions and complaints because of collective engagement and because the engagement plan has identified answers to Frequently Asked Questions and opportunities to follow up where necessary	
Less staff time needed to deal with individual complaints because level of complaints reduced by good engagement which has identified problems early and minimised conflict and dissatisfaction	
Less staff time needed to deal with Parliamentary Questions and other demands created by protest and dissatisfaction	
Less staff time needed because fewer staff off sick (or leaving) because of stress caused by protest and complaints	
Lower legal fees because less need to take appeals, judicial reviews etc to court as a result of legal challenges	

- **Identifying costs of no engagement or using alternative methods**

It can be useful to list all the things that would be lost if there was no engagement, what other approaches could be used to achieve those results/outcomes, and how much those alternatives would cost.

<b>What would be lost without engagement?</b>	<b>How else could this have been achieved?</b>	<b>£ cost of these alternative methods of achieving the same benefits (roughly)</b>
Intelligence about key public concerns	Detailed social/market research	
Where does the public draw the line on this issue?	Detailed social/market research	
Better relationships with stakeholders through joint working on public dialogue	Individual communications and relationships with each stakeholder	
Raising public awareness of the issues	Communications campaigns	

The calculations above will only give a very rough guide to the costs of alternative approaches to achieving the same results. It is important to note that there is not always clear evidence showing what results these alternative approaches deliver, nor how cost effective they are (in terms of comparing results to costs).

In addition, the 'depth' of positive results may be very different depending on methods used. For example, although various methods may be used to 'raise public awareness', there is likely to be an enormous difference in terms of depth of understanding between the impacts on an individual of a national communications campaign and of involvement in a deliberative public dialogue; on the other hand, a national communications campaign may reach much higher numbers of individuals. The importance of these issues will depend on the objectives of the exercise: exactly what is the purpose of the engagement.

Nevertheless, the calculations above will at least help identify the rough costs of alternative approaches, and demonstrate that alternatives will also have significant costs.

- **Identifying all potential benefits and positive impacts**

The next step is to identify and list all the benefits and positive impacts, with a focus on very specific benefits in the particular circumstances.

When a good list of benefits and positive impacts (including potential cost savings) has been developed, the next step is to assess how **important** the benefits are to the commissioning organisation in the particular circumstances (**importance of benefits** e.g. of knowing where the public draw the line).

Then assess how **important** the benefits are to the organisation in the particular circumstances (**importance of benefits** e.g. of knowing where the public draw the line).

The **importance** of the benefits will depend on some contextual issues, such as:

- How contentious is the subject and therefore what are the risks to policy of not testing public and stakeholder views and levels of acceptance?
- How important to the policy is it that it works for the public and stakeholders, and therefore how important is it that there is access to their knowledge and experience?
- How important is it to gain public 'buy in' to the policy proposals (e.g. success of the policy depends on changes to public attitudes or behaviour) and therefore how important is it to identify key triggers or barriers early on?

The table below summarises how the identification and assessment of benefits and positive impacts could be done. It has four columns to cover:

- What are the benefits and positive impacts
- How could these benefits be maximised at no (or minimal) extra cost
- Where to get evidence to demonstrate benefits
- How important each benefit is to the commissioning organisation

<b>Benefits and positive impacts</b> <i>(the benefits listed below are <b>examples only</b>; it will be useful to identify really specific benefits relevant to the specific project)</i>	<b>How could benefits be maximised</b>	<b>Where to get evidence of benefits</b>	<b>How important?</b> (rate 0-10; 10 = most; 0 = not at all)
Saved time and money on communications and marketing (see previous table for details)			
Saved time and money on implementation (see previous table for details)			
'No surprises' for policy and decision makers because able to identify potential conflict, dispute or protest early enough to deal with risks positively and move more quickly to implementation and completion			
Met legal obligations to consult, reducing legal challenges and complaints (and thus costs)			
More targeted and effective marketing materials because engagement has shown which issues are most important and valuable to the public and stakeholders			
Final policies and decisions are more robust and defensible because the evidence base was stronger and richer as it included public and stakeholders' knowledge and views			
Final policies and decisions are better because input from the public and stakeholders showed that xx was unworkable (or suggested xx that made it work better)			
Achieved effective two-way conversations between the public and key stakeholders (including scientists and other experts), promoting mutual learning and understanding			
Improved relationships with other public bodies because commissioning body carefully consulted over communications and engagement			
Spread public awareness and knowledge of the role of the commissioning body, helping reduce unrealistic expectations and inappropriate questions and complaints			
xx [an individual] had a 'lightbulb moment' and suddenly understood the proposed policy/decision			
xx participants went away having learnt more about the project, and xx become more enthused about what was being proposed			
Got good PR from running a good engagement process			
Enabled staff/experts/scientists to explain their work and views directly to participants, and to listen to and learn first hand about participants' views			
Enabled experts/scientists to experience and learn about how public dialogue works, and its relevance to their work (and where it is not relevant)			
Fewer complaints and conflict throughout the project, reducing stress on staff and costs of dealing with complaints (delays and financial costs)			
Created good relationships with participants and stakeholders through the engagement process that could be built on in future			
[List any other <b>unanticipated</b> benefits and impacts that were actually found]			

## Summarise feedback on whether money well spent

Evaluation research on engagement processes should include a question to all those involved on whether the dialogue was 'money well spent' (in interviews and/or questionnaires). This question can be put to the main project team, the Project Board, the delivery team (including contractors), others involved (including technical specialists and other experts), and public participants. It is a question about *perceptions* and is seeking information on two things:

- **Whether**, overall, those involved felt the whole engagement process was 'money well spent'; so some idea of whether all, most, some or very few felt this was the case. This will give an indication of the *scale* of positive feedback on costs and benefits.
- **Why** respondents felt the way they did. This will provide some pointers on what different respondents value most in the process.

This feedback is an important part of the evidence base for considering cost effectiveness, and is likely to provide some useful indicators for future evaluations of what it was about the dialogue that had real 'value' to different audiences. It is useful for this analysis to include quantitative analysis (e.g. xx% of participants felt it was money well spent) as well as qualitative (including illustration by quotes).

The research for this paper found that, in evaluations to date, the greatest value (in answer to questions about whether it was 'money well spent') varied according to different audiences. Overall the main value for both participants and policy makers is around 'what difference did it make?', although the nature of the 'valuable difference' was different:

- For **public participants**, the engagement was valuable only if their views were listened to and/or the process made a difference to policy/the decision.
- For **policy makers**, the engagement was valuable only if it contributed to their policy development processes. In particular, they tended to value gaining **confidence and reassurance in their decision-making** so that decision making could take place and policy could be moved on (*political* value). They also valued public input as an essential **part of the evidence base** for policy making (*practical* value) as it provided information from public knowledge and about public priorities and views.

Other outputs and outcomes are also important to these two (and other) audiences, and will need to be considered in evaluations. However, these two elements tend to be the most universal and strongest indicators of value ('money well spent') identified to date.

## Compare costs and benefits and assess cost effectiveness

The final step here is to **compare the costs and benefits** qualitatively by considering the **importance** of the benefits and the **amount** of the costs, and to consider those conclusions in the light of the feedback from others involved.

If there are a lot of very large costs and not very many important benefits, and the feedback suggests that others do not consider it was 'money well spent', the engagement process cannot be considered cost effective. If there are a lot of important benefits and not many large costs, and the feedback generally did consider it was 'money well spent', the engagement process can be considered cost effective.

The following table identifies the key overall questions at this stage.

Questions	Answers
What were the main <b>costs</b> and negative impacts of the engagement?	<i>Summary of the conclusions from the table listing the costs, with just the main costs identified</i>
What might have been the <b>costs of not doing the engagement</b> (i.e. no engagement), and of alternative approaches?	<i>Summary of conclusions from table above on costs of not engaging the public, and costs of alternative approaches</i>
What was the <b>total budget</b> for planning this project overall, and what proportion was spent on engagement? Did the benefits from the engagement seem appropriate to that proportion of the budget?	<i>Summary of conclusions from this question in table above; with conclusions on whether the benefits were appropriate for that proportion of the overall budget</i>
What were the most important <b>benefits</b> and positive impacts of the engagement (for the commissioners, policy makers, participants, stakeholders, and experts), covering immediate, longer term and cumulative outcomes/benefits?	<i>Summary of the conclusions from the table listing and assessing the importance of the benefits, with just the most important benefits identified</i>
What <b>future costs could be saved</b> in communications and implementation by engagement?	<i>Summary of conclusions from the table assessing potential costs saved later</i>
What was the <b>feedback</b> from those involved on the extent to which the engagement was money well spent?	<i>Summary of feedback from those involved (e.g. participants, scientists, policy makers, delivery team) on extent to which it was money well spent; ideally this will include statistics (xx% felt it was money well spent) as well as qualitative feedback</i>
Do the benefits outweigh the costs, or vice versa, and therefore how <b>cost effective</b> was the engagement?	<i>Conclusions about cost effectiveness</i>

The important element here is to work through the analysis to consider the issues in some depth. The key conclusion is about whether the benefits are perceived to have outweighed the costs overall.

The table is designed to help write up conclusions at this stage, so that the findings can be used to identify lessons for the future (see below).

The aim of this analysis is to provide a framework for **thinking** about the cost effectiveness and value of public dialogue. It allows for a **qualitative** analysis that provides some understanding of the balance between benefits and costs based on a rigorous identification of costs and benefits (which will be a learning exercise in itself) and of the balance between them.

## Lessons for the future

After all this analysis, the final stage is to write up the results of the evaluation, identify lessons across all the analysis, and consider how the lessons that are identified can be shared and used among the team and more widely.

The questions in this final analysis return to the six key questions for any evaluation of engagement outlined earlier in this framework:

- Has the engagement met its objectives?
- Has the engagement met standards of good practice?
- Have those involved been satisfied with the engagement (what is in it for them)?
- What difference/impact has the engagement made?
- What was the balance overall of the costs and benefits of the engagement?
- What are the lessons for the future (for practice, in terms of what worked and what did not, and more widely for future planning of engagement activities)?

Questions	Answers
Did the engagement <b>meet the objectives</b> ? What lessons emerge from that analysis?	<i>Summary of analysis completed as shown above. Including whether any objectives were no longer relevant. Lessons: ...</i>
Did the engagement meet the <b>quality criteria</b> ? What lessons emerge from that analysis?	<i>Summary of analysis completed as shown above. Lessons: ...</i>
Have those involved been <b>satisfied</b> with the engagement (participants, project team, others)? What lessons emerge from that analysis?	<i>Summary of analysis completed as shown above. Lessons: ...</i>
What <b>difference or impacts</b> has the engagement made (to those involved, to policy, to specific decisions, etc)? What lessons emerge from that analysis?	<i>Summary of analysis as shown above about how the process has impacted on decisions and the people involved. This analysis may also include a summary of the benefits and positive impacts identified in the assessment of cost effectiveness. It is useful to also list here specific benefits and impacts that <b>could not have been achieved</b> without engagement, <b>costs saved in future</b> by engaging the public, and <b>costs of alternative methods</b> of achieving the same results. Lessons: ...</i>
Did the benefits outweigh the costs, or vice versa, and therefore how <b>cost effective</b> was the engagement? What lessons emerge from that analysis?	<i>Overall summary of analysis as shown above. Summary of the balance between costs and benefits, including reflections on the feedback from others on this. Lessons: ...</i>

<p>What are the <b>lessons for the future</b>?          What should be done again because it worked well, or done differently, next time to ensure the engagement meets the objectives and quality criteria within budget (e.g. bigger budget, less ambitious process)?          What lessons emerge from that analysis?</p>	<p><i>Lessons from evaluation overall about what worked well and less well in the engagement, and what should be done differently, with rough cost implications identified.</i></p>
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The writing up of all these results is important, so the learning can be shared more widely. The forms this writing up takes depends on the audiences: case studies, feedback in person from project teams to other teams, mentoring etc may all be valuable ways of using the evaluation results.

At this final stage, it may be worth just a last brief review asking three simple questions to identify any other lessons:

- **What?** What happened (context, process, methods, products)?
- **So what?** Did it all succeed (meet objectives and quality criteria)? What difference did it all make? What benefits did we get out of it? Were the costs at an appropriate level?
- **What next?** What are the lessons? How can we embed the lessons into future activities?

Evaluation is the start of learning, and can help build future improvements when the results are used to improve understanding, policy and practice. The framework outlined here is intended to support that future learning and understanding.

## 12 Summary, conclusion and next steps

This paper has suggested that, although activity on public engagement is growing, practice is often ahead of theory. This is changing as more practical evaluations of engagement are completed and more academic research examines and challenges evolving theory and practice.

However, there are some clear gaps in current practice in how evaluations provide the research evidence needed. To date, not one of the major national public policy dialogues in the UK has been evaluated in terms of **cost effectiveness**. Also, there are currently no comprehensively agreed methods of **measuring quality** in public dialogue, nor any consensus that it is possible, or even desirable, to do so.

This research has aimed to fill these two gaps in current evaluation practice and provide practical guidance on measuring the quality and cost effectiveness of public dialogue. The paper has reviewed some existing models of measuring costs and benefits in engagement, and existing criteria for measuring quality. It has concluded that it is both desirable and necessary to develop a generic set of criteria that can be used to measure the quality of all public dialogue processes and that, in spite of the problems of measuring the cost effectiveness of public dialogue, it is vital that evaluations consider this missing element in future.

The paper concludes with a 4-stage framework for evaluating dialogue in future. The framework provides overall guidance on the scope and principles of evaluating dialogue, proposes a way of measuring quality and success against objectives and

12 new criteria of good practice, outlines a way of measuring cost effectiveness and value, and suggests an approach to identifying the key lessons for future practice.

In terms of cost effectiveness, the focus of the framework is on qualitative analysis that will promote data collection, reflection and learning. It shows that trying to give the benefits of dialogue a monetary value so that a conventional cost benefit analysis can be done is not appropriate because it is impossible to monetise the benefits in any meaningful way. Such calculations would take huge amounts of time and resources to provide figures that would be essentially arbitrary and meaningless. Instead, a straightforward and practical approach to identifying cost and benefits and establishing their importance and scale is proposed.

The aim is that collecting information in this way will help demonstrate accountability for public money, and also improve future planning in order to make best use of scarce resources. Many practitioners and academics believe that engagement is highly cost effective and valuable, and can save time and money in the long run. Some sort of measurement is essential to provide the evidence to support that belief. It is hoped that this new evaluation framework will allow that evidence to be created and used to show the value of public dialogue in future.

Sciencewise-ERC plans to work over the coming months to gather data on the costs and benefits of the projects it funds, and use the framework in this paper to consider the cost effectiveness and value of that dialogue. Sciencewise-ERC also plans to set up new partnerships with others to link into the collection of data from a wider range of projects and to test the mechanisms proposed here. Refinement and constant development of these mechanisms are likely to find a practical way forward that can be used more widely to increase understanding of the practical costs and benefits of public dialogue.

Beyond the immediate plans for implementation to test and develop this work, there is much more that needs to be done, including future research such as on the following:

- **Learning.** Evaluations can provide data on lessons but do not create learning. There are real issues about how best to spread learning about public engagement, including:
  - Collating the lessons from practice, especially from evaluations, on specific practice issues
  - Considering how best to share and develop knowledge and learning about public dialogue (e.g. barefoot evaluators learning through structured observation of actual processes, participant mentors for new participants, policy mentors, communities of practice)
  - How to make learning 'stick' and be applied in future
- **Researching demand and needs.** Researching what policy makers really want and need from public dialogue, presenting the evidence of existing benefits, and developing priorities for future work and innovation in methods.
- **Researching the benefits to, and learning of, the experts and scientists** who are involved in public engagement processes.
- **Research around non-participants and non-participation.** People have the right to be left alone, and refusal to take part in dialogue may mean no confidence

in the process; or actually confidence in those running things to get on with it (and tell them occasionally what they are doing); or apathy; or people may care but disagree with the framing, or act politically to undermine the process. There is more to explore on these issues.

- **Longitudinal evaluations.** Longer term evaluations are needed that follow up the costs and benefits over time (e.g. recent research<sup>85</sup> which followed up participants ten years after they had taken part to assess long term impacts on social learning), and could follow up personal stories e.g. physical and mental health impacts on participants. This sort of evaluation could contribute to various initiatives to keep in touch with participants over longer periods of time.
- **Cumulative benefits to society.** Developing methods for assessing the cumulative impacts of public engagement projects (e.g. on strengthening democracy, public perceptions of Government among those involved). This might include impacts on active citizenship e.g. through assessing involvement in civic affairs, voting etc.
- **Benefits to specific systems.** It would also be useful to find methods to assess the impacts of dialogue on wider systems e.g. the development of science and technology, and environmental impacts.
- **Benefits of upstream dialogue.** There is an assumption that dialogue is best held as early as possible in the policy cycle. It would be useful to research exactly what the benefits are of dialogue at different points in the policy cycle, and where in the policy cycle dialogue is most effective and valuable to all those involved.
- **Continuing work on good practice.** It will be useful to continue working closely with practitioners and researchers to take forward lessons from evaluations of what is good practice, and standards for good dialogue e.g. around iteration, depth of engagement, longer term relationships, longer term learning etc. This could then feed into the continuing development of criteria of good practice that could become more widely used.
- **Better links between practitioners and researchers.** Although practice is currently ahead of theory in many ways in this field, there is also increasing academic interest in this field. Better links between practitioners and researchers may encourage understanding and reflexivity that would benefit all involved.

This paper provides some starting points for taking this work forward, and Sciencewise-ERC plans to continue to investigate data collection and test mechanisms for more comprehensively evaluating the costs and benefits of public dialogue over the coming months.

The atmosphere surrounding public dialogue in policy on science and technology is changing. It has been moving from having to 'justify the need' for public dialogue to a much greater focus on accepting dialogue as part of the 'due process' of evidence-based policy-making, linked to the concept of the 'duty to involve' at local level.

However, in the new context, the need to evaluate the cost effectiveness and value of public dialogue by understanding the true costs of dialogue, and considering the cost implications in terms of the benefits and impacts achieved, and the quality of the process, becomes more important than ever. This evidence is needed to support the

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<sup>85</sup> Bull, Petts and Evans (2008) op cit.

advocacy of dialogue, and to feed into planning cost effective dialogue processes in future.

Diane Warburton  
diane@sharedpractice.org.uk  
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# Sciencewise-ERC Research reports

This is one of a series of reports from the Sciencewise-ERC that cover a range of strategic issues in public dialogue as an input to policy on science and technology issues. These reports (and the authors) are:

- Enabling and Sustaining Citizen Involvement (Diane Beddoes)
- Widening Public Involvement in Dialogue (Pippa Hyam)
- Working with the Media (Melanie Smallman)
- Evidence Counts - Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue (Diane Warburton)
- Departmental Dialogue Index (Lindsey Colbourne)
- The Use of Experts in Public Dialogue (Suzannah Lansdell)



## Contacts and links

The research was carried out by Diane Warburton, Sciencewise-ERC Evaluation Manager.

For further information, please contact Sciencewise-ERC by email at [enquiries@sciencewise-erc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sciencewise-erc.org.uk) or by phone on 0870 190 6324

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