Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

Understanding Society

An extraordinary year

December 2011

In brief

Do you need to know what young people think? Use our schools-based omnibus study exclusively devoted to exploring the views, experiences and aspirations of a large and representative sample of young people aged 11-16.

Contact: Julia.Pye@ipsos.com

Do you need to know what senior public sector managers think? Use our omnibus survey of public sector leaders to tap into the opinions of those managing change in the public services.

Contact: Peter.Cornick@ipsos.com

To stay up-to-date with Ipsos MORI's latest thinking on the key public policy issues, visit our blogs: The Politics Wire and The Big Society.

BIG society The POLITICS WIRE

In 2011, Ipsos MORI was nominated for 7 Market Research Society awards - more than any other agency - including the Award for Public Policy/Social Research and the Virginia Valentine Award for Cultural Insights for work with UNICEF.

Editorial team
Gideon Skinner
Bobby Duffy
Anna Beckett
Tom Mludzinski
Chloe Forbes

Design/Graphics
Rita Sexton

e: chloe.forbes@ipsos.com
www.ipsos-mori.com
www.twitter.com/IpsosMORI

Contents

Foreword

Welcome to the latest edition of *Understanding Society*, from the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute.

It's been an extraordinary year, with riots, public protest, strikes, national scandals and, most notably, economic turmoil. But two points are worth highlighting from our tracking of opinion. Firstly, we actually end the year much as we started on some key measures, such as support for the different political parties, and satisfaction with the government and prime minister.

And more importantly, as extraordinary as it may feel, looking over the longer-term high anxiety about the economy is actually more the norm than an exception. Our tracking of national issues starts in the early 1970s, and an economic concern (inflation, unemployment, the economy in general) has dominated more often than not. The period from roughly 1997-2008 really was the "odd decade", as one of the very few times when the economy wasn't at the top of our worries. It didn't make us particularly happy at the time – but we're likely to look back on it more fondly now we face a "lost decade".

Certainly the British public is telling us that leaders and policy-makers are right to be concerned about the future. In a striking new finding, we are now more likely than not to think our children will have a lower quality of life than ourselves, a complete turnaround from where we were eight years ago. This is a watershed finding. We've grown used to the assumption that future generations will do better than our own – it's not clear how the public will react as it becomes increasingly obvious this is no longer the case.

When it comes to public services, this year saw the release of the long-awaited Open Public Services White Paper. We think it's worth paying attention to; while there were much more eye-catching stories this year, it could well be that in a few years' time we will look back at it as heralding a new direction – especially in how it expects citizens and users to change their relationships with public services.

We are also very pleased to have an article from Matthew Hancock MP, member of the Public Accounts Committee and former chief of staff to George Osborne, who succinctly lays down the challenge facing public services: how to do more for less? One change which will have major implications in the future is that of benefit reform. The introduction of the Universal Credit has been called the biggest change since Beveridge, and we examine the public's response to benefits reform, and how important it is to look at household-level factors when encouraging people into work.

Some of the most shocking images of the year came from the riots. Just days before they started, our specialist qualitative team carried out an ethnographic study with young people across London and the South East. We uncovered their aspirations and anger, and here we present some of the different tribes we found among young people, and what it might mean for public services hoping to engage with them. As a companion piece, we also have a view from our colleagues in the Ipsos Social Research Institute in the US, looking at public opinion on the 'Occupy' movement there.

One issue that perhaps hasn't had the focus it deserves in 2011 is the environment, but again, this is an issue that is here for the long-term. In this edition, we look at how environmental concerns are changing in response to the economic crisis, particularly the emphasis placed on energy costs and security of supply. By going with the grain of public opinion, this concern among citizens provides a real opportunity to persuade more people to "go green".

Whatever your views on the long and short term impacts of this year's events, we hope you will enjoy reading what we have learned from listening to the public, service users and policy-makers over 2011. If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised, or if you would like to learn more about any of the research, please do get in touch. In the meantime, best wishes for 2012.

Bobby Duffy
Managing Director,
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute

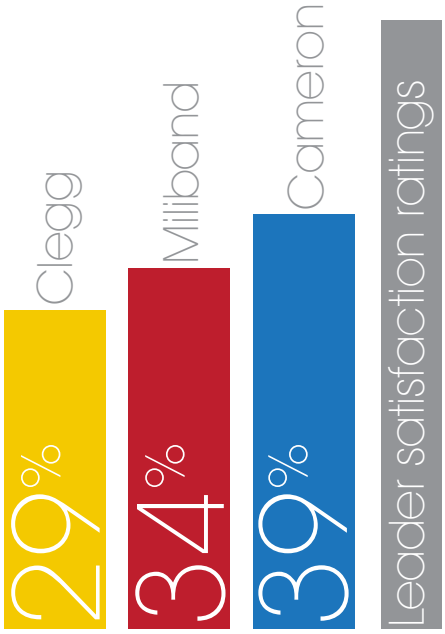
The calm despite the storm

A review of the year in politics and public opinion


Gideon Skinner


Tom Mludzinski

Against a backdrop of huge economic turmoil and uncertainty, uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East, violent riots throughout England and major cuts in public spending, public political opinion it seems has stayed remarkably stable. Or has it? We review the year in politics and public opinion and analyse the challenges ahead for the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.



November, Reuters Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

The economy has of course dominated the concerns of the public this year and it is a natural place to begin our review of 2011. Our Issues Index shows the economy has been by far the number one issue facing Britain every single month since September 2008, and concern about unemployment has reached its highest level for thirteen years. As we come to the end of the year and the crisis in Europe overshadows almost any other news story, economic attitudes have become increasingly depressed.

The public's economic optimism has taken a dramatic fall – after what looked like a brief reprieve in April and May it has spiralled to its lowest point since December 2008. Even by global standards we Britons are pretty gloomy. Our Global @dvisor survey consistently finds Britons ranking at the lower end of the 24 country economic feel-good league, above Greece and Ireland but far below the likes of Germany, Sweden, Canada and Australia.

The impact of the economic crisis however goes deeper than just background atmospherics, as a nation we are more concerned about the day-to-day impact than we were in 2009. A third (34%) now worry about being able to retire as planned, compared to 21% over two years ago, while 37% worry about their ability to pay bills, rising from 32%. Concern has even grown about our children's job prospects and whether we can still automatically assume that they will have a higher standard of living than their parents.

So who is benefitting politically from the economic doom and gloom? The answer is a complex one. Most people think that the government has done a bad job of managing the economy and particularly on keeping unemployment down. However, only one in five think a Labour government with Eds Miliband and Balls in Downing Street would do a better job of managing the economy. Despite the growing concern, the Conservative Party now has a 10 point lead over Labour in having "the best policies on managing the economy", compared with just a three point lead in March. Indeed, Labour still share some of the blame for the current situation and this is clearly a major stumbling block for the party, even if they can offer a better alternative.

Only **23%** think our children will have a higher quality of life than us

Nevertheless, all the bad economic news - both domestic (e.g. rising unemployment and very little growth) and international (e.g. eurozone crisis) - will clearly be worrying for both Coalition partners. In this context, it is interesting that there has been a subtle shift in the debate away from debt reduction towards growth – although the two, of course, remain closely linked, as David Cameron argued in his recent speech to the CBI:

> ***I am absolutely clear about the right answer for the UK economy. It can be summed up in one sentence; we need to deal with our debts and go for growth. Those things aren't alternatives, they are essential companions. We will not get one without the other. Just look at countries in Europe that don't have credible plans for dealing with their debts, their interest rates are climbing to levels that will make growth impossible[1]***

The economy has been the dominant story of 2011, but that is not to say there have been no other flash points throughout the year. We've seen a war in Libya start and finish, riots in London flare up and spread to other major cities, major public sector strikes and the demise of the News of the World amid the phone hacking

1 Prime Minister's speech to CBI Annual Conference, Monday November 21st 2011

scandal. While each of these stories garnered significant media attention it is striking how little lasting impact they had on public opinion.

The military action in Libya evoked mixed feelings in the countries taking part. Our poll conducted across Italy, USA, France and Great Britain showed that while Britons and Americans were split 50/50 in their support for the action from the beginning, a majority of French people were in favour – with Italians the least supportive. The poll also exposed an interesting contradiction in public opinion – significant numbers across all four countries agreed that we should not be interfering in Libya as it was none of our business (and there were also concerns about the financial cost), yet at the same time believing we should seek to remove Colonel Gadaffi.

And if the fall of Gadaffi and his regime did not result in any "poll bounce" for the Prime Minister (perhaps because only 3% thought he was making most of the decisions on military action), he can be thankful that his reputation has not been damaged in the same way Iraq did for Blair.

Nonetheless, the summer months proved a testing time for David Cameron and his government and provided an opportunity for Ed Miliband to step to the fore as Leader of the Opposition. Questions were raised about the Prime Minister's association with Andy Coulson via probably the most watched (and most eventful) select committee hearings in history. Indeed, public satisfaction with David Cameron fell to its lowest point in July in the wake of some of the most damaging revelations in relation to the scandal – although they did subsequently recover. Ed Miliband on the other hand was often described as "finding his voice" and "leading public opinion" on the issue – indeed, our polling showed he was seen to be handling the scandal better than anyone else and received a personal boost in the polls in July. However, voting intentions remained unchanged, and the personal bump enjoyed by Miliband soon disappeared - by September his satisfaction ratings were at their lowest point.

Public disturbances, whether it be strikes in the public sector or the riots across England's cities made a comeback this summer. June and November saw public sector strikes over pensions, although negotiations are continuing. The 'Occupy' movement is also expressing public dissatisfaction with the failures of capitalism. Our polls consistently show that public sector workers are more dissatisfied with the government, but the battle for public opinion is finely balanced. Support for the strikes in the summer was split down the middle with 48% in support and 48% opposing. Most believe unions are essential to protect workers' rights, and concern that they are too powerful is a long way below its 1970s heights – but the impact of more disruption to public services could see this attitude return.

Concern about unemployment highest for **13** years

The riots have troubled politicians and commentators alike. Were they a public display of disaffection with the government by an underbelly of disengaged youths? Or was it people seeing a chance to loot and riot seemingly unpunished? This is covered in more detail later in this issue, exploring the nuts and bolts of engaging with young people on the ground. The political implications though were far less dramatic than the riots themselves, with little change in voting intentions that month. While seven in ten agreed with the Prime Minister that pockets of British society are "frankly sick", we must remember that most thought Britain was broken back in 2008. So the question needs to be asked, did the riots change people's opinion about some of the social challenges we face, or just confirm it?

The Political Landscape

2011 started with the Conservatives on 33%, Labour on 43%, and the Liberal Democrats on 13%, and our most recent Reuters Political Monitor puts the respective positions at 34%, 41% and 12%. With a general election not likely until 2015 voting intentions are at this stage just a barometer of the public's mood – and the passing of the Fixed Term Parliaments Bill will only encourage a longer-term view. Nevertheless, none of the parties will feel totally secure with their position.

Starting with the Liberal Democrats, while it is traditional for their support to fall in 'peacetime' it is even below that low watermark. They have now lost their position as the main "none of the above" party and as a result their image has suffered: they are seen as the party most likely to break promises and as the most divided. Crucially for them, they have not yet gained from the other side of the coin as a credible party of government – nor of course, did they succeed in winning the AV referendum. Senior LibDems do admit that they were not, at first, well-prepared for being in government, and

their vote has now at least stabilised, but much now depends on their ability to create a new USP for themselves while still acting as a party of government.

Labour are the only major party to have significantly increased its vote share since the election, and have clearly benefitted from the decline of the Liberal Democrats (even though, as Hilary Benn told delegates at the Reuters/Ipsos MORI conference fringe event, the media are so used to two party politics that Labour and the Liberal Democrats are both fighting for the role of the 'unofficial' Opposition). They are also the party seen as most fair, and most able to heal the divisions in British society. However, so far they have not made significant inroads into the 2010 Conservative vote. Ed Miliband has two, linked, challenges on this: first, he must improve his own personal ratings (he has just started to do so among his own supporters, but there is a long way to go), and second, needs to regain the public's trust that Labour would actually do a better job on the economy.

The Conservatives have more or less held their support, and they certainly have two big assets: David Cameron and credibility as a party of government. Cameron's personal ratings are relatively high, he is seen as a capable leader and good in a crisis. However his detoxification strategy has been less successful; while Cameron is the most liked leader, his party is the most disliked. This is an important point as, come election time, the Conservatives will need to show what else they have to offer if the economy has not improved. And in the same way Labour's credibility on the economy has been knocked, so the Conservatives have their weaknesses. Health is a case in point; the debate around the government's reforms saw Labour extend their lead over the Conservatives as most trusted with the NHS.

So despite all the turmoil of 2011, the key questions facing each party are the same as at the beginning of the year. The number one issue for the public certainly is the same: the economy. However, with the likelihood that the recession will have a much longer and more permanent impact than thought at the beginning of the year, there has been a change in how the debate is framed. In the 1980 United States election, then-Governor Reagan famously asked, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?". With the downgrading of economic forecasts by the Bank of England, Office of Budget Responsibility, and many others, it is much less likely that anyone will be able to give a strongly positive answer to that question. Instead, the fight could be over who had the right answers in difficult times to stop it getting any worse. ■

A whiter shade of green?

What the Open Public Services White Paper means for services and their users

 **Peter Cornick**

 **Daniel Cameron**

After months of delays the government published its Open Public Services White Paper in July this year. With much of 2010 having been spent setting out how budgets would be cut, the paper had been expected to crystallise the government's plans to shift power from Whitehall to the local level. Such was the anticipation, it was billed by some as the biggest overhaul of the state for 50 years.

But on its launch the paper was greeted with a somewhat muted response and limited media coverage as it was swamped by the News of the World phone-hacking scandal.

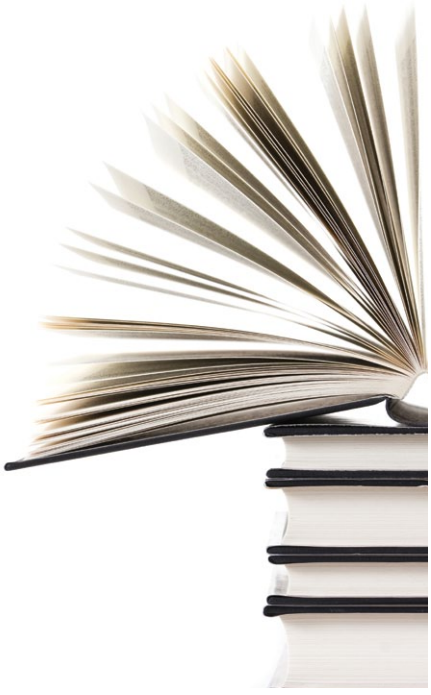
Now that policy makers and providers have had time to absorb the paper's contents – and as government departments plan how to implement open public services – it is a good time to look at how the paper has been interpreted and what it might mean for the public sector and for users.

The White Paper sets out the government's policy framework for how it wants public services to operate in the future. It rejects a 'top down' approach to running public services in favour of more local control, and an implicit quasi-market thread runs throughout the paper's 56 pages. In particular, the paper highlights five key principles:

- "Wherever possible we will increase **choice**.
- Public services should be **decentralised** to the lowest appropriate level.
- Public services should be open to a **range of providers**.
- We will ensure **fair** access to public services.
- Public services should be **accountable** to users and to taxpayers". [1]

Despite its long gestation period, however, the White Paper still retains a greenish tinge. While some of the measures it outlines are already underway (for instance, the Free Schools, Academies Act 2010) and some are being taken forward in legislation currently being debated in Parliament (the Health and Social Care Bill, for example), it is otherwise light on specific details on how these five principles will be adopted by individual services and what this means for users.

This is reflected in the differing interpretations that have been applied to the paper. One argument suggests that it offers little new thinking and is simply a natural evolution of the previous Labour government's policies. Devolving power to the lowest appropriate level and increasing fairness and accountability



were all discussed in the 2008 'Excellence and Fairness' White Paper[2], for example. Choice has long been a feature of the debate over public service reform thanks to the work of academics such as Julian Le Grand (a former senior policy advisor to Tony Blair).[3] And competition too – in some form – was one of the guiding themes of public policy under both the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s and the Labour governments of the late 1990s and 2000s.

Viewed in this way, the paper could be seen as a result of compromises between the coalition partners. This was the line taken by the Economist which stated 'the paper hardly feels like a major renewal' and 'It is all good stuff, but its keynote is timidity'[4], and echoed in the Guardian, which called it 'a major easing of the pace of its [the government's] public services reforms.'[5]

However, while some question the paper's boldness, others feel it goes too far and question the motives and evidence base behind its thinking. The New Economics Foundation, for example, blogged that in the White Paper 'Ideology overrides evidence at every turn… It promotes competition and individual choice where there's clear evidence that co-operation and shared responsibility work best.'[6]

This is the argument taken up by the trade unions – unsurprisingly, perhaps, the most stringent critics of the paper. The TUC recently published a 24,000 word rebuttal of the White Paper which rejects the government's approach to reform as 'failing to understand the collective nature and ethos of public services'.[7] Public Finance records similarly unflattering interpretations of the paper from the leaders of Unison and Unite.[8]

Advocates of the government's approach provide a different analysis. They argue that by applying its five principles together in a single framework across all public services – which has never been done before – the paper offers something fundamentally new and radical.

This is the view adopted by, among others, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which claims 'what is new is that this Government plans to embed this approach systematically across all public services'[9] and the Institute for Government, which came to the conclusion that '… the White Paper is both incremental and radical.'[10]

Private sector commentators also tend to be positive about the White Paper. KPMG's head of public service practice, for example, said: 'I have no doubt that the direction of travel is correct and will lead to radical improvements in the services provided to citizens and the value obtained by tax payers. As always, setting out the strategy is the easy bit. The hard work will come when the ideals of the White Paper are put into practice.'[11]

It is this last point that is vital. Although there is little consensus on what the White Paper means as a whole, there is widespread agreement that, in order for any reform to work, the public has to see the benefits in day-to-day service provision. However, the overriding impression is that the government's reform agenda is still a work in progress.

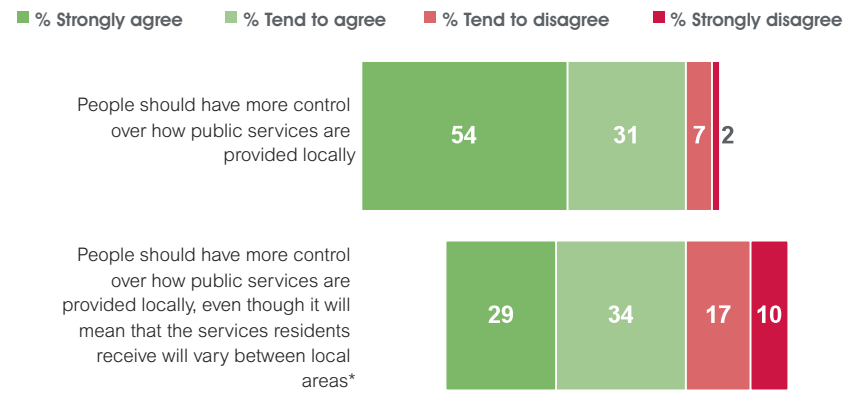
There are three main areas which will require more development and clarification before the public will be able to perceive a difference.

Firstly, although our research shows that the public is broadly supportive of the principles behind the White Paper in the abstract – supporting the ideas of choice, decentralisation, diversity, fairness and accountability in theory – in practice people's views on the concepts are sometimes contradictory.

One major challenge for the government, therefore, is that people do not always know what they want from public services. For instance, while the public likes the idea of choice, and people

People want more local control, but are worried about lack of uniformity

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:



Base: 613 British adults aged 18+, *622 British adults aged 18+, 18-19 April 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI/Economist

are positive about their ability to make their own decisions in areas such as the NHS, our work consistently shows a tension in public opinion between choice and uniformity. So while there may be, for example, strong support for decentralisation and devolving more power to the local level, when it is pointed out that this might lead to local variation, disagreement triples.[12]

Furthermore, the public does not necessarily think that all public services should be treated in the same way, and people find the implications for some services more troubling than others. We have discussed these issues at length elsewhere, such as in our 2010 report 'What do people want, need and expect from public services?'[13] so will not go into detail here, but the case study of diversity in schools below illustrates how views can vary. The government will need to think carefully about what it means by each principle and how they apply to each individual service.

Secondly, one issue that is frequently discussed in the White Paper is how greater transparency and improved information about public service performance will play a key role in opening up public services and narrowing the gap between outcomes for different social groups – both through our ability to make more informed choices and through holding government to account.

However, our research suggests that although people say it is important to open up data to the public, most remain passive consumers of information and few take up opportunities to become more involved.

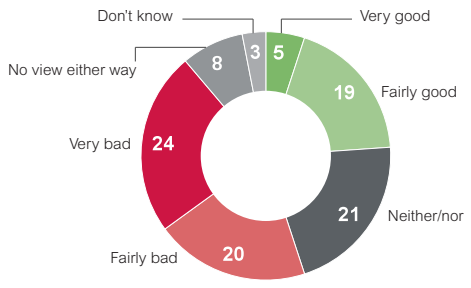
More specifically, desire for the type of data the government is opening up to scrutiny is limited – at the moment at least – to a small minority of informed and engaged citizens. Based on what we know about those who have accessed performance information in the past, these are likely to be middle-aged people, of higher social grades and owner occupiers. As a result, one concern we may have is that it will be the middle-classes that are most able to reap the benefits of the reforms. This poses a considerable challenge in engaging others – particularly those in the C2DE social grades – in the effective use of public service performance data.

Diversity in schools – a case study

The drive to introduce choice in primary and secondary education has come through opening up opportunities for new providers and encouraging schools to become independent from their local authority. Until now, these new providers have usually come from the private or charitable sectors, but the free schools policy has expanded the types of groups who can run schools so that it now includes parents.

Who should run schools?

Some people have suggested that more schools in the future could be run directly by private companies, religious groups, charities or groups of parents, rather than being run by the local council as they generally are now. How far do you believe this is a good or bad idea, or do you have no view either way?



Base: 1,211 adults age 15+ in England, 5-11 March 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI/NASUWT/Unison

When asked outright, the public is not particularly enthusiastic about schools being run by new providers – even parents – with those who think it is a bad thing outnumbering those who think it is a good thing by nearly two to one. Further, the majority of the public (62%) still thinks that local authorities are the most appropriate group to run schools.

However, when we explore public perceptions in more depth, it is clear that views vary depending on the potential provider. Only three per cent of the public support the idea that profit-making companies should be allowed to take charge of schools, while faith schools (1 per cent) are also unpopular. But 46% are open to the idea of parents opening schools and a third (32%) prefer teachers to take over the running of schools, suggesting that perceptions of the coalition's schools policy will depend heavily on the types of groups that end up in charge of schools and their perceived motives.

Above all, however, this probably reflects a wariness amongst the public, not surprising given the early stages this policy is in, and its potential impact on a crucial service. There is a strong pragmatic streak running through the British public, and in the end it will be judged on its success or otherwise in driving up standards.

There is also a related issue around the medium through which information is provided. Most of the plans to open up data outlined in the White Paper revolve around it being published online. However, even now this excludes a large chunk of the public, especially older people and those from the C2 and DE social grades. Of course, the government is not claiming that this is the complete solution, and we would expect the scrutiny exercised by engaged members of the public as well as journalists and think tanks to trickle down, but ensuring that the more vulnerable and harder to reach groups are not left behind remains a concern.

Finally, there is the question of how the performance of public services will be measured to ensure that people can make informed choices and that the minimum standards discussed in the paper are being met.

On the one hand, the paper implies that the government intends to increase the use of market-based systems in measuring standards and service improvement. On the other hand, the paper suggests that service providers will be required to publish information on performance and user satisfaction – and that the government will consult on how to collect this data and what key metrics they will measure.

But details on both of these approaches, and how they will interact together, are less clear. The paper offers limited detail on how the government intends to deal with market failure or the role user voice will play in shaping services, for instance, and more information on how these will work in practice is crucial. And while the balance between a market-based approach and a target-based approach is likely to change, the role for standards and inspections will not disappear (the recent debate over how to ensure minimum waiting times in the NHS is a good example of this).

Mentions of the Big Society are conspicuous by their absence from the White Paper, yet many of the key challenges are the same.

In fact, when we look at the key principles of the White Paper, and what is needed to make it a success, they seem to be intrinsically linked to the success of a perhaps more famous government policy – the Big Society. Mentions of the Big Society are conspicuous by their absence from the White Paper, yet many of the key challenges are the same. How to engage all sections of the public – and not just the most interested – in making local decisions, monitoring public services and holding them to account is the necessary other side of the coin to the 'supply-side' changes envisaged in the White Paper.

So while the paper was one of the big set-piece policy events of the past year, it is still clearly a work in progress. The most radical aspects of the reform agenda lie not in the policy direction, nor in the structural changes within public services themselves, but in how it expects users and citizens to change the way in which they interact with services. This needs to be a major focus for the government because this radical societal shift will not happen fairly or equitably by chance. ■

1 HM Government (2011) Open Public Services White Paper

2 HM Government (2008) Excellence and Fairness White Paper

3 A 2005 profile of Julian Le Grand in the Guardian said: 'If there is a single defining thought about New Labour's approach to public services, it surrounds the benefit of choice, alongside investment. And if there has been a single leading intellectual exponent of this thesis, it is Julian Le Grand, the health policy adviser to the prime minister.' http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/jan/27/uk.labour1

4 http://www.economist.com/node/18958721

5 http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/jul/11/public-services-reform-slow-down

6 http://www.neweconomics.org/blog/2011/07/14/ten-big-questions-about-the-open-public-services-white-paper

7 http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-20175-f0.cfm

8 http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2011/07/cameron-to-launch-public-service-reform-plans/

9 http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2011/07/public-services-white-paper

10 http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/3045/incrementally-revolutionising-public-services/

11 http://www.kpmg.com/uk/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/newsreleases/pages/openpublicserviceswhitepaper-governmentneedstospecifywhichservicesaretobeopenedupandhowprincipleofcompetitionwillbeputintoe.aspx

12 Ipsos MORI/Economist (April 2010) http://www.economist.com/node/15964403?story_id=15964403

13 Ipsos MORI/2020 Public Services Trust (2010), *What do people want, need and expect from public services?* http://www.ipsos-mori.com/DownloadPublication/1345_sri_what_do_people_want_need_and_expect_from_public_services_110310.pdf

14 Ipsos MORI/Prospect, April 2009, http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/04/whatdoparentswant/

How to do more for less

Matthew Hancock MP

The outdated model of top-down state provision is incapable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century. Just as the Poor Laws and workhouses had to make way for a modern welfare state, we now need to rethink the way we deliver public services.

The challenge is great. We have to equip our workforce with the skills to compete against the best of the rest of the world. We have an ageing population with rising demands for increasingly expensive treatments. And we need to ensure that the most vulnerable groups in society are not left behind by globalisation.

Of course stable public finances come first. There's no point thinking about how to prepare our economy for the rise of the Chinese middle class if we can't even afford to fund basic public services. As the countries of the eurozone have discovered, the years of easy money are over, whether we get a grip ourselves or are forced to by our creditors. The state can no longer afford to confuse spending with reform. For government, the bottom line has to be outcomes, not levels of spending.

> Tough times force us to abandon old dogmas. In the depths of a bust, when the old ways of doing things are no longer viable, the innovators often seize their chance.

Of course the scale of our deficits - with one pound out of every four borrowed - means cutting some things anyone would rather protect. But research also suggests that in some areas, with strong leadership and thoughtful planning, savings can actually deliver better public services.

This year I chaired a series of studies into how public sector organisations can manage their property more efficiently. We looked at the approaches taken by the most innovative local authorities in the country. These ranged from co-locating different services in the same building to freeing up office space by introducing more flexible working practices.

What we found was astonishing. The local authorities who thought most intelligently and radically about how they used their property were not only saving millions in running costs but also reducing their carbon footprint and improving the productivity and morale of the workforce.

Where services are co-located for example, people from different departments talk to each other, breaking down the

silo mentality. Allowing employees to work from home one or two days a week saves desks, but it's also been found to reduce stress, sick days and staff turnover. If best practice was imitated across the public sector, we estimated that the productivity gains would be equivalent to £8 billion worth of public spending. The Government estimates £35 billion savings are available in all.

The point is that in this area getting a better deal for the taxpayer while delivering better services are not only compatible goals, but mutually supportive. Yet just as in the boom, it's not enough to think of reform only in terms of how much is spent. For any meaningful change to take place there also has to be a change of mindset.

One of the major barriers to more efficient property management in the public sector is that property tends to be thought of as an asset. In fact it's more accurately regarded as a cost. Once this principle has been accepted easy savings begin to reveal themselves. Elsewhere in public life mindsets are changing. In education it's increasingly accepted that children aren't the only ones doing the learning. Schools are being given greater freedom to innovate and improve because the state no longer presumes it has all the answers. In welfare policy support will always be given for those that need it, but it's now recognised that the best kind of support is support into work.

Tough times force us to abandon old dogmas. In the depths of a bust, when the old ways of doing things are no longer viable, the innovators often seize their chance. It was during the economic stagnation of the 1970s that Microsoft and other future tech giants were founded. From the ruins of war came the NHS. Now we must learn how to satisfy greater expectations with less. We cannot afford to fail. ■

Biography

Matthew Hancock was elected as MP for West Suffolk at the 2010 election. Before moving into politics, he worked for his family business, as an economist at the Bank of England and later as a senior economic adviser and Chief of Staff to George Osborne. Since becoming MP for West Suffolk, Matthew has been elected to the Public Accounts Committee, which scrutinises and questions the way that Government departments spend taxpayers' money. He is also a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges which adjudicates on MPs' conduct. With Nadhim Zahawi MP Matthew is co-author of 'Masters of Nothing', the bestselling book on the human behaviour which caused the financial crisis. Matthew, 33, is married to Martha, and has two children. Among other things, he enjoys cooking, walking, and spending time with his family. He is also a keen cricket fan and is joint-secretary of the Lords and Commons Cricket.

Urban Youth:

After the riots, how should we engage with young people?

Sarah Castell

For many years, one of Britain's peculiar obsessions has been to see "the youth" as intrinsically problematic. For years surveys in towns and cities across Britain have shown that local residents view teenagers as a key concern, and we are in fact the only country out of 23 we've surveyed where activities for teenagers are seen as the most pressing priority for improving local areas.

The summer riots brought our concerns about young people into sharp focus. There are a million more young people aged 16-24 in Britain today than there were 10 years ago, and according to the Ministry of Justice just over half of those brought to the courts for public disorder offences at the time of the riots were aged 20 or under[1]. This meant that parts of the media unhelpfully demonised some sections of young people as 'disaffected youth', blaming them for many of society's perceived ills.

The government has emphasised that it has no time for a soft approach to those caught taking part in the riots and violence and condemned society's moral breakdown. Shortly afterwards the government also announced a drive to "mend our broken society" and a dedicated unit has been set up within the Department of Communities and Local Government to do so.

But how true are the negative images of young people – and what do we really know about young people today? 16 to 24s are not one homogenous group. There are a huge number of subtle differences by age, class, gender and so on, as young people move through the transition from childhood to adulthood. There are many different tribes and attitudinal groups. These have been

1 Ministry of Justice, Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th-9th August 2011

exhaustively researched and analysed by marketers, though not always considered by policymakers.

Any measures designed to tackle issues raised by the riots - school truancy, poor health, antisocial behaviour, crime and gangs – must take into account the specific subcultures of the group known broadly as young people.

The week before the riots, Ipsos MORI completed Youth in Transition, a qualitative study with over 120 young people in London and the South East. Whilst we did not predict the riots, we uncovered the hopes, dreams and aspirations of young people and some of the pressures which affect them.

We identified four broad qualitative groups. As a start point, policymakers seeking to engage young people (with public services, education, employers and wider society) could look at their communication tasks in the context of the different needs of these groups.

Realists: "What's the point of joining in?"

The first group we called *Realists*, because their world is rooted in their practical, real life experiences of work and hanging out with friends. They form their identity in relation to their peers rather than through institutions.

It is among the *Realists* that we find some of the angriest young people and those most disconnected from wider society. Many of this group are aged 16-18, from less advantaged backgrounds, with little disposable income. They tend not to see themselves as part of a wider adult world. They feel society is against them, contending that the police bother them when they're *"doing nothing"*. Society is going on around them, but they feel they neither contribute to it, nor benefit from it.

"Lots is going on, but you don't know where… there isn't anything for us" (Female,18)

Though they often live in very urban areas, their sphere of travel and influence is quite limited.

"I wouldn't go up to somewhere I didn't know – I might get beat" (Female, 17)

When this group talks about the future, they sound fearful and powerless. They worry that they might fail at school and fail to find a job, but they are also so worried about the costs of continuing education that they are on the point of giving up. If service providers want this group to play a more integrated part in their communities, they must note that *Realists* appreciate face-to-face, real-time support delivered at a very local level.

Apprentices: "Will my hard work eventually pay off?"

Apprentices have just left education. They are trying to get a job, or dealing with the tiring work routine of a first job. Usually slightly older than *Realists* at around 21-24, they feel grateful to have work at all. This group are not the academic high flyers nor from the most affluent backgrounds, but they are ambitious. There is a real emphasis on money and a burning desire to get lots of it. They have suddenly realised, however, how many years of hard slog might be ahead before they get the lifestyle they want.

Rioting in London this summer began in areas of high social inequality. After the riots, we went back to some of our Youth in Transition participants for their views. One told us that in his view, rioting was the only way for frustrated young people, desperate for money and opportunities, to be heard.

Apprentices display this frustration when they talk about the difference between affluence for some, poverty for others, and inescapable hard work for those in between.

"I look up at Canary Wharf and want that corner office, but my job every day is really boring and tiring and it's going to be like that for years to come." (Male, 19)

This group see the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, and they feel they could easily get stuck in dead end occupations, even while the opportunities for success in London may be greater than elsewhere.

"I just want to get out of Camden" (Male, 20)

So what do *Apprentices* need? To be reassured that their work is worth doing, otherwise they can easily become daunted by the hard work ahead, drop out of skills learning, and become NEET (not in employment, education or training).

Aspirers: "So many ambitions, but what do I do next?"

Aspirers are 16-18s, full-time studying, and with a reasonable amount of disposable income. They have a wider and more cosmopolitan outlook than the *Realists.* They take inspiration from traditional and social media and from

the online world in all aspects of life. Online constantly, usually via mobile, it is the internet which shapes their opinions about society.

"I Googled the three main parties… I Googled tuition fees, I Googled Education Maintenance Allowance), student finance, I Googled those sort of things and Lib Dems kept popping up and popping up. So I just thought 'okay they have my support'" (Female, 18)

While they are enthusiastic and engaged consumers, *Aspirers* have their own frustrations. They feel close to, yet far from, the world of celebrity, luxury, and wealth. Social media means they have two-way relationships with celebrities - when you tweet, they tweet back. This normalises fame and fortune. Like the *Apprentices*, *Aspirers* feel pressure to have money but feel pressure to spend it now, on luxury brands and media. The media they consume includes stories of fame and good fortune, and the rhetoric they share is all about following dreams and making goals reality. But this brings pressure to achieve and attain very optimistic goals.

Aspirers are more confident of success than *Apprentices*, but unsure of all the possibilities open to them in the future. While they have some role models (older friends and family), they would like more inspiration about the opportunities they have to engage with the wider world in future.

Professionals: "How do I network and develop my own professional identity?"

Professionals are older (22-24), more highly educated and of higher social grades. They are entrepreneurial. They have a coherent identity online which supports their offline goals, for example they upload music, art, business information and use the online world for networking and drawing inspiration from others. They are looking for, or working in, jobs where they can continue to express this online identity.

They are very clear about the skills they need: formal education, work experience, online presence, and networking with good contacts. Their greatest frustration is that their education has only given them the first of these and they are struggling to get the right contacts and the right work experience, and to promote themselves online.

"(My degree) opens doors, but not always to the places you want. It helps you apply but you still need internships and things. My masters didn't open any doors to be honest!" (Male, 23)

Professionals are thirsting to get both soft networking skills and hard work experience.

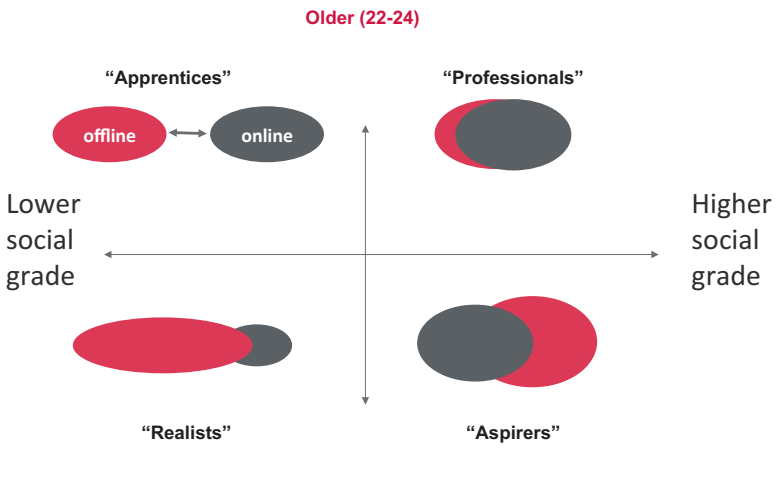
How should public servants communicate with these groups?

Rather than accepting a simplistic rhetoric of 'rioting youth', the study argues for a more nuanced understanding of young people's different needs. It adds support to the argument that young people will not all respond to communications in a uniform way, and that the style and channel of communication, as well as the message, will be important.

Youth In Transition reveals that all the four youth groups want to have pragmatic, human discussions with employers and educators. In particular, they want to engage with older people and authority figures in an informal and human way, even when discussing work or serious subjects.

This chimes with findings of other research. A recent Hansard study revealed that young people want to see the 'day to day, human side' of politicians and learn how their jobs affect them as individuals. The Sciencewise-ERC blog in October 2011 reports research which explains that young people want to see the 'wild, creative side' of scientists –

Four groups each with different approaches to the world



another indication of the value of the personal element in the public sphere, for young people.

This is partly because young people want the informality of the online world, which they are used to, to extend to the public realm. The conventions of social networking, where shorter and more informal is better, are conditioning all their interactions and responses to communications. In a world of instant messaging, even texting is starting to feel overly formal.

Beyond this shared need for pragmatic and informal conversations, different groups use the online world very differently. Policymakers can leverage the power of the online world to design communications for each group.

Using online to communicate with the four groups – what do they need?

Realists are heavily focused on social media, and use it to support the peer group rather than to connect to the wider world. Blackberry Messenger (BBM) and Facebook are used to build communities, but they are all based around the same few streets. There was interest in the role played by BBM in the riots and it is this group who are most likely to be using it. *Realists* say that social media is at the centre of their groups, but can also stir up problems, by raising the temperature of arguments within their peer group.

When they talk about the internet, they are talking about websites which promote their friends, or local organisations or gangs. They share music mixed by their friends rather than buying music by famous bands; rather than using the internet to broaden their horizons to the wider world it narrows their focus.

"We love Facebook, but we don't really use the internet" (Female, 17).

While not, precisely, digitally excluded – *Realists* may well have smartphones and access to broadband - they do not turn to the internet automatically for advice and information. The message for public services is not to assume that just because they are young, they will engage with online, and to understand how local and specific to the peer group their social networking really is. There is a need to provide other channels for them as well.

Apprentices, on the other hand, have a closer relationship to the online world and are mainly looking for guidance as to how they can progress in their careers. They are mobile and online, but because they are busy, worried and tired, online resources need to be easy and quick to access, and very reassuring in content.

Aspirers get great emotional satisfaction from the online world. They work hard at crafting their online identities, by using and sharing commercial content.

"On facebook you create a character of yourself" (Male, 18)

In some ways it is easy to reach *Aspirers* and help them shape their future aspirations, because they love any online content which is exclusive, timely, and interactive. Apps, for example, which give them exclusive access to information which they can share with others online helps them to feel inspired and creates the opportunity for them to talk to other *Aspirers* about their ambitions and create realistic life plans for themselves. Communications

will, though, be competing with a lot of sophisticated commercial content so will need to be well designed.

Because *Professionals* are so keen to network and build skills, there is a huge opportunity to engage them in society, using social media in a variety of different ways, so that they can become well networked adults and their careers and aspirations can benefit. Offline, this group are also very well placed to engage in volunteering – it can help them with the networking and experience they are keen to establish.

Overall, *Youth in Transition* gives pointers to policymakers for how best to answer the needs of the different groups of young people sensitively, while acknowledging that they are all different from their elders and under different pressures.

Young people are characterised as much by optimism as by frustration, and it remains more likely that they will be creatives rather than rioters. Policymakers need to compete to get their attention and leverage their energy and potential. ■

Notes from across the pond: The Riots, 'Occupy' and growing public unrest

Julia Clark
Vice president, Ipsos Public Affairs USA

For both the US and the UK, 2011 has been a year where public unrest has exploded into two entirely separate but equally significant waves of disorder and demonstration. First we had the August riots in England, starting with a localised incident in Tottenham before spreading across London and the country.

The US, on the other hand, is seeing a number of 'Occupy' protests, which began in New York City as 'Occupy Wall Street' protesting against what they believe to be the greed and excess of those on Wall Street. The 'Occupy' movement has since expanded both throughout the United States and internationally, reaching St. Paul's Cathedral in London where protestors have set up camp. While the aims of the 'Occupiers' are not always clear, they represent a group of people disaffected with capitalism and angry with the banking institutions' contribution to the economic crisis.

While there is no suggestion that one led to the other, or even that the two are related, the fact that both movements gained traction and support so quickly suggests that the economic and political backdrops in both countries may be ripe for this kind of public demonstration (it is difficult to call the riots a protest). Both situations appear to have arisen in part from a growing public frustration with economic disparity and the perception of an increasingly disenfranchised economic under-class – or at least that's how it looks from the States.

Public concern about the economy in both the US and the UK has remained at very high levels since the recession, and increasing unemployment paired with a recent focus on wealth disparity may be fueling this sentiment. Clearly, an atmosphere of anger and discontent in the poor economic climate seems to be taking its toll with a public more eager to make itself heard, certainly in the case of the 'Occupiers'.

Where the riots in England were violent and destructive, the current 'Occupy' movements at least started off more peacefully. However, there have been some clashes between 'Occupy' participants and the police and enforcement authorities in various cities around

…a growing public frustration with economic disparity and the perception of an increasingly disenfranchised economic under-class…

the world, and November saw the clearing out of the 'Occupy' Wall Street camp in New York. While there was national condemnation of the riots in Britain by both political leaders and the public (69% of Brits agree that there are parts of British society that are sick), there is quite a lot of sympathy for the 'Occupy' movements here in the US.

While this is certainly due to the different nature of the two movements (one mainly destructive and the other mainly peaceful), it is worth noting the volume of public support for the 'Occupy' movement, even as concerns about the destructive and potentially violent undertone of the movement are increasing.

Among those who have heard of the protests (82% of Americans had in early October), about two in five feel favorable towards them. A quarter are unfavorable, and over a third are undecided. Democrats express the greatest favorability towards the protests (51%) followed by Independents (37%) and just 22% of Republicans.

As 'Occupy' continues to gain momentum, and as clashes with enforcement officials increase, the US has to be cautious about the 'tipping point' between peaceful protest and violent riots. As should those wanting to make their point, with violent clashes likely to turn public empathy into disapproval.

This is not an attempt at a single, unified theory; as noted, there are many different causes of these events. But these are not isolated incidents; there have been protests in Greece and Italy over austerity measures, and we have argued elsewhere for the relationship between disaffected public opinion and regime change in the Middle East[1]. With the global economic climate unlikely to improve in the near future and the eurozone crisis in fact threatening to make things worse, this theme of our times may only grow in 2012. ■

1 "A year for change": Public opinion and the Arab Spring in *Understanding Society*: The Power of Opinion, Ipsos Social search Institute 2011

Deal or no Deal: a green light for energy saving?

Edward Langley

At a time of economic uncertainty, can the public afford to care about green issues?

Throughout 2011 we have been reminded of the importance of continued action on the environment and climate change. One year after David Cameron declared the Coalition would be the greenest government ever, US President Barack Obama told the UK Parliament, *"No country can hide from the dangers of carbon pollution".*

However, as political and economic realities bite it is difficult to avoid the feeling that this issue has fallen down the pecking order. George Osborne's comment that *"We're not going to save the planet by putting our country out of business"* has also left those pushing a green agenda feeling nervous.

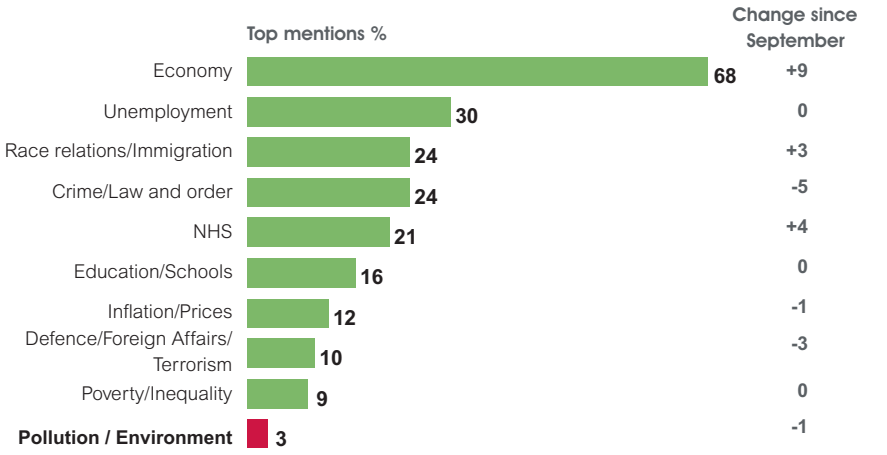
That said, there are ambitious plans afoot with the introduction of the Green Deal in 2012, which is designed to enable the British public (and businesses) to make our homes and workplaces more energy efficient. In addition, the roll out of smart meters to every household in the country is due to be completed by 2019, with the potential benefits this might bring by providing real-time information to householders.

The success of both of these measures and other mechanisms to encourage behaviour change will depend on the public's response to them. To what extent are the public ready to go green, and what lessons can be learnt around changing behaviour from the recent evaluation of the leading energy efficiency scheme, the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target?

The Ipsos MORI Issues Index has historically shown the environment to be a second or even third tier issue in comparison with other concerns such as the economy, immigration, crime and the NHS more top of mind. In the most recent Index 'Pollution / Environment' was mentioned by just 3%.

Issues facing Britain: October

What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today? What do you see as other important issues facing Britain today?



Base: 982 British adults 18+, 7 – 13 October 2011

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

Can we take from this that the public simply don't care around green issues, or at a time of economic uncertainty can't afford to care? A wealth of survey data from Ipsos MORI and other organisations shows that we clearly are concerned about the environment when prompted. A study for Cardiff University in 2010 showed seven in ten people expressed concern about climate change, albeit this had declined from eight in ten back in 2005[1].

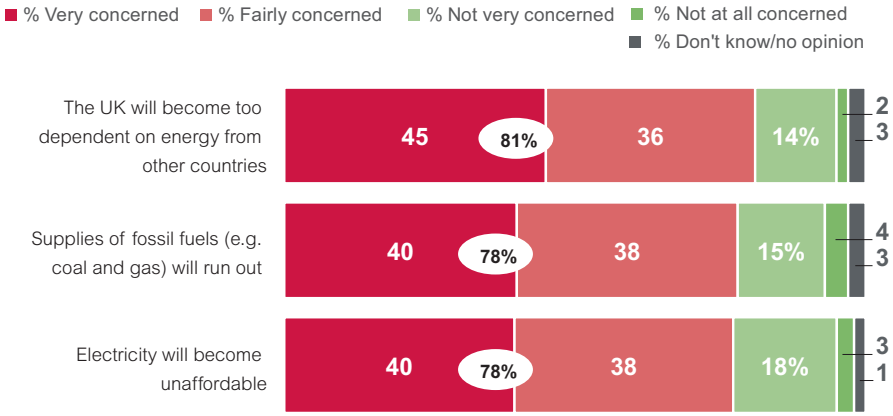
Our interpretation of these findings is that the environment is not an issue that is top of mind for many people in a time of economic uncertainty, but remains an underlying and long-term concern for the public.

Interestingly the Cardiff University survey showed higher levels of concern around energy security than climate change. Eight in ten people expressed concern that the UK will become too dependent on energy from other countries; that supplies of fossil fuels will run out and that electricity will become unaffordable. Despite everything that has been said about climate change and its impact on our lives, it still remains somewhat intangible for many people. Energy security, on the other hand, especially given its implications in the current economic crisis, can feel much more real.

This is an extremely complex matter of public policy. While simple energy independence is generally recognised to be neither practical nor necessary in a world of interdependent economies, securing energy supplies is much harder, being both multi-faceted and context-dependent. That said, broad trends have emerged. The OECD wrote in 2005 that an expected sharp rise in energy demand over the next 50 years, coupled with short-term shocks, means that governments have 'focussed attention on issues such as long-term price stability, the security of energy supply and sustainable development.'[2] Indeed, policy has clearly been directed towards protecting energy supplies, exploiting

The public are more concerned about security of supply and affordability

How concerned, if at all, are you that in the future…



Base:1,822 British adults, aged 15 and over, 6 January-26 March 2010 Source: Cardiff University / Ipsos MORI

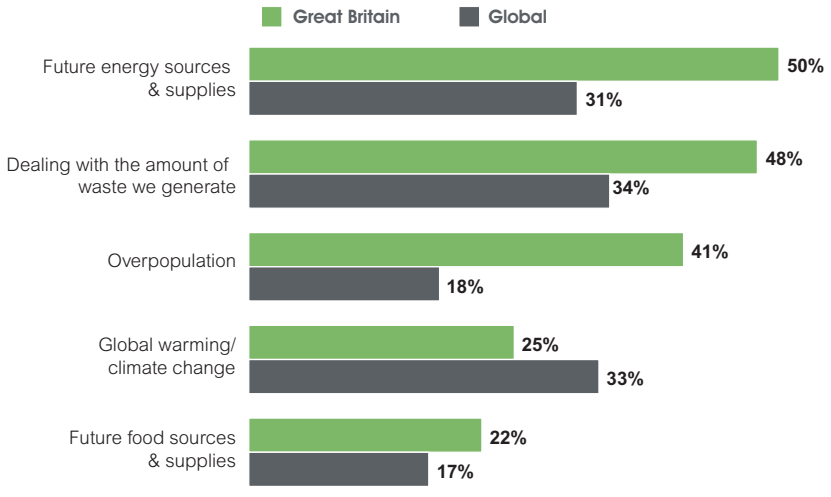
natural resources and diversifying sources so as not to be reliant on any one form of energy.[3]

Further evidence of the British public's concern around energy security relative to climate change was highlighted in an international study that we conducted earlier this year. The study asked an online audience across 24 nations to pick their leading environmental concerns from 15 possible options.

The British public were far more concerned with energy security, dealing with waste and overpopulation than the global average. In contrast, while global warming and climate change was ranked as the fourth most important issue, Britons were less likely to highlight it than those in other countries.

Energy security, waste and population concerns are more acute in GB

In your view, what are the three most important environmental issues facing your country today?



Base: Between 500-1,010 respondents per country, February 2-14 2011 Source: Ipsos MORI Global @dvisor

This survey has implications for policymakers on how pro-environmental messages might be framed. A message around being self-sufficient as a nation should have broader appeal than one saying we need to play our part to tackle climate change.

Changing behaviours

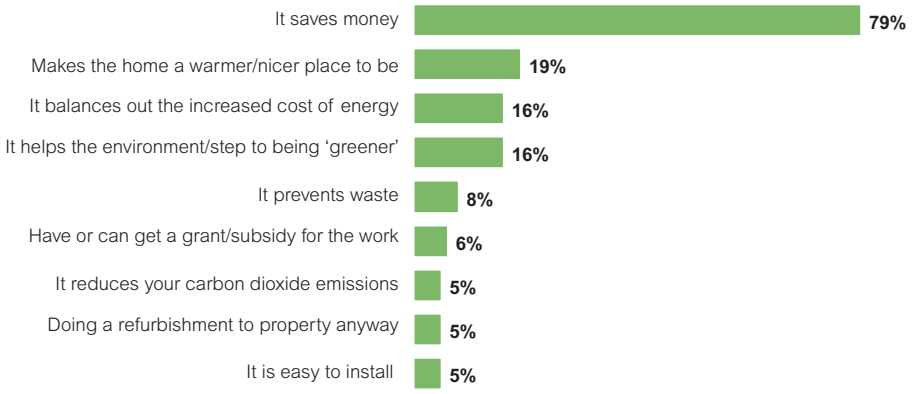
Looking ahead to the Green Deal, how might the British public be encouraged to change behaviour and take-up energy efficiency measures such as loft or wall insulation? The Cabinet Office paper, *Behaviour Change and Energy Use*[4], provides a number of pointers on this, including:

- The use of incentives, including trials of council tax holidays or high street vouchers, as well as incentives at a community level;
- Utilising social networks to ensure these behaviours are perceived as a norm;
- Reducing the hassle factor created by arranging and preparing for the installation, for example through a subsidised loft clearance service;
- Prompting individuals at moments of change and thinking about the "messenger" (as highlighted by the MINDSPACE report on behaviour change[5]).

Since the publication of this paper, DECC has published further research evaluating the success and lessons learnt from the current leading energy efficiency scheme, the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT)[6]. Ipsos MORI delivered this evaluation in partnership with CAG Consultants. Many of the insights from the evaluation further support the Cabinet Office paper.

Reasons for installing energy efficiency measures

What would you say are the main reasons you have already installed energy efficiency measures in your home?



Base: 666 CERT customers+, interviewed between 14 and 24 January 2011
+ Refer to footnote for definition of measures included within 'CERT customer'
Source: Ipsos MORI Global @dvisor

The importance of a trusted messenger was highlighted across 79 in-depth interviews conducted as part of the CERT evaluation. Householders felt schemes which were delivered by their local authority – or at least endorsed by them – had greater credibility than direct marketing at a national level by energy companies. They said this was important in persuading them to sign up to the measures.

"I knew if the council was in the scheme there wasn't going to be any hidden charges."

We also observed the importance of social norms in CERT. Householders living in areas where there had been concentrated activity felt reassured seeing their neighbours having insulation installed, and also experienced a desire to conform, as illustrated by the following comments on cavity wall insulation:

"Why block it up? Will you get condensation? Will you get damp walls? Some of these questions were answered, so I thought OK I'll give it a go. Plus a lot more people were getting it done, and you cannot think I'm right and they're all wrong."

"There were so many houses in the area getting done … Once you've seen the van you just followed suit."

However, while trust and social norms are important in addressing barriers to the take-up of energy efficiency measures they do not provide the underlying motivation for doing so. This was measured in a nationally representative survey of customers, which showed that in the end this came down to saving money (mentioned by 4 in 5 customers).

The emphasis on saving money presents a problem for the Green Deal, as the scheme is unlikely to deliver significant savings. This is because, while the householder does not pay for the measures to be installed, they must repay the finance through a charge attached to the property's energy bill[7]. The charge is likely to largely offset the savings the measures deliver, thereby removing the impetus for many to act.

This means that another primary motivation needs to be found for consumers, such as thermal comfort, insurance against future energy price rises and going green. As noted earlier, the relative importance placed on energy supplies and the cost of energy suggests this is a more powerful message frame than climate change to advance green aims (even if some have argued that concern about ever-rising prices due to dwindling supplies is based on faulty assumptions[8]).

Green Deal providers and the government need then to consider how they can best hook into these concerns, while also creating the right mix of incentives and conditions to encourage householders to take up the Green Deal, if green growth is to bloom. ■

1 Spence, A., Venables, D., Pidgeon, N., Poortinga, W. and Demski, C. (2010). Public Perceptions of Climate Change and Energy Futures in Britain: Summary Findings of a Survey Conducted in January-March 2010. Technical Report (Understanding Risk Working Paper 10-01). Cardiff: School of Psychology

2 OECD (February 2005) Policy Brief – Nuclear world today http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/62/34537360.pdf

3 See, for example, EC (2001) *Towards a European Strategy for the security of energy supply*, Green Paper Office for the Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg; Department of Energy and Climate Change (2011), *Planning our electric future: a White Paper for secure, affordable and low-carbon electricity*

4 Behaviour Change and Energy Use, Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team (2011)

5 MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy. Cabinet Office/Institute for Government 2010

6 CERT: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/funding/funding_ops/cert/cert.aspx

7 Householders would only continue to pay the charge for as long as they are resident in the property. If they sold or rented out the property the charge would transfer to the new occupant and energy bill payer.

8 Dieter Helm, The peak oil brigade is leading us into bad policymaking on energy. *The Guardian*, 18 October 2011

Well fair? Public opinion and the welfare state

Suzanne Hall

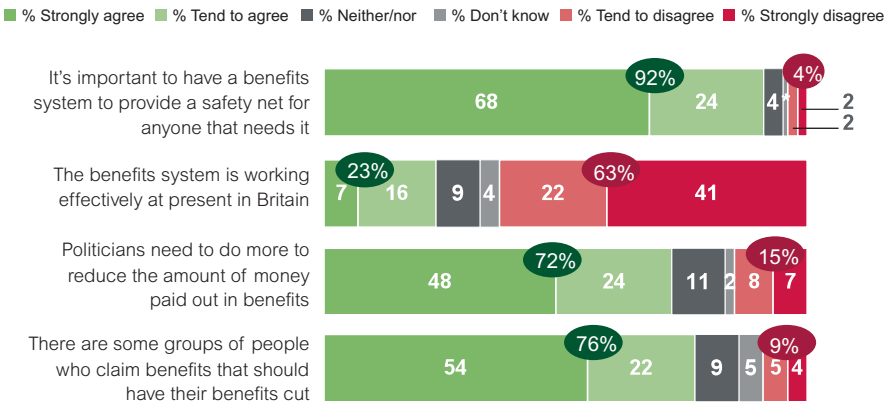
How to deliver help and support to those who need it – the unemployed, the sick and the elderly – has always been an issue that has prompted much debate in the UK. The last Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George, faced stern opposition when introducing the National Insurance Act of 1911, with workers likening him to a thief who was stealing their wages and critics within Parliament suggesting that the reforms undermined individual responsibility and eroded freedom[1]. Furthermore, even among the war weary public of 1940s Britain, the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942 was not met with universal acclaim. Mass Observation, a social research project founded in 1937 to record everyday life in Britain found much cynicism with some suggesting the reforms were merely election promises likely to be broken in peacetime while one man forcefully opined *"if people stand here for the trades unions putting this bloody Beveridge scheme across they deserve to lose the sodding war"*[2].

And so the debate continues. As Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, ushers through reforms which herald "the biggest change since Beveridge introduced the welfare system"[3] there is much discussion about the proposed changes

which aim to simplify and streamline the benefits system through the introduction of Universal Credit. They will also see the introduction of stricter penalties with payments withheld from those who refuse work while community placements and support delivered through the private and voluntary sector will help get the long-term unemployed into the habit of working. At their heart, these reforms seek to ensure that work incentives mean a life of employment is always more attractive and viable than seeking support from the state. With the welfare bill currently costing the state £56bn, this is something that really matters given the squeeze on the nation's finances.

A broken welfare system?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Base: 1,003 British adults aged 18+, 16-18 September 2011

Source: Ipsos MORI

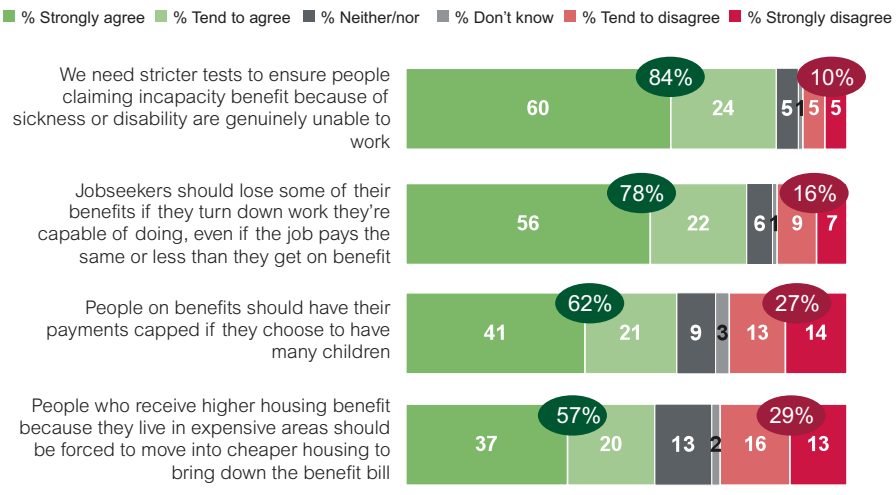
On the one hand, these reforms are very much in tune with popular opinion. While polling for a recent BBC documentary found that nine in ten agree *in principle* that it is important to have a benefits system to provide a safety net for anyone that needs it, only a quarter (23%) believe that this same system is working effectively at present[4]. Their problem with the benefits system is clear: too much money paid out to those who do not deserve it. Seven in ten agree that politicians need to do more to reduce the amount of money paid out in benefits, including half who strongly agree. Further, when looking at where the benefits are going, the public are quick to identify who should get less. Of the three-quarters who said that there are some groups of people who claim benefits who should have their benefits cut, immigrants are most commonly mentioned (35%) followed by those who claim over £400 a week in housing benefit (27%) and the long term unemployed (25%). So, it would seem that the public's high level of support for a welfare state is highly conditional on the types of people in question.

Given this sense that too much money is being paid to the wrong people, it is perhaps no surprise that the public advocate hard-line measures to reform the benefits system. More stringent eligibility criteria hold wide appeal. Over four in five agree that we need stricter tests to ensure people claiming incapacity benefit because of sickness or disability are genuinely unable to work.

Furthermore, there appears to be a strongly held conviction that any work, irrespective of the wages paid or whether the job is well-matched to the candidate's skills, is better than a life on the dole. Around three-quarters say that jobseekers should lose some of their benefits if they turn down work they are capable of doing, even if the job pays the same or less than they get on benefit.

Stricter sanctions and eligibility criteria…

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Base: 1,003 British adults aged 18+, 16-18 September 2011

Source: Ipsos MORI

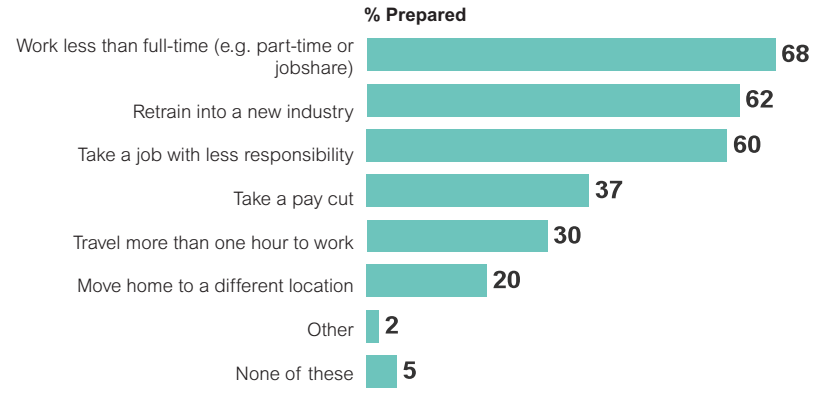
There is also a strong sense that those reliant on state support should not be able to exercise as much choice in how they live their lives when compared to those who are able to pay their way. Three in five (61%) agree that people on benefits should have their payments capped if they choose to have many children. It is clear then, that these reforms will strike a chord with a public keen to see a fairer welfare state which delivers support to those most in need and a tough line to those seeking to shirk their responsibilities. However, the question remains as to what those on the receiving end of these reforms think, and whether they will help them back into work.

We know from our research with the unemployed that, for the majority, being out of work is not a life that they would readily choose for themselves with three-quarters (75%) of unemployed adults agreeing that they are determined to do whatever it takes to find work. This conviction necessitates further analysis though. When asked what specific steps they would be prepared to consider in order to find a job, around two-thirds (68%) state that they would be willing to work less than full-time while three in five (62%) would retrain into a new industry. A similar proportion (60%) would take a job with less responsibility[5].

However, it is important to remember the context in which decisions about employment are taken and this is where the needs of the family as a whole as opposed to just the individual are taken into consideration. Our work for the Department for Education and HM Revenue & Customs evaluating the impact of the Childcare Affordability Pilots[6] exposed this complexity by examining the decision-making process around employment and childcare.

People are willing to work less, retrain and have less responsibility…

Which of the following, if any, might you be prepared to consider in order to accept a job?



Base: 1,624 unemployed adults, 24 April – 13 May 2011

Source: Ipsos MORI

The research uncovered just what a finely balanced ecosystem the family unit really is and how, for many, combining work and childcare responsibilities is a complex puzzle. Factors include access to affordable and trusted formal childcare, a supply of flexible labour, the hours for which are compatible with the demands of childcare, wages which pay enough to ensure combining employment and childcare is worthwhile, ready access to transport, good networks to provide out-of-hours care when needed and both the employer and the childcare provider to be located close enough to the home to ensure that the travel is not too onerous[7].

Given the interplay between all these component parts, decisions as to whether work is viable are often taken as a family rather than by an individual alone. This issue therefore perhaps goes some way to explaining why the unemployed are not prepared to accept work at any cost. For instance, a third (37%) would take a pay cut while only three in ten (30%) would be prepared to travel more than one hour to work. Fewer still (20%) would be willing to move home in order to find work.

Given the low levels of agreement for making these sacrifices questions need to be asked about whether some elements of the reforms will achieve their intended consequences of both reducing the welfare bill and ensuring that work always pays. For instance, the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit has been cut so the government will now only pay up to 70% of childcare costs incurred as opposed to 80% for eligible claimants. However,

> ***I'm probably better off not working, but I need to get out to stimulate my brain***
>
> ***Lone parent, 100% costs pilot, CAP09***

our work on the Childcare Affordability Pilots showed that even when 80% of costs were covered, many families found finding the extra 20% from their wages a real struggle which, in turn, made them question the value of them being in work. It may, therefore, be reasonable to assume that now families have an even higher childcare bill to cover, employment becomes a less appealing and viable proposition.

Furthermore, given the lack of willingness regarding commuting, the effects of the

> ***I don't know how they calculate these thresholds, but right now I am just struggling day-to-day***
>
> ***Lone parent, 100% costs pilot, CAP09***

government's cap on housing benefit need to be considered. While more than two in five (44%) support spending less on housing benefit if it helped pay off the national debt, opinion is divided when asked whether they would still support this if it means that tenants have to move to a different area to find cheaper accommodation because housing benefit is lower than the rents they pay (36% oppose and 38% support)[8].

The elephant in the room is, of course, whether there are enough jobs for people to apply for. This is not lost on those seeking work with over four in five unemployed adults concerned that the current economic climate will make it difficult for them to find work[9]. The latest statistics would also suggest that this concern is justified: growth over the past three quarters has hovered close to zero meaning 'sluggishness has become virtual stasis'[10] while the recent unemployment figures make for grim reading[11].

In spite of this, of course the government is right to try to reduce the welfare bill.

However, what comes through strongly from our research is that simply focusing levers on individual-level motivations won't be enough, especially at a time of economic uncertainty. Instead, reforms need to take into account the more complex interplay of factors at the household level. There are several good examples of this already in what the government is doing, for example the Family Intervention Projects and Family Nurse Partnerships for vulnerable families at risk, and the Genesis 2 project in Wales, which aims to increase participation in the labour market, especially for female lone parents, by providing support across a range of needs such as childcare, transport accessibility, debt, alcohol and drug misuse, and work-limiting health conditions. Currently, such holistic policies are reserved for 'problem families' rather than the public more broadly. However, as this piece has demonstrated, there is real potential for more family focussed approaches to bring great rewards in supporting people back into sustainable employment.

The government is in tune with public opinion, but one of the key reasons for this is Britons' very real sense of fairness, and if there are not sufficient opportunities and support for vulnerable people affected by the reforms then that same sense of fairness could turn against them. In this context, the government is making the case that the changes to benefits and the introduction of Universal Credits are not happening in isolation, but are linked to its Work Programme to get people back to work. The reality of whether each policy supports the other will be crucial to their success. ■

1 W.H.Greenleaf, The British Political Tradition Vol 2. The ideological Heritage (Methuen, 1983)

2 D. Kynaston, Austerity Britain, 1945-51 (Bloomsbury, 2007)

3 The Telegraph, Iain Duncan Smith: My welfare reforms are Beveridge for today, with a hint of Tebbit, 6th November 2010

4 Ipsos MORI/BBC, 1,003 British adults aged 18+, 16 – 18 September 2011

5 Ipsos MORI, 1,624 unemployed adults, 24 April – 13 May 2011

6 Ipsos MORI/DfE, Families behaviours and experiences in the Childcare Affordability Pilots (CAP09), 2011

7 Ibid

8 Ipsos MORI/Inside Housing, 1,002 adults aged 16+, 5 – 12th May 2011

9 Ipsos MORI, 1,624 unemployed adults, 24 April – 13 May 2011

10 Jonathan Portes, The coalition's confidence trick, The New Statesman 24 August 2011

11 According to the Office for National Statistics, there were 2.62 million unemployed people in the third quarter of 2011, the highest number since 1994

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Information

Ipsos MORI
79-81 Borough Road
London SE1 1FY

t: +44 (0)20 7347 3000
f: +44 (0)20 7347 3800
www.ipsos-mori.com

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