



# What is Sciencewise-ERC?

The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre (Sciencewise-ERC) helps policy makers to understand and use public dialogue to inspire, inform and improve policy decisions around science and technology.

Sciencewise-ERC was launched in May 2008 and is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It began as Sciencewise in 2004.

## Over the past five years, Sciencewise-ERC has:

- **Influenced public** policy by providing evidence of the richness and strength of public views and ideas (e.g. influenced priorities for investment in nanotechnology research, and the extent and conditions for the use of hybrid embryos for research). By 2009, 14 major Sciencewise-ERC projects had worked with 12,595 public participants, providing immediate face-to-face feedback to policy makers, as well as reports summarising the public views, concerns and aspirations.
- **Influenced practice** by helping Government learn how dialogue can build legitimacy and accountability with the public and contribute to greater trust in science-based decision making. By 2009, 10 full evaluations had been completed of the 14 Sciencewise-ERC projects.
- **Enabled progress to be made on strategically significant, sometimes highly contentious topics** by supporting policy makers to find ways forward that go with the grain of the public's views, and avoid the conflicts and entrenched positions that can result in the complete rejection of new technologies.
- **Improved the quality of communications between Government, scientists and the public** by providing a rich understanding of the public's potential concerns and aspirations on new science and technologies. Policy makers are then better prepared to discuss the implications with the media and the wider public.

"Many of the scientists (me included) who have been involved with public dialogue have reported that the experience is very positive. There are strong arguments that public deliberation and interaction can lead to more robust science policy."

Richard Jones, Professor of Physics at Sheffield University and Senior Strategic Adviser on nanotechnology to EPSRC

"The (public dialogue) meeting was incredibly useful. The most interesting thing was the richness of the debate on the tables, the intelligence people applied and their willingness to engage in debate."

Adam Dawson, Director, Office for Nuclear Development, Department of Energy and Climate Change

"Its made me aware. And to spread the word ... I guess it's like a ripple in a pond."

Dialogue participant

"Pretty much everything will have to change over a period of time and if we're going to do that then sensibly we need to know to what extent we can bring the public with us. We can't just do it ourselves. The public are part of it."

Joan Ruddock MP, Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change

- Increased public awareness and understanding** of science and technology issues, both among immediate participants and their contacts. Evaluations show that each dialogue participant is likely to talk to 30 others. This 1:30 ratio of spread of public interest, enthusiasm and knowledge means that Sciencewise-ERC dialogue participants will talk to and influence approaching 400,000 members of the public.
- Driven sustainable behaviour change** by affecting the views and behaviour of participants, and resulting in the creation of public allies and ambassadors for implementing potentially controversial policies.
- Driven synergy and integration across Government** by bringing together different departments to work on dialogue projects. For example, a Sciencewise-ERC funded food security dialogue, requested by Number 10 and led by the Food Standards Agency, also involves Defra, Department of Health, Department for International Development, Welsh Assembly Government, Scottish Government, and the NI Assembly.

Government routinely engages with experts and stakeholders to inform its thinking. In many cases there is a need for greater insights and this engagement is not sufficient. Policies that emerge have sometimes been difficult or impossible to implement because they fail to take account of broader public concerns. Public dialogue is increasingly recognised as filling this evidence gap for policy-makers.

**Sciencewise-ERC has shown that public dialogue provides the evidence that helps policy-makers to make better national policy in science and technology.**

“You can’t expect any drugs policy to have long-term success unless you take people with you. If you cut across the grain of the public instinct, it’s disastrous. Engaging with people should help us devise policies which are acceptable and sustainable.”

Roger Brownsword, Professor of Law, Kings College London, on Drugsfutures project

“If you have got a specific issue that you know you are going to have problems with and ... public perception could have a big impact or be a big barrier in future to a particular policy ... (dialogue is) definitely the way we would do something like this again.”

BIS Industrial Biotechnology - Industrial Grown Team

“One thing we have learned from our ongoing activities on stem cell research is that the way in which you become a leader in stem cell research is by being responsive to public opinion.”

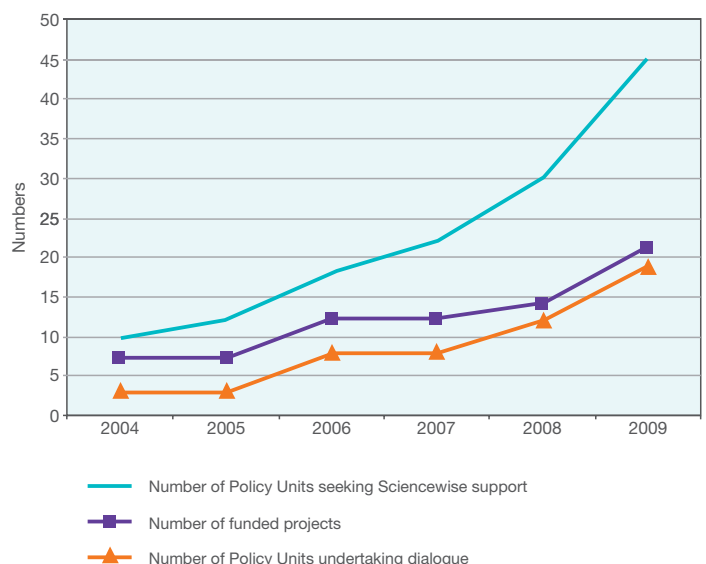
Simon Wilde, Medical Research Council

“Understanding why, where and how trust in the cyber world is lost is vital to the successful introduction of technologies that are true online enablers.”

Stephen Crane, Hewlett Packard Project Manager for Trustguide

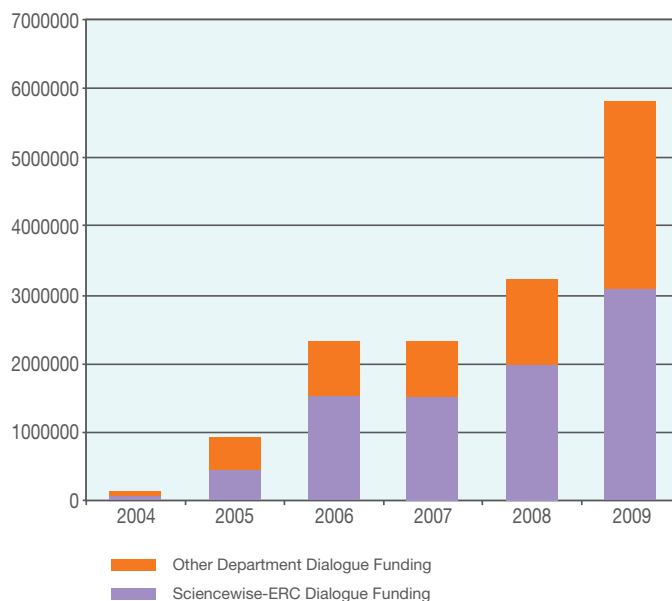
## Sciencewise-ERC is experiencing a growing demand for support and funding

- UK Government departments are increasingly recognising the benefits of public dialogue and are turning to Sciencewise-ERC for support and guidance.
- Sciencewise-ERC has seen a substantial increase in the number of individual departments involved with dialogue, an increase in the number of dialogue projects underway, and an even greater increase in the number of potential projects where Sciencewise-ERC is helping departments to develop future dialogue projects: by 2009, 21 projects had received support, with a pipeline of over 40 further prospects.



## Sciencewise-ERC funding - leveraging resources, increasing services, reducing core costs

- In 2009 alone, the Sciencewise-ERC investment of £1.1 million in public dialogue projects has stimulated additional investment of £1.5 million.
- Sciencewise-ERC has stimulated a total investment by other Government departments of £2.7 million in public dialogue projects.
- Other resources have also been brought into Government policy making: the 12,595 public participants, plus over 1,000 civil servants, academics and others from across Government, NGOs, industry and other institutions who have taken part in steering groups and dialogue events: a further invaluable contribution.



The Sciencewise-ERC 2009 budget of £2 million is comparable to the costs for single consultation processes. For example, the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) cost £4.8 million over 4 years, including £0.8 million for programme management fees, £1.3 million on members fees and expenses, and £1.5 million for public consultation. The national consultation on new build nuclear power in 2007 had a budget of £2.4 million over 9 months.

The proportion of Sciencewise-ERC funding spent on dialogue projects has risen steadily; from 42% in 2004 to 55% in 2009. At the same time advice, support, management and evaluation services have continued to expand to meet greater demand.

## Dialogue costs - minimal in terms of overall investment

The scale of investment in Sciencewise-ERC dialogue projects is dwarfed by the scale of the policy fields that dialogue has influenced. For example:

- The Nanodialogues project in 2006 cost £240,000 for four different processes which over 26 months explored nanotechnology and upstream engagement, reaching 100 citizens directly. The value of nano research in 2007 was estimated to be about \$12 billion; and the value of nano-enabled products was estimated then to be around \$50 billion (Jack Stilgoe, 2007, *Nanodialogues. Experiments in public engagement with science*. Demos, London).
- The stem cell dialogue in 2007 cost £300,000 and involved 200 public participants in 5 regional workshops plus 50 stakeholders. Continuing support for stem cell research has placed the UK in a leading position in regenerative medicine, currently a more

than £500 million per annum industry, estimated to rise to around £1 billion by 2013 (Research Councils UK, 2009, *Excellence with Impact*).

Overall, the costs of not doing public dialogue far outweigh the costs of the dialogue. Public opposition can delay or entirely prevent continuing policy development, innovation and new technologies. Public dialogue allows policy makers to find ways forward that go with the grain of public views, and avoid the conflicts and entrenched positions that can result in the complete rejection of new technologies.

**“If you think dialogue is expensive, try conflict.”**

(Andrew Acland)

## What is public dialogue?

Public dialogue run by Sciencewise-ERC brings together members of the public, policy makers and scientists to discuss and come to conclusions on the social and ethical issues raised by new science and technology, and other policies of national importance.

### It allows a diverse mix of public participants with a range of views and values to:

- learn from written information and experts
- listen to each other, and share and develop their views
- reach carefully considered conclusions
- communicate those conclusions directly to inform Government's decision making.

### Good public dialogue can help policy makers and Government to:

- make better, more robust decisions that reflect public values and societal implications

- increase legitimacy for tough decisions
- demonstrate accountability in public investment
- overcome entrenched positions to enable policy to move forward
- gain a rich understanding of public aspirations and concerns that goes beyond media headlines or focus groups.

### Public dialogue does not:

- remove Government responsibility for decision making
- rely only on surveys or opinion polls to gather public views
- seek endorsement of decisions that have already been made
- replace other public information or consultation processes.

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## Sciencewise-ERC support programmes can help policy makers create effective public dialogue in science and technology through:

- **One-to-one consultancy** on dialogue for policy makers from internationally renowned specialist advisers who provide advice, training and mentoring on design, commissioning, delivery, evaluation and funding for dialogue processes. Increasing numbers of Government departments and others are requesting repeat business (e.g. DH, BBSRC, DECC).
- **Publications** that provide information on good practice, with evaluations and case studies of all funded projects, and published good practice principles and guidance for policy makers.
- **Training and mentoring** for Government departments and others as an introduction to dialogue and/or around specific engagement activities.
- **Events** that provide opportunities for policy makers and practitioners to learn, celebrate achievement and network; Sciencewise-ERC runs its own events, provides speakers and materials.
- A **website** that acts as a 'knowledge hub' for Sciencewise-ERC, covering all Sciencewise-ERC projects, publications and related materials, with blogs, twitter feeds and other interactive links
- **Research and development** that is leading thinking and innovation in practice through research and development events and publications such as *The Road Ahead* (2009), and recent research and guidance reports (2010) on working with experts, dealing with the media, scaling up, maintaining links with participants, evaluating the costs and benefits of dialogue, and assessing culture change.

In summary, Sciencewise-ERC is there to help policy makers to use public dialogue to develop better policy on science and technology and other issues of national importance. Sciencewise-ERC is the place to come for advice and guidance on good public dialogue, now and into the future.