Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

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Open policy making and democratic renewal

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Introduction


Bobby Duffy


Daniel Cameron

This edition of Understanding Society brings together two closely connected issues that are core to what we do at Ipsos MORI. We are probably still best known for our political polling, even though it makes up a tiny fraction of our work. Much more of our time is spent helping design, implement and representing the views of the public, service users and other groups to the people making decisions that affect their lives.

So we have a real interest in the political and democratic elements of what Westminster and Whitehall do, but also how that translates (or doesn't) into particular policies and programmes.

This edition covers these two themes and how they interact.

First, we have a number of articles on how open policy making is taking root in various forms in Whitehall and beyond. We are delighted to have the Head of the Policy Profession, Chris Wormald, outline his vision for open policy making. We are also delighted to have thoughts on the challenges of making the theory a reality, particularly where it overlaps with politics, from Jill Rutter of the Institute for Government.

We also have case studies from our own and others' work on a range of issues like the siting of radioactive waste disposal facilities, the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy, the Amplify project at DfID and the Northern Futures initiative from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Our second theme is outlined in an article from Paddy Ashdown, where he warns of the huge challenges facing the legitimacy of our democratic system as it is currently structured.

We share Paddy's view that something new and serious is happening to the public's relationship with our political systems. We are keenly aware of it from our regular political polling, our qualitative research, and reanalysis of our long-term trends comparing the views of different generations.

There are some irresistible forces in culture and technology that make it impossible to see how our political system will work in the same way as it currently does in 10-20 years' time. As a recent St George's House/Political Studies Association event concluded, we are trying to 'run the 21st Century using 20th Century systems on top of 19th Century political structures'.[1]

In that context, some might see discussions of open policy making, and the examples we give here, as technocratic fiddling – rearranging the deck chairs on a Titanic of a political system. But that's not how we see it. As we will outline, the public are generally very practical and pragmatic on these issues – they mainly just want things to work better. It is going to take years and much more imagination than is currently visible to reshape our democratic system – and in the meantime opening up policy in a more effective way is an important step, if only part of the answer.

We need to be careful not to assume that what we are seeing is a 'new crisis of trust' in politicians and the political system.

A new democracy?

There are a dizzying number of signals that our relationship with politics and democracy is shifting fundamentally. At its bluntest, the last three general elections have seen the lowest turnouts since 1918, and the belief that there is a 'duty to vote' has declined markedly, driven mostly by generational differences, as younger cohorts do not feel bound to the system in the same way.[2]

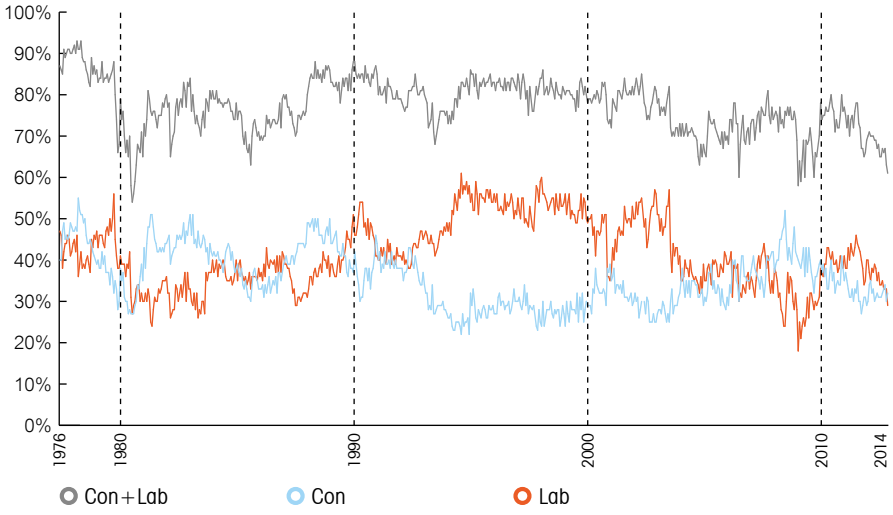
The repercussions from the Scottish Independence referendum are still rippling outwards. Our qualitative research around it showed that a key driver of engagement in the debate was the rejection of a perceived London/Westminster elite, who are felt to be far-removed from the realities of everyday life.[3]

This same sentiment is often linked to the rise of 'challenger' parties that overtly play to the fact that they are not the main two parties or part of this elite, particularly UKIP, but also the SNP and Greens. In our latest poll just 61% say they support either of the two main parties, compared with a peak of 93% in 1979. But as Figure 1 shows, there have been periods where this duopoly has been similarly challenged, most notably by the SDP in the early 1980s.

And in all of this we need to be careful not to assume that what we are seeing is a 'new crisis of trust' in politicians and the political system. On many measures, trust has not shifted that greatly in recent decades – mainly because there was no (recent) golden age of trust, as Figure 2 shows.

Figure ONE.

Q: How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?



Late 1970s combined average = **89%** 1980s combined average = **77%** 1990s combined average = **80%** 2000s combined average = **74%** 2010s combined average = **71%**

Figure TWO.

Q: No new crisis of trust in politicians?
…would you tell me if you generally trust them to tell the truth, or not?

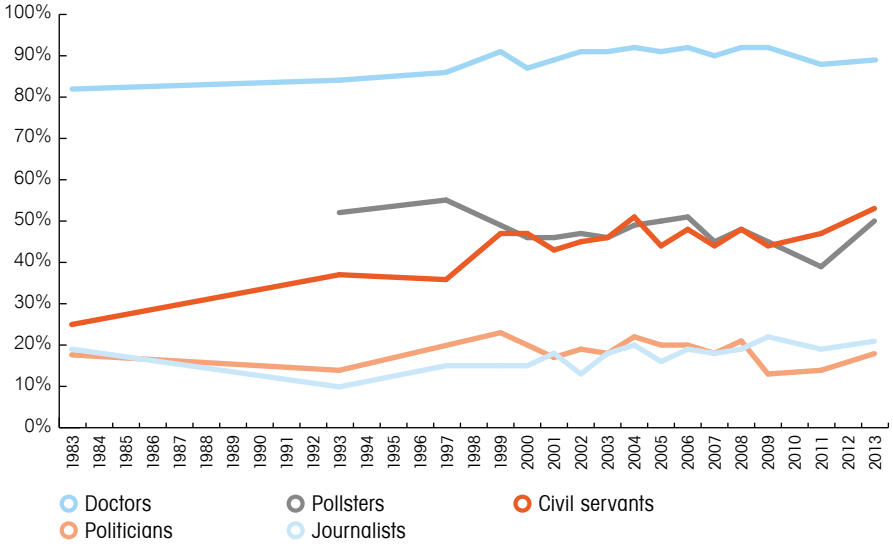
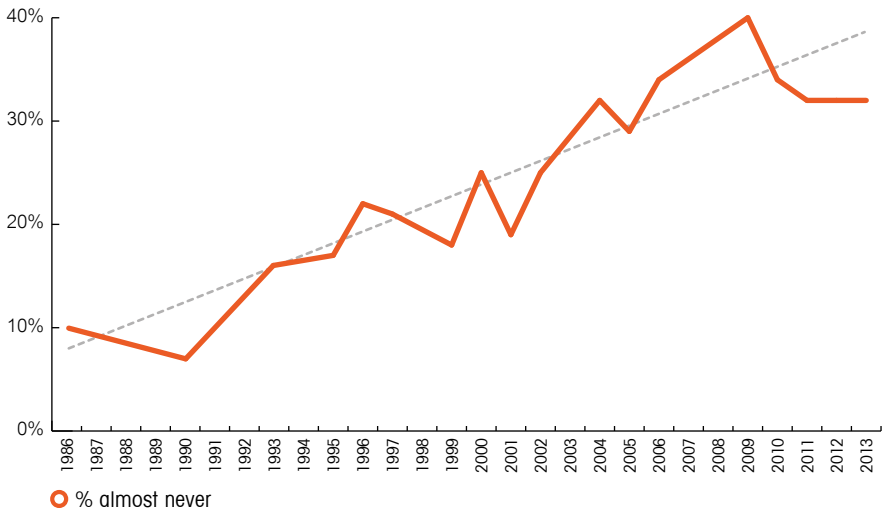


Figure THREE.

Q: How much do you trust a British government of any party to place the needs of this country above?



But some things have moved. In particular, people are quicker to believe that the government acts in its own or parties' interests rather than the public's. This may be due to a decline in deference that is often cited – but probably more accurately reflects greater realism, driven by hugely increased media and social media exposure to the detailed actions of politicians.

But it is important to distinguish the different types of effects on public beliefs, particularly to help us identify what is key for the long-term. We often use a sea analogy in understanding public opinion more generally, and it fits here too. This suggests there are three levels of impact on public views – froth, waves and tides.

Political scandals, whether that's expenses, Plebgate or pictures of white vans and England flags, are froth – they have little lasting impact. Even the relentless stories on the expenses scandal in 2009 only had a relatively small and temporary impact on our (already rock-bottom) view of how trustworthy politicians are in general.

Waves are more damaging in the longer term, and could include factors like the relative lack of control politicians had in the face of a global economic crisis, as Paddy Ashdown touches on in his article and other speeches.

But the key force here are the tides that no political system can resist. In this case, these are cultural and technological shifts, and because we are so influenced by the context we grow up in, are most evident in generational patterns.

So, for example, this is where we see a massive generational split in connection to individual political parties, as Figure 4 shows. There is a huge gap in feeling attached to one particular party between the oldest and youngest generations – and the pattern is so solid that you can roll the years forward and predict the inevitable decline of party attachment with some certainty.[4]

We have looked at similar data across Europe, and while the pattern is repeated in most other countries, Britain has the widest gap between old and young in party engagement – we face a particular challenge here.

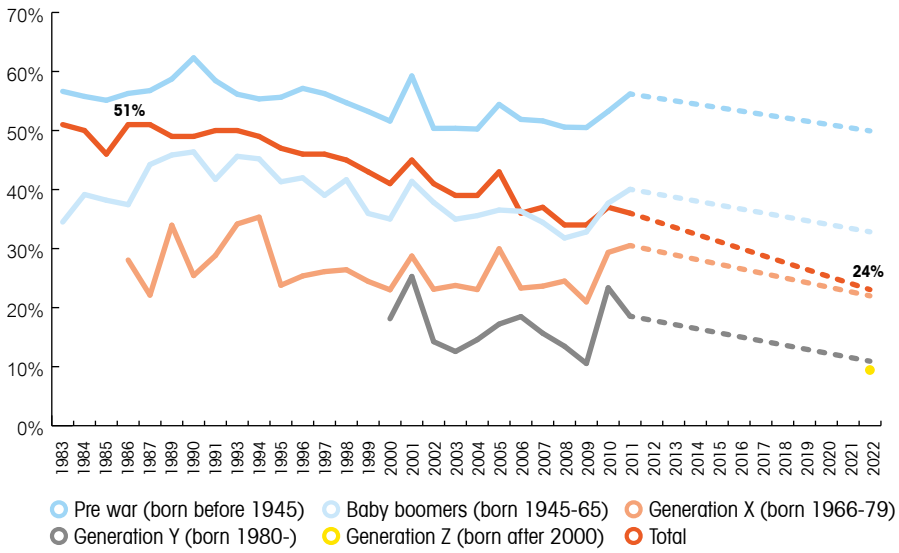
This does not mean that young people are rejecting politics overall. In fact, there are no generational gaps on levels of trust in politicians or institutions like parliament, and the young are just as likely to think politics is important. They just do not see the draw of buying into one over-arching manifesto, when they can pick and choose in all other aspects of their lives, having grown up in a highly filtered and tailored world.

This does not mean that the younger generations are selfish. In fact, as we have seen in previous work, it is quite the contrary, as this individualised outlook often goes along with a very strong sense of personal responsibility.[5] For example, the youngest adult age group are the most likely to be involved in social action, particularly informal activities.

One of the key lessons from our recent work for Nesta is that the state needs to shift its own perspective to leverage this effectively.[6] For example, if you ask people whether they are willing to get actively involved in 'local public services', only 5% say they would volunteer. But over 50% say they would do the shopping for an elderly neighbour once a week, 40% would work with others to help improve their local environment and 30% would visit patients in a local hospital. The state

Figure FOUR.

Q: Do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?



needs to find ways to fit with this real interest in 'people helping people', rather than propping up institutions they feel little connection to.

This points to a key facet of these trends – that it is much broader than just relationships with political parties. We see exactly the same generational pattern when we ask people about their connection to other big institutions like religion and the welfare state, with younger cohorts settled at a much lower level of engagement. The reasons will vary, but at heart there is a clear theme where more recent generations do not automatically see big institutions as the best solution to a problem.

People now have an ability to identify a single issue they care about, join with other like-minded people to address it, take action and then dissolve to move on to the next issue in a way that would have been unimaginable even a decade ago. This clearly shifts expectations of how issues can and should be addressed by governments.

We seem a long way from working out a political and governmental system that fits better with these major shifts. But it is likely to draw on at least two key features: much greater devolution of power and decision-making to communities and individuals, and using technology in more inventive ways to achieve both more direct democracy, as well as more meaningful deliberation when decisions are still made centrally.

The process of shifting power is already underway, reactively, almost accidentally, following the devolution of more control to Scotland – but there is scope and a need for the political classes to get ahead of this trend. 2015 marks the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta, and arguably it could not be a better time for a recasting of the political system. How this can be practically delivered is still very open – but a wide-ranging Constitutional Convention actively shaped by and engaging the public, not owned by political classes, would not be a bad place to start.

Opening up policy

In the face of these major challenges, the open policy making response may seem quite removed. But at its heart is the very important aim of reducing the distance between those who design and implement policy and those who are affected by it.

The latest update on the Civil Service Reform Plan reports that progress has been made in raising the profile of more open policy making, and developing a suite of approaches and methods that can be used in different policy scenarios.[7] But the update acknowledges that more work is needed to embed open policy making as the default approach across government departments. For example, contestability – where Ministers have access to advice from outside Whitehall – has happened in a few cases, but it is far from the norm.

In the face of major challenges, the open policy making response may seem quite removed. But at its heart is the very important aim of reducing the distance between those who design and implement policy and those who are affected by it.

From policy makers' point of view, being more open means asking better questions, inviting input from more sources, using evidence better and considering the impact on frontline implementation. All of which should give policy makers greater confidence about the advice and options given to Ministers.

For those on the outside – and that includes the public, service users, advocacy groups, frontline staff and experts in the policy area – a more open policy process will mean different things.

In terms of public engagement, a recurring theme of our research is that there is appetite for people to get involved in shaping the policies and services that they care about.[8] As we noted above, not everyone wants to engage with every issue – something policy makers would do well to bear in mind when they want to find out what the public think about a topic that is important to government, but may not resonate with the public more broadly. However, on the right issue – and with the right process in place – it is possible to secure meaningful public involvement.

Qualitative research Ipsos MORI conducted for the Office of the Leader of the House of Commons points to some ways public engagement with the policy process could be better facilitated.[9] The research found that many people want to have a say in policy issues but are largely unaware of the existing mechanisms for doing so. New digital engagement methods will have an important role to play in addressing this, although for some policy areas digital exclusion remains a big issue.

Alongside the challenge of developing and communicating opportunities, the research identified a number of significant attitudinal barriers. These included only being interested in specific issues; a fear of not being listened to; concerns about being unable to engage with the policy because of its complexity; and significant cynicism that getting involved makes any difference to the outcome.

In particular, people said they wanted some kind of framing for their input, not just a completely open process. They did not generally see themselves as expert enough to set the overall policy agenda – but they did feel they could help ensure that specific policies and ideas were sense-checked against their experience. And, of course, this kind of public feedback is what is supposed to happen through consultations. The current danger people identify is at the other extreme – that they are only invited to contribute to the policy process when decisions have effectively been made.

The other key constituents are those tasked with delivering policy on the ground, and we know that many do not currently feel involved in national policy decisions. In our Public Sector Leaders survey in 2013,[10] local government leaders were evenly split on whether they agreed or disagreed with government's objectives and priorities for their sector. Other sectors were even less convinced - in education, more disagreed than agreed with the government's priorities. Again, as throughout this discussion, policy and politics cannot be separated.

We hope you find this edition of Understanding Society useful and interesting. Both themes can be seen as being about how we 'burst the bubble', through injecting more external influence into the policy making process – but also ultimately moving more power and decisions away from Westminster.

Opening up

An interview with the Head of the Policy Profession in government, Chris Wormald

Bobby Duffy

Chris Wormald was appointed Permanent Secretary for the Department for Education in March 2012. He is also Head of the Policy Profession in government.

BD: Can you tell me a bit about your role as head of policy profession for the civil service?

There are two big things to say as context. One is that the policy profession is, of course, not strictly a profession. It doesn't have a defined set of people who are able to be policy makers, so it's not a profession like finance or HR, or like lawyers or doctors. The second thing is we do not expect policies to be made in the same way in every department.

So it's very much not a command and control role. Instead the focus is on the framework departments should operate in so that they make good policy. What help can we give from the centre and how can we facilitate departments learning from each other?

I chair the group and there's a Head of Policy Profession in each department. Together we focus on three things. It's about trying to create a policy profession that is open – and we can talk more about that later. We also want to ensure policy makers are professional, in the sense of having skills and training and development. And finally policy making needs to be consistent in that we know what good policy looks like and we have ways of measuring whether we've got there or not.

BD: Could you describe, from your perspective, what open policy making is and why it's become a focus for government?

For me it is about the question you ask yourself as a policy maker. What is it that makes you believe, as a policy maker, that you are in touch with leading edge thinking from around the world on your subject, so that you are the person who has the right to advise a Cabinet Minister? And that question can be common to any type of policy making and any policy subject.

But the answer will be very, very different in different places. If you are working in the Department of Health on dementia policies, then the answer to that question has to involve thinking – 'do I really understand how people care for people who have dementia?' You then need to use more classic open policy making techniques like consultation, engagement and user-led design. In another area of policy, it might be about knowing all the leading academics in that subject and what they think. In another area, it might be I have excellent contacts with people on the frontline.

Open policy making is about encouraging a mindset in policy makers: 'I do not know all the answers and I will not get them – no matter how clever I am – by sitting at my desk and staring at information.' We're trying to encourage policy makers to recognise that the civil service has no monopoly on good ideas, good advice, data, etc. and should therefore be in a dialogue with the outside world. Then we can properly advise Ministers before they take final decisions.

BD: Why do you think it's come to the fore now?

Obviously there has been a ministerial drive. It's a core part of the Civil Service Reform Plan that is championed by Ministers. Another reason is the massive expansion in transparency around data and information. When I joined, the civil service was listened to because we had data and information that nobody else had. Now, many academics, think-tanks and research organisations can have the same information and if their ideas are better, then they'll also be listened to. There have also been genuine concerns about some civil service policy making, particularly how consistent it is.

But the best policy makers within and outside the civil service have always operated in the way that I'm describing – it's not a new phenomenon. I think the change is the expectation that every policy maker ought to meet the standards that the best have always reached.

BD: To put the cynical challenge, it's not to do with subcontracting policy because of resource constraints? It's about getting the best thinking?

Of course there are resource pressures – that's just a statement of fact. The civil service and departments need to be more efficient and more effective at policy making, as with

We're trying to encourage policy makers to recognise that the civil service has no monopoly on good ideas and should therefore be in a dialogue with the outside world.

everything they do. I don't see what you just said as a cynical view at all. I think it's probably fair that there is an added impetus because of financial constraints but I don't think that's the major driver. There are lots of excellent ideas outside government so I think we would want to have this focus anyway.

BD: Is there a tension between transparency and being allowed a safe space to give frank advice that civil servants and others might not want to be made public?

Yes, there clearly is a trade-off between absolute transparency and freedom of information and safe space. That's built into the Freedom of Information Act. But I think there's a difference between being transparent, particularly about the data and information that you use, and an individual civil servant's advice to a Minister.

You can be completely transparent on the former. If people have access to the same information as government and can come up with better ideas, then other people will win the argument. Saying that you want to be able to have private, safe space conversations about what you might conclude from that data is different. There is a trade-off but it's within quite limited areas – on the vast majority of things we can be transparent.

A lot of government policy is in areas which are not controversial and where no one knows the answer. So take again the example of dementia care. The Department of Health has been having a very open dialogue with the people who are actually experiencing the services because they have the answer. You don't need a safe space. What you need is an open dialogue with people who are actually using the services because everybody wants to improve them.

BD: There's quite an interesting contrast in our data between increasing in trust in civil servants and very stable and low trust in politicians. I was just wondering whether you've got a take on trust in the civil service and why we might be seeing those types of shifts?

I suspect that you and Ipsos MORI are better able to answer that question than I am! I can't comment on trust in politicians but I have seen some data that shows trust in civil servants is quite high. I am obviously pleased about that as a civil servant. The question for us is about how that plays out and how we build trust in an individual policy area.

I don't think it's something we should be at all complacent about, given the amount of policy which is implemented through people basically thinking that it's a good idea. We have traditionally underplayed the importance of trust to policy making. Actually, I would have that on my list of things that the civil service needs to work harder at.

BD: Do you think a more honest and collaborative approach, being very up front – in terms of both the positives and the negatives – would give people a better appreciation for the toughness of decisions that have to be made?

Yes, but I think it's very variable between different types of policy in different areas. There are any number of areas where government is making a yes/no decision based on reviewing the evidence, recognising that there will be people who agree and disagree with that decision. But eventually, we have to say

we've reviewed the best of the evidence and we've taken the decision we have.

There are quite a lot of areas, however, where actually no-one knows the answer and it's better for policy makers to be humble and clear that what is needed is dialogue, experimentation, conversation, different approaches being tried, randomised control trials, etc. At times policy makers have seen it as their role to always be clear about what the answer is. Deliberative and user-led design techniques where we explicitly say 'we don't know the answer yet but this is how we will be in dialogue with you to move towards an answer' – they are very, very powerful.

BD: How much of a role have wider changes played in the move to more open policy making?

I think there are three fundamental changes in the way the world is now that push you towards open policy making. One is transparency around data, as I've already mentioned.

Secondly, I think the digital revolution and the changes in the way that people access services change the relationship with public services. People rightly have an expectation that they will be able to access public services in the way that they access services in the private sector. There has been a complete revolution driven by Amazon, Google and all the tech companies. That clearly has a big impact and is a big opportunity in the public sector.

And the third one, and I've sort of hinted at it already, but we are in a situation where a lot of the issues for public policy are about how we impact on behaviour, whether that's public health or whether it's global warming or different challenges in education. The nature of these problems brings to the fore policy techniques like user-led design, like Nudge, like deliberative techniques, like collaborative policy making.

BD: In the civil service's own assessment, decision making can be 'slow-moving and focused on process rather than impact'. Why do you think is still the case?

Well I think this is a difficult challenge. The processes are very often about ensuring fairness in decision making and that is, of course, very important in public policy. But it's a very regular piece of feedback from Ministers and ex-Ministers that they want more pace.

There is a challenge that is built into my earlier question: how do you know you're at the leading edge of thinking? That pushes you towards yet more research and yet more evidence gathering. But in a lot of areas, it's very important that a decision is made and implemented. So I do think those things can sometimes be in tension. I don't think there's a silver bullet answer, other than to be constantly aware of the issue and challenging ourselves 'are we actually doing this at the right pace?'.

The final thing to say is that in a lot of areas the whole reason why there is a public policy debate at all is because there isn't an existing consensus about what should happen. And there are quite a lot of areas of policy where the aim is for a consensus to emerge, and that does take some time.

So for me, it is all about identifying right at the beginning – what sort of policy is this? Is this one where actually pace is the most important thing because there is a pressing need? In

There are a lot of areas where actually no one knows the answer and it's better for policy makers to be humble.

these cases, the fact that you haven't got every single last piece of research is less important than dealing with the issue. Or is this a policy where what you're aiming at is a consensus to emerge? If I took my own Department for Education, there is an infinite amount of research you can do, but when you're dealing with a service that every child only gets once, every delay means a child in a school never gets that week or that month or that year back again. You are therefore always trading off the desire to know more with the desire to have a quick impact.

BD: A final question to sum things up. What does all of this mean for the role of policy makers in the future?

My colleague Ian Dodge at the Department of Health speaks about this a lot. The role of the civil service policy maker is very frequently to be the 'holder of the ring' of policy making. You see your job as being the person who can bring together all the public opinion information, all the external research, all the information from users of the service, all the international examples, bring together all that evidence and world expertise, and synthesising it into something that is understandable. You are then the person who can draw some conclusions and make some propositions coming from all the expertise and evidence in a way that a Minister or somebody can then take a series of decisions.

So it makes the role of a civil servant not, 'I will be the personal expert who sits in a dark room and has great thoughts', but 'I am the person who is best placed to bring together all the stuff that open policy making generates and then turn it into something from which actual decisions can be made'. And I think that's quite a good description of the role of civil servants in the open policy making process.

Deliberative and user-led design techniques where we explicitly say 'we don't know the answer yet but this is how we will be in dialogue with you to move towards an answer' – they are very, very powerful.

The end of the policy rabbit?

The challenges of open policy making in practice

Jill Rutter

The civil service is now committed to making 'open policy making the default'. We know this because it appears in the 2012 Civil Service Reform Plan,[11] is being actively promoted by the Cabinet Office and is even the subject of a series of videos by the Cabinet Secretary.[12] So, after two years, it's worth asking a few questions about what 'open policy making' is turning out to mean in practice.

'The open policy maker'

A recently released progress report describes the attributes of a new beast – the open policy maker – a deliberate contrast to the stereotyped deskbound policy maker dreaming up clever thoughts in a vacuum.[13] The open policy maker is 'curious, networked and collaborative and digitally engaged' – and demonstrates those new qualities by 'broadening the range of people and quality of engagement', 'using the latest analytical techniques and knowledge' and 'taking an agile, more iterative approach to implementation'.

These are all potential routes to improving policy making, particularly when the policy maker is trying to achieve results to complex problems with multiple actors where a top down command and control system is unlikely to produce the right results. Institute for Government work on policy implementation shows the advantages of proper engagement with the people who need to make a policy work – for example with the employers and payroll

It would be difficult to justify making policy while ignoring the latest analytical techniques and knowledge.

Figure FIVE.

software providers who were being asked to implement the new automatic enrolment system for pensions. It also highlights the advantage of learning by doing, as demonstrated in the London Challenge, a schools improvement programme where the advisers working with schools had licence to try what they thought would work and succeed (or fail) quickly. Equally it would be difficult to justify making policy while ignoring the latest analytical techniques and knowledge, assuming they both improved the quality of the final decision. But these steps alone would not meet public expectation of what openness might mean.

So what is new?

If part one is changing the policy maker, part two needs to look at opening up the process. Although openness is the new mantra, some of the best examples of open policy making in practice came under the last government: the Turner Commission on pension reform[14] and Tony Blair's Social Exclusion Unit.[15] The former went global to establish its evidence base – and then opened it up to scrutiny and challenge. The latter pioneered talking to what are now called service users – for example taking the then radical step of talking to pregnant teens about teenage pregnancy.

But now there are three innovations – the Contestable Policy Fund,[16] the Policy Lab[17] and the What Works initiative.[18] The first allows Ministers to commission advice from outsiders – but so far funded projects look very similar to those which would have been previously funded from departmental research budgets.

The most embryonic is the Policy Lab – aimed at bringing design approaches and more user insight into policy making. It is based on the Danish MINDLab – and like MINDLab is at the (important, but less politically salient) 'making things work' end of policy making. It has been given a year to prove the concept. Watch this space.

By far the most interesting is the What Works initiative. Building on the success of NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence), the establishment of a network of What Works Centres looking at issues from educational disadvantage to policing to ageing, could be the start of a major ratchet up in the generation and use of evidence about effective policy and good use of public resources. The test will be whether and how it starts to influence the next spending round. However, a lot of big issues – like major structural reforms to public services – are out of scope for any What Works Centre.

So the innovations thus far are interesting, potentially useful but far from turning policy making upside down – or more crucially inside out.

Open Ministers?

Open policy making has ministerial support from Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude. But it is not clear that the 'open' mindset is yet embraced by many of his colleagues when it comes to the issues that are important to them.

Take one example. The Turner Commission was an independent commission which consulted widely on its evidence base and involved both employer and employee groups in the development of its thinking. It then spent time creating cross-party support which led to the introduction of automatic enrolment (currently being rolled out) and a plan to raise the state pension age.

But this year has seen new pensions initiative after new pensions initiative: the budget changes on annuities and then further changes to the treatment of retirement savings announced in the Chancellor's party conference speech. Of course, these are important issues, with hard to predict but very significant consequences for tax revenues, future pensions, and savings options for people and for the industry. Yet they were all sprung as headline grabbing surprises. In the run-up to the election we will see more (much more) of the same.

That is the problem with making open policy the 'default' on big issues. It requires politicians to give up the short-term political advantage of the policy rabbit. There may even be votes in such abstinence – polling for the Institute for Government's Programme for Effective Government showed 43% of the public thought politicians prioritised making big announcements in the media – but only 4% wanted them to do that.[19] Voters said they wanted politicians who fulfilled their promises, got best value for taxpayers and took decisions about long-term direction.

Genuinely open policy making – on important issues – could help. But that will probably require a ministerial reform plan to sit alongside the civil service reform already underway.

The innovations thus far are interesting and potentially useful but far from turning policy making upside down – or more crucially inside out.

Re-balancing the state in favour of the citizen

Lord Ashdown offers a political perspective on the bigger picture and what needs to change

I have a radical thought and it is the following: the days of the classic nation state are over. We have to find a new balance between the power of the citizen and the power of the state. Hidden behind the economic crisis – the protests in Spain, France, Greece and all over the world – is a crisis that is ultimately more dangerous. It is the crisis of democracy itself.

The problem can best be expressed like this. We know what must be done to solve this economic crisis. But we do not know how to get the support of our people to do what must be done.

Everywhere in the world, the centre ground is in retreat and the demagogues are on the march. You can see it in Greece, France and Holland. You can see it in the electoral gains made by UKIP in Britain. We are suffering from two simultaneous crises. One economic and one of confidence in our political system and above all in our political elites.

We need only to go back less than one hundred years to find another age dominated by the same ingredients and we do not need to be reminded what it led to. Whilst it is both tempting and justifiable to blame those who run the establishment – the politicians, the media and the bankers – it is not sufficient. Even if all the above behaved like paragons, we would still have a dangerously dysfunctional political system.

The classic Bagehot and Dicey nation state – the systemic model for our politics and government – is breaking down. It has become dysfunctional, out of date and no longer fit for purpose. It is indeed being torn apart before our eyes by two opposing forces.

One is the gathering of power which now lies in the global space, beyond the borders of the nation state; powers strong enough to affect the lives of citizens, alter the course of governments and make a mockery of electoral promises. But in this article, I will focus on the second force that is tearing at the current fabric of the state from the opposite direction – from below.

The crisis of trust in politics will not be solved by tinkering at the top and making the establishment behave better.

Let's consider the way ordinary citizens live their lives today. They are individually empowered. Individually able to shape their choices without intervention of officials, able to adopt what pastimes or practices they wish, and choose their acquaintances without constraints of geography and locality. They are empowered by daily choice in the market, but disempowered in the political system which gives them a false choice every four or five years and then ignores them in between.

Consider this disjuncture between the way ordinary people in advanced democracies live and the way they are governed. The market is in touch, listens and is attentive to their needs. But their government is a distant institution most of them know almost nothing about. It explains its decisions in language they do not understand; it is ignorant of – or worse actively ignores – their views; it is out of touch, and seems to care chiefly for itself. In the day to day business of living – in the market, on the internet, in private life – the citizen is powerful. But in the day to day business of our politics they are more and more powerless.

This gulf is now so structurally deep that it cannot be bridged by little things like reforming Members' Expenses, improving government communication, simplifying voting, stopping bankers from being greedy or journalists from being irresponsible. All these are necessary but not sufficient.

The crisis of trust in politics will not be solved by tinkering at the top and making the establishment behave better. It can only be resolved by re-connecting the citizen with power. If we are to make our democracy work again, there has to be a substantial re-distribution of the powers of the nation state.

The fault lies almost always with lack of transparency, bad leadership and rotten structures.

Pooling sovereignty with others on the international level is necessary to deliver what we want for our citizens. But we must go further and pass power downwards to create intermediary institutions between the citizen and the state; which brings power closer to the citizen, gives them a stake in the governance of their lives, provides them with closer contact, more involvement and greater control.

This is not about shrinking the state as many in the Conservative Party would wish. It is about re-balancing the state in favour of the individual. That is one of the crucial differences between us. This is, of course, not a new Liberal idea; it's an old one. But it's now more relevant than ever – more necessary than ever.

Why should our national government interfere so much in our personal lives? Surely, it should be looking after things that are genuinely national – our defence, our foreign affairs, our macro-economic policies, our national planning and transport policies. If Westminster did far less, it would do it far better.

The truth of the matter is that the great black hole of Westminster has sucked into itself so much of the power that ought to lie elsewhere, that it has made itself dysfunctional. It simply cannot efficiently manage the power it has accrued for itself. Which is one of the reasons why it makes more mistakes and is trusted less and less by those it serves.

So, when it comes to those services which touch on the lives of ordinary citizens – health, education, welfare, social services – why should these not be delivered within a national framework of universal entitlements and by institutions much closer to the citizens?

The Great Reform Act of 1832 is credited with saving Britain from the revolutions which soaked Europe in blood in 1848. Perhaps the time has come for another Great Reform Act – one that doesn't merely shuffle the papers of local democracy and localism, but actually hands down power.

The problem with the Government's localism agenda is that it merely shifts power from Whitehall to the Town Hall – we will never regenerate our democracy by simply transferring power from one bureaucracy, to another. Local government will have to recognise that it is only one of the local structures through which the citizen has engagement and control.

We must think about creating a much wider network of systems of the sort which you can find in Switzerland and the United States, which put citizen's choice back in charge of the services they depend on, such as health and education. If this leads to differences in delivery between one area and another, so what? You cannot believe in local determination and object to people choosing to be different.

The argument over private and public ownership of services is a good example of re-distribution of power. Over the last forty years or so, ordinary citizens have been ripped off, abused and exploited by bad public institutions, as much if not more so than exploitative private ones. The fault lies almost always with lack of transparency, bad leadership and rotten structures rather than the public ownership versus private ownership argument. The key question is not, as we like to think, public or private. It is how is the citizen and the public interest best served. That can be determined by asking three questions:

1. Is the process completely transparent for all to see - from the drawing up of the contract to the delivery of the service?
2. Does the citizen have choice, or is it a monopoly?
3. How is quality measured?

Surely, if we are in favour of a mixed economy, we should also be in favour of a mixed system of public service delivery too. The more mixed the better. This means more imagination, brave experimentation and an eye for implementing best practice.

Whilst more forward looking commercial institutions are taking the ideas of openness and public deliberation seriously, why do so very few public ones? Why are we killing off, for instance, alternative ownership and control structures based on mutualism, when we should be promoting them?

I believe we are facing a most dangerous conjunction. An economic crisis against a background of a frightening collapse of trust in politics, government and maybe even in democracy itself. Tinkering at the edges putting our house in order and improving behaviour at the top will not solve this.

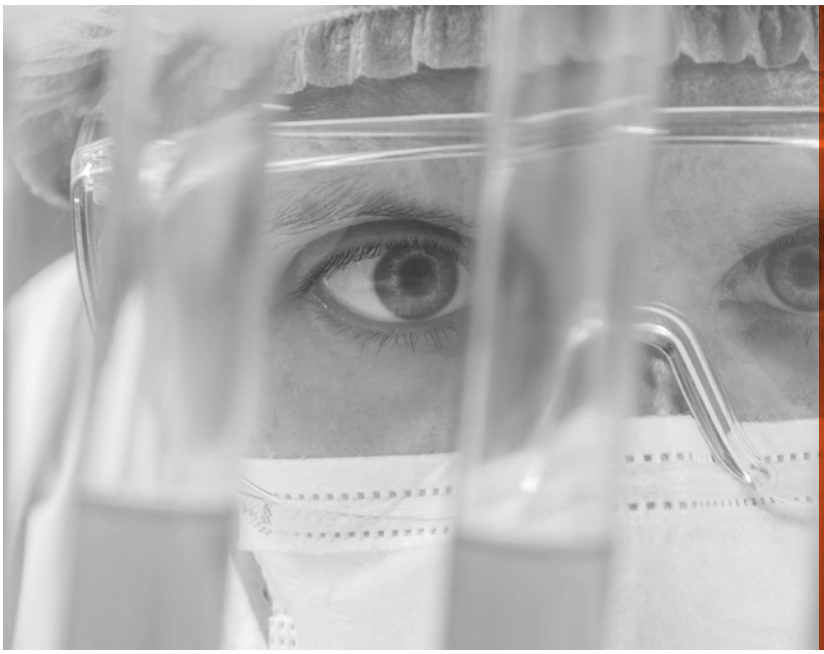
If we won't find the courage to give the citizen more stake in the decisions which affect their lives, there may be worse ahead.

Public policy: open to experiment

Is the public ready for more experimental methods to test policy?


Prateek Buch


Jayesh Navin Shah



Policy makers will be far likelier to use robust policy experiments when they feel greater expectation from the public to do so.

Let's start with a survey question. Suppose you want to test a drug designed to treat high blood pressure. Which of the following ways do you think scientists are most likely to use to test the drug's effectiveness?

a) using their knowledge of medicine to decide how good the drug is

b) talking to the patients that have used the drug to get their opinion

c) giving the drug to some patients but not to others, then comparing the results for each group

In the 2012 Wellcome Trust Monitor survey, two-thirds (67%) of the public chose option C, which describes the 'controlled trial' approach, as shown in Figure 6.[20] In medicine, the expectation that we use randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to find out what works is a well-established social and cultural norm.

Beyond medical research, the Behavioural Insights Team describes RCTs as the best way of determining whether a policy works.[21] They enable policymakers to establish a clean, causal link between a policy intervention and successful outcomes. The newly-established What Works Centres will also emphasise the importance of using robust evidence to shape policy making.[22]

So why is the use of RCTs and other experimental methods still relatively rare in areas such as crime, education and welfare policy? The Behavioural Insights Team and others have focused on changing the culture within government towards conducting RCTs, but little is known about the public's perceptions of this approach.

This is important – the public, after all, need to be consenting research participants in order for trials to proceed. Furthermore, policy makers will be far more likely to use robust policy experiments when they feel greater expectation from the public to do so. Recognising this, the charity Sense about Science has launched two campaigns, *Ask for Evidence*[23] and *Evidence Matters*,[24] which aim to get the public to hold policy makers to account for their use of evidence in public policy.

This is not straightforward. Ipsos MORI's research points to three challenges for engaging the public with RCTs and other experimental approaches.

Skin-deep understanding?

Firstly, public understanding of RCTs and experiments tends to be low. When people were asked to explain why they chose the controlled trial approach, very few were able to articulate their reasons convincingly. Two in ten (21%) mentioned 'the placebo effect' and just eight per cent mentioned 'control groups'.[25]

A 'trial', as perceived in the public imagination, can be quite far removed from the reality. Ipsos MORI's 2013 public dialogue work on the research approvals process for the Health Research Authority (HRA) also showed participants as thinking they had participated in 'a trial', when in actual fact their doctor had just put them on a medication and waited to see what effect this had. Participants were also often surprised that the RCT approach was used beyond trialling drugs, for testing other therapies and surgical techniques.[26]

More generally, many people have simplistic notions of how research is done, and what constitutes good or poor evidence. For example, in Ipsos MORI's Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) 2014 study for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, a third (35%) of the public thought that scientists adjust their findings to get the answers they want, and another one in three (31%) were undecided or neutral about this.[27]

The value of social research

A second challenge is public understanding of and attitudes towards social research. Ipsos MORI's Dialogue on Data, conducted in 2013 on behalf of the Economic and Social Research Council and the Office for National Statistics, highlighted the key reasons why participants often attached a low value to social (i.e. not medical or hard science) research. There was widespread perception that some of the social research projects presented to them did not have clear, well-defined benefits. In some cases, they felt the findings were stating the obvious, or rehashing what was already known.[28]

These attitudes will have implications for public attitudes towards RCTs and other experiments in policy research. Why should people support experimentation if the purpose of the research is unclear or if the results seem predictable?

Public acceptability

Finally, the public may be less accepting of experimentation in some areas than in others. In Ipsos MORI's 2011 poll for the Association of Medical Research Charities seven in ten said they would either definitely (35%) or probably (37%) like to be told about opportunities to participate in trials of new medicines or treatments for a health condition that affected their daily life.[29] But this willingness to participate may not be matched in other policy areas, and more research is needed on this specifically.

Furthermore, while people may accept RCTs and other experiments involving the general public, they may be less comfortable with trials taking place with vulnerable groups, such as children, older people or disabled people. In the HRA research, participants were generally surprised and sometimes concerned to hear that trials could be conducted among children.

Getting it right

Advocates of policy experiments need to clearly communicate how and why RCTs and other robust ways of testing policy can work beyond medical research. They need to popularise what are currently academic discussions, making the benefits clearer to the public. Only then is public demand for experimental approaches likely to increase.

While this is undoubtedly challenging, it is important not to underestimate the power the public can have over policy makers. Strong support for greater use of experiments in non-traditional areas of public policy could help to significantly speed up culture change among policy makers.

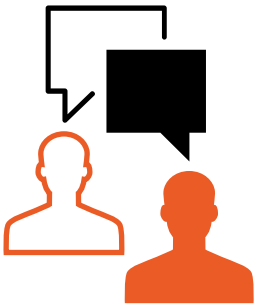
This is an exciting time for evidence-based policy, with a plethora of organisations and initiatives working to improve the quality of evidence used by those responsible for developing and implementing policy across government. Policy makers could be on the cusp of a revolution akin to that seen in medicine over four decades ago – but only if the public are on board and ready for change.

Advocates of policy experiments need to clearly communicate how and why RCTs and other robust ways of testing policy can work beyond medical research.

Figure SIX.

Q: Suppose a drug used to treat high blood pressure is suspected of having no effect. Which one of these ways do you think scientists would be likely to use to investigate this problem?

67% Give the drug to some patients, but not to others, then compare the results for each group

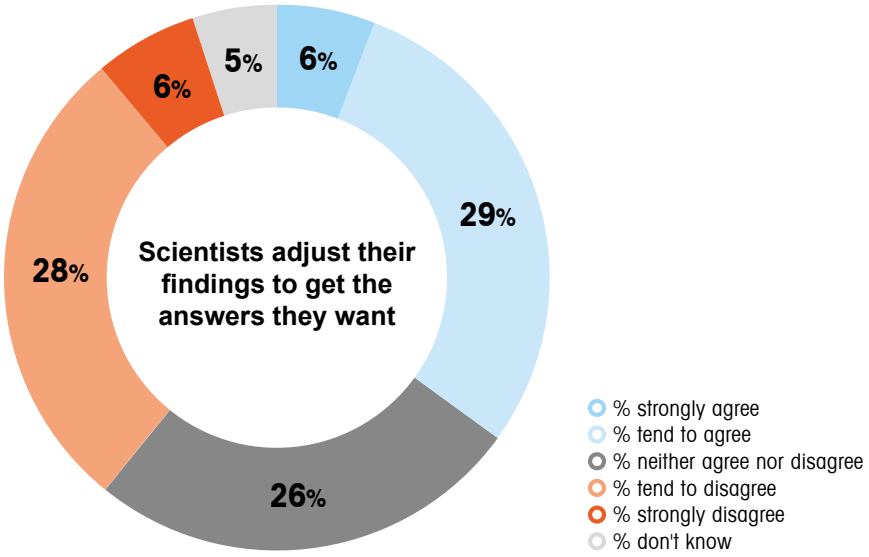


16% Talk to those patients that have used the drug to get their opinion

11% Use their knowledge of medicine to decide how good the drug is

Figure SEVEN.

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



Room for improvement

How the review of the NHS Friends and Family Test shows what matters to the public and the frontline

Paul Carroll

When a high profile new policy is introduced it may not work as intended straight away. This is especially the case if the context is challenging: for example, if the staff responsible for implementation have other important priorities to manage.

Ipsos MORI recently reviewed the NHS Friends and Family Test (FFT) for NHS England. The FFT asks people if they would recommend the NHS services they have used. When combined with a number of follow-up questions, the FFT provides one way to understand patient experience.[30]

The NHS is a hugely complex and varied organisation – but also one where effective policy making is crucial. By opening up the process to wider influences, the review helped policy makers find out what really matters to frontline staff and patients. In turn, this has the potential to improve the effectiveness of the FFT as it is rolled out across a wider range of NHS services.

What matters to the public?

People do not want purely transactional interactions with many of the public services they use.[31] This is especially true for what many feel is the most important public service – the NHS. They want something more collaborative, where there is a meaningful two-way relationship between those providing NHS services and those using them.[32]

We know this because people's perceptions of NHS care are not just influenced by clinical outcomes. Being treated with dignity and respect has long been shown to be important to patients.[33] In fact, the data we collect for the Department of Health suggests that people are increasingly likely to agree that they are being treated with dignity and respect when they use NHS services.[34]

A key component of being treated with dignity and respect is being listened to. As such, there is an increasing drive to put the patient's voice at the centre of policy and decision making in the NHS.[35] The public are fairly evenly split about whether or not giving feedback is easy (41% agree it is easy to do so, with 46% disagreeing). Developing mechanisms to collect patient feedback systematically and thoroughly is therefore a priority for policy makers, although doing so in practice is challenging in times of austerity and pressurised budgets.

Being treated with dignity and respect has long been shown to be important to patients.

Figure EIGHT.

Q: Please tell me whether on the whole you agree or disagree with each of the following statements…people are treated with dignity and respect when they use NHS services?

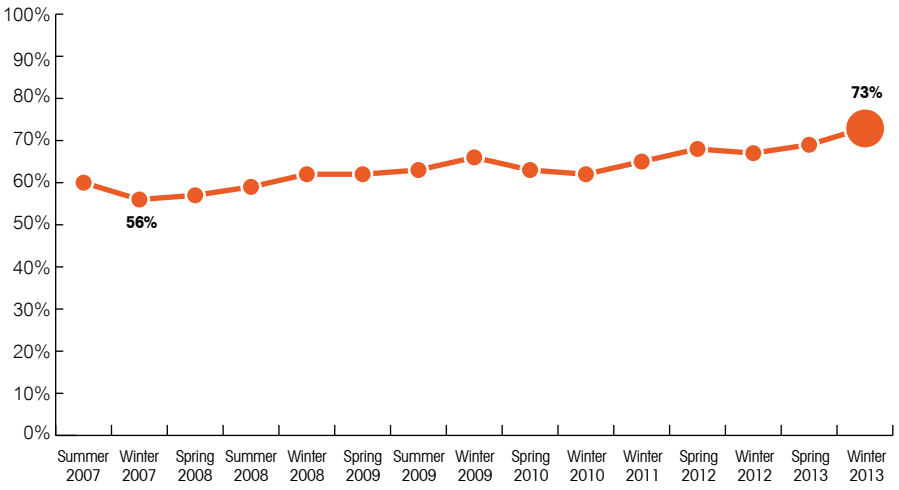
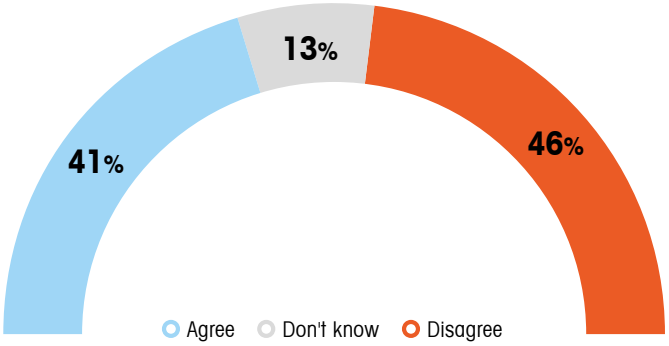


Figure NINE.

Q: Please tell me whether on the whole you agree or disagree with each of the following statements…it is easy for people to feed back on the service they receive from the NHS?



The Friends and Family Test

I am determined to give patients a far greater voice within the NHS as a way of highlighting the best and worst of care within our hospitals… With the Friends and Family Test, we now have a single measure that looks at the quality of care across the country.[36]

David Cameron, July 2013

With these words, the Prime Minister welcomed the first published data from the FFT. The FFT has a far-reaching aim: to encourage service improvement and greater transparency around quality of services by collecting feedback from all patients in all NHS trusts in England.

Given the public's desire to be listened to and have a say about the care they receive, the FFT instinctively appeals as a good idea. However, it was clear from the outset that more work was needed to make sure the policy would work in different NHS settings. There was also some scepticism about the value of the FFT among NHS staff. Taking this into account, NHS England recognised the need to review early implementation of the FFT by engaging the people most affected by it.

Any review of a novel policy like the FFT requires a carefully thought through exploratory approach. Ipsos MORI selected nine case study trusts, to reflect a range of criteria including organisation size, region, FFT approach, levels of response and the scores themselves.

While familiar qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews and discussion groups with staff and patients, were cornerstones of our review, more was required. On-site observation revealed actual behaviours in situ. A discursive, generative and observational environment allowed us to tease out the attitudes and behaviours around this relatively new policy. Trusts themselves were as interested in findings and ideas from elsewhere as they were in how well things worked in their own organisation.[37]

For example, the review identified a simple way the FFT can help drive improvement on the ground. NHS staff can pick up a completed FFT postcard at the end of their shift. This allows them to see a patient comment that might praise the care they have received or point out a problem that needs to be dealt with immediately. An interaction like this can provide near real-time feedback on how patients perceive their care.

It was also clear that frontline staff found the scoring system confusing and difficult to explain to patients, who themselves paid little attention to the scores displayed on Trust wards. Rather, patients and frontline staff alike paid much more attention to the verbatim feedback typically included as part of the FFT question.

Through highlighting simple but effective uses of the FFT, the review has helped establish what the policy can best achieve. A powerful case for change can be constructed by consulting widely on a policy like this – across senior and frontline staff, patients, key stakeholders and the wider public. By engaging so many of those affected by the policy and understanding their behaviour in real settings, qualitative research can help improve policy quickly and cheaply. This shows what matters to the public and staff, but also generates insights that help shape policy design and implementation.

An interaction like this can provide near real-time feedback on how patients perceive their care.

The Open Policy Making unit at the Cabinet Office are using a range of approaches to open up policy making, both in Britain and internationally. Below are two case studies that they are currently running.

Case study 1: Northern Futures

Northern Futures seeks to stimulate growth in the North of England.

Maria Nyberg

There is a perception that policy about the North is created in isolation in Whitehall. So the Deputy Prime Minister's office wanted to make sure that people who lived in the North were central to creating a radical new economic strategy for their region.

Northern Futures was an initiative launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in July 2014. It raised the question: 'How do we build on the strengths in the North to create an economic core in the heart of the region that can compete with the biggest cities in the world?'

Public engagement started with the Nick Clegg debating with 300 people in town hall sessions and a series of roundtables. But the Deputy Prime Minister's office also wanted to try out innovative ways of crowdsourcing ideas.

They began by using social media and a crowdsourcing site[38] to allow people to submit and rate ideas. The team also wanted to reach out to more people in the North who were not 'the usual suspects' consulted by government. So the Open Policy Making team (OPM team) in the Cabinet Office used social media analysis tools to reach out to different areas and groups and invite them to take part.

The OPM team also ran eight 'Open Ideas Days'[39] simultaneously in cities across the North. They used design tools to encourage designers, small businesses and the local community to generate creative ideas about the future of the North. Approximately 190 people attended and the days were heavily over-subscribed. To make the process more open, the events were live tweeted and videos of the ideas were uploaded onto YouTube[40] so those who couldn't attend could take part virtually.

During the whole process, over 500 ideas were submitted via the website, email and Twitter. The challenge for the Deputy Prime Minister's team was to synthesise these ideas and ensure people felt their contribution had been taken into account. The ideas were identified to fall into nine broad themes. Pitches on these themes were selected for a Northern Futures summit[41] in Leeds and a communiqué[42] was released to show the public how their ideas had been analysed.

The summit brought together council leaders, businesses and young people to debate and vote on the ideas for the future of the North. People at home could watch the summit on livestream and also vote for their favourite ideas on the website. The summit and the process were very popular with participants saying they felt their views had been listened to and it received extensive national media coverage.

In response to the ideas gathered, the DPM has announced new policies on improved train links in the North and increased investment in tourism. The next challenge will be to see if more of the ideas from the process can be translated into policy for the Autumn Statement or the next Parliament. But a key benefit has already been the experience gained by trialing new, more innovative ways of reaching diverse audiences and how creative methods can be used to inform a complex debate.

Lessons learned:

- Don't build it and expect people will come. Crowdsourcing requires extensive engagement with the public to persuade them to take part.
- Involving policy makers in creative ideas events is likely to produce more focused ideas, although care needs to be taken that they don't close down possibilities.
- Use a hashtag rather than just a Twitter handle to encourage debate and participation.
- Use multiple channels as people will engage more if they can use the channels they are comfortable with – eg Twitter, email etc.
- Keep people informed about how their ideas will be used and final outcomes
- Crowdsourcing can be resource and time intensive. Making sure you already have a good network of engaged stakeholders can make it easier.

How do we build on the strengths in the North to create an economic core in the heart of the region that can compete with the biggest cities in the world?

Case study 2: Amplify

How a collaborative and flexible approach can aid international policy.

Jonathan Wong

The Innovation Hub in the Policy Division of the Department for International Development (DfID) is a small team which looks at ways we could do what we do better. We set ourselves the challenge of making both our funding and our programmes more open, collaborative and flexible.

We did this in response to what we'd heard from teams in DfID about what needed to change. Staff across the organisation told us that our partners tend to come from a small pool of organisations. The burdens of writing funding applications favour larger organisations with established resources and know-how. We can be overly-rigid in the way we work and have few mechanisms that allow our partners to collaborate. If we set up a challenge fund, we're inherently calling on partners to make closed, competitive bids for a single pot of funding – competition can produce great results, but not in every circumstance, and this process offers no rewards for working together or learning from each other.

So what did we do? In order to really be open we knew we had to bring in new partners and new voices. We wanted a programme that would be able to respond to the needs of the user and be flexible and responsive to feedback, and one that could reward openness and collaboration.

We worked with our partners IDEO.org[43] to design a new programme, called Amplify. Amplify is a five-year project, set to tackle 10 poverty-related challenges. It does this by setting a poverty-related question to IDEO.org's online community – openIDEO.com. It's a community of over 50,000 users that works through a four-stage design process,[44] tackling the question in phases, from research, through to an open call for ideas, into shortlisting and refinement, and finally evaluation and funding.

OpenIDEO provides a platform where people with good ideas for tackling poverty can talk to each other, collaborate and use human-centred design to create development programmes in collaboration with poor communities, building projects which are constructed around their behaviour. The ultimate vision for Amplify is an online design process that will be shaped and challenged by users who can test and prototype the strongest emerging ideas.

Each challenge begins with research. The Amplify team conduct a scoping visit to sketch out opportunities for innovation. On openIDEO.com, we ask users for their knowledge of success stories, insights, studies and notable failures in this space. For our first challenge, 'how might we make low-income urban areas safer and more empowering for women and girls' we received 771 research contributions in a matter of weeks, illuminating examples of good practice, providing interviews and making surprising analogous connections.[45] By comparison, if DfID wants to learn about an area of work, stocktakes of existing projects can take months. Simply understanding what is already happening in a specific area of development is surprisingly tough, and while the research phase only provides a snapshot, its insights and breadth were robust and valuable.

The second stage is an open call for ideas on the site, during which users can team up and build on each other's submissions. The current challenge on early childhood development is in the Ideas stage right now.[46] In the third stage, the Amplify team take a shortlist of the strongest ideas and refine a prototype on

the ground, using feedback from small communities of users.

For the first challenge, we gathered the views of user communities in Delhi, who often don't have online access. Members of the Amplify team set up an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) number in partnership with two popular radio stations in Delhi. Radio listeners are told about the project in short programmes and encouraged to phone in. Their call was then transcribed online.

For the second challenge, the team expanded this work to feature spots on community radio in Tanzania. This work remains in the early stages, but our hope is that eventually the programme will link up communities of people who really experience and understand the problem with a wider online community. Together, these groups can design innovative solutions.

Finally, the strongest ideas to emerge from this process receive funding from DfID (from a $500,000 fund) and 14 weeks of design support from IDEO.org. Through a process of prototyping, sifting and refining, 575 ideas from varied backgrounds were shortlisted down to five. Proposals included a collaboration between design students at New York University and a small Nepali NGO and a childcare social enterprise run by a group from Nairobi.

We don't know where the programme is heading yet. Working with new people carries risks – some of our proposers don't have a lot of experience running projects. The structured programme of prototyping and refining means that we marry experience and design solutions to the best ideas.

Despite the complications involved, Amplify has acted to cast a wider net to draw in interested parties with different skills and expertise, always committed to tackling poverty in a new and engaged way.

Lessons Learned:

- Openness takes work – people won't offer their ideas automatically just because you've made it possible. The Amplify team has been tenacious and direct about reaching out to contacts to participate.
- People are nervous of the internet – especially civil servants! Making a process open means people often feel their ideas are subject to scrutiny, but when they receive positive feedback, they respond with enthusiasm. You need resources for this. OpenIDEO.com has a dedicated community manager and a number of volunteers who help encourage people.
- Getting online and offline communities to talk to each other is tough – but not impossible. Whether it's uploading and summarising insights from interviews and workshops with users – so members of openIDEO know, for example, that smartphone apps are not a great solution for most of the urban poor – or using SMS or IVR to bring offline groups into the conversation, the Amplify team have bridged the communication gap.
- Online collaboration can help you overcome logistical problems – like translation. The Amplify team is working on a volunteer translation project which uses OpenIDEO's large diaspora community to help translate posts from users who do not speak English.

To find out more about Challenge One and Challenge Two visit our website at openideo.com/content/about-amplify

Despite the complications involved, Amplify has cast a wider net to draw in different skills and expertise, always committed to tackling poverty in a new and engaged way.

Something in the air

Radioactive waste management will be the challenge of the next decade. How will the public engage?

Ed Langley

Much of the UK's energy infrastructure is approaching its expiry date. Commentary and debate has focused on how we keep the lights on, setting out the various arguments for renewables, nuclear and fracking.[47] While there is little consensus about the way forward, there is no doubt that this is one of the major policy challenges for government over the next decade and beyond. But there is an important aspect of energy policy which has received relatively little coverage – the management of our energy legacy, and more specifically what to do with radioactive waste.[48]

Radioactive waste is currently stored in secure facilities across the country while we seek out a long-term solution. Since 2006 the UK Government has been committed to storing this waste in a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) – where radioactive waste is packaged and disposed of in a deep underground facility, with the geology forming an additional barrier against any leakage. The original process put in place to find a site for a GDF was derailed when Cumbria County Council and two of the district councils in Cumbria reached a stalemate.[49]

In January 2013, the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) had to go back to the drawing board. They invited comments on how to take the siting process forward, before publishing a consultation paper in September 2013.[50] While DECC anticipated various interest groups would respond to the consultation they were keen to open up the policy making process further, to ensure they had the public's perspective on these important issues.

Public views on big infrastructure projects

Our recent work for the CBI to understand public perceptions of big infrastructure projects highlights some of the challenges for developing the policy around storing nuclear waste.[51] It is certainly the case that this kind of infrastructure is seen as important by the public, both in the context of their local communities and the wider economy.

However, people are broadly content with the infrastructure that they experience, especially at a local level – they do not believe that 'the lights will go out' any time soon. They remain unconvinced by the current arguments in support of developing UK infrastructure. In particular, there is more concern about short-term disruption and downsides for local communities as a result of infrastructure projects than there is about the potential long-term consequences of not investing further.

The dialogue included conversations about how best to engage affected communities, as well as gathering views about who should make the decisions.

How did we approach these challenges?

DECC worked in partnership with Sciencewise to commission a public and stakeholder dialogue to run in parallel with the consultation. Ipsos MORI led the public dialogue, engaging over 60 participants in Bridgwater, London, Nottingham and Penrith. The dialogue involved informing participants about the challenge, enabling them to do their own research, and providing them with the opportunity to engage directly with policy makers, regulators and scientists.

One of the challenges for the dialogue was the focus on public perspectives of the siting process – a complex and technical topic. This meant the dialogue included conversations about how best to engage affected communities, as well as gathering views about who should make the decisions and how these should be communicated. In order to get to this point, there had to be sufficient time and space to inform participants about the challenges around dealing with radioactive waste, as well as considering what the alternatives might be to a GDF.

> Everyone is ignorant of it so they need time to learn to absorb it. It's important to have the information up front and so they can decide their views.

> The issue is our community as a country; it should be discussed as a country.

This dialogue was largely successful in engaging the public around an unfamiliar and relatively complicated issue. In an independent evaluation of the dialogue process, most participants (63%) said they were confident that DECC would take account of their views while a minority (11%) were not.

Following the publication of the dialogue report,[52] Ipsos MORI represented the 'public voice' at a workshop where DECC tested some of their proposals for the revised siting process. The DECC team commented on how valuable it was for them to attend the workshops and hear the public's views first hand, as well as receiving the synthesised report.

While the public did not necessarily come to a consensus on the best approach for the siting process there were a number of key principles that underpinned their responses and cut across the discussions:

- Awareness and education – workshop participants felt they initially knew very little (if anything) about radioactive waste and the agreed policy for managing it. They felt that if communities were to volunteer to host a facility then the wider public needed to understand the challenges of managing our radioactive waste, and what the impact of a GDF might be for a community.
- Transparency and openness – participants felt that it was important that government was open and transparent about the need for a GDF, including what the potential risks could be from implementing it (or not). They wanted the siting process to be run in a similar way.
- Local – in all the discussions participants referred back to the importance of ensuring the views of the 'local community' and 'local people' were heard.

Even contentious and difficult challenges can benefit from genuine, early public involvement.

- Fairness – the participants frequently spoke of fairness and for most this meant ensuring that the process represented and involved everybody in the community (whatever their perspective). Fairness also meant that any information on the siting process needed to be balanced.
- Efficiency – there was a clear call from participants for the process to be run as efficiently as possible. They were keen to find efficiencies which could lead to cost savings. In particular this principle underpinned responses around the calls for screening and targeting resources on specific communities (if possible) as well as queries around the timeline.

By opening up the policy to public scrutiny early in the process, the findings helped influence the subsequent white paper in at least two specific ways:

- Firstly, it reaffirmed in DECC's mind the need to raise awareness of the issue of managing radioactive waste more widely across the public and local authorities.
- Secondly, the public called for the government and its agencies to do more to help identify potential locations or areas of the country which could be more or less suitable. This message is reflected in the revised plans for a national geological screening process, which DECC feel will help build public understanding of GDF development and confidence in the siting process.

This project demonstrates that this kind of public dialogue is one helpful tool to improve and open up policy making, even on technical topics. Of course, public views are not the only consideration for policy makers. But even contentious and difficult challenges can benefit from genuine, early public involvement – giving both the public and policy makers confidence that they are on the right track.

Influencing policy through evaluation

How evidence and assessment is used to drive solutions to policy problems

Kelly Beaver

Evaluations are undertaken by governments and agencies for many reasons: they are, of course, important for government accountability and for learning about what works and why. But they are not just cold, after-the-fact assessments of impact. Often evaluations are most useful when they provide evidence to policy makers which they can use to drive change and improve how they tackle policy problems in real time.

In March 2012 Ipsos MORI was commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy[53] ('the Strategy'). The proportion of children living in poverty is higher in Wales than in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. Eradicating child poverty by 2020 is a key priority for the Welsh Government. The recession has further compounded this challenge. In tough economic conditions, key indicators such as the proportion of children living in workless households have been heading in the wrong direction.[54] The Strategy has been in place in some form since 2005, and was reinvigorated in 2011 with a new statutory duty on local authorities to develop their own Child Poverty Action Plans.[55] The Welsh Government also developed its Tackling Poverty Action Plan in 2012.[56]

The evaluation focused on assessing whether steps taken by the Welsh Government under the Strategy (including the statutory duty on local authorities) had any impact on child poverty in Wales. It also explored whether there was any impact associated with having this kind of strategy in place. The Welsh Government planned to publish this assessment of progress to a wide audience including policy teams delivering under the Strategy and local authority partners. It was clear from the outset that there was an appetite for this evaluation to be a clear 'marker in the sand' for all government agencies responsible for delivering the objective to eradicate child poverty.

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The Strategy itself encompassed more than 30 policies and initiatives intended to help prevent poverty, support people out of poverty, or to mitigate the negative impact of poverty in the short term. This included flagship Welsh Government programmes such as Communities First, Flying Start, the Economic Renewal Strategy, and the Want2Work programme.

So what did the evaluation find? And how useful was it for policy makers?

Evidence from the evaluation suggested the Welsh Government's approach is likely to make an important contribution to tackling poverty.[57] However, this is likely to be in the longer term. One of the main conclusions was that the evaluation evidence for outcomes from child poverty-focused programming was lacking in some areas, and that monitoring was only taking place at an output level (which can often be the case for interventions where the outcomes are more complex to measure).

An important concern was that, where evidence did exist, the impact assessment techniques used were often weak and did not include any kind of counterfactual assessment. Programmes were also being implemented before pilots had concluded, and there was no assessment of the value for money in realising outcomes. In some cases the evaluation team picked up unrealistic expectations about what this kind of strategy approach could achieve. When we really dug deep into delivery it was also clear that the scale of programming was not enough to have a significant impact in terms of reducing poverty overall across Wales.

However, there was an important 'Strategy effect' achieved through Ministerial support for the Strategy's objectives, and the programmes and initiatives delivered as a result. This helped ensure the messages communicated to Welsh Government stakeholders were clear and joined-up. The Strategy also helped to articulate the extent to which the challenges around child poverty were within Welsh Government's control.

The evaluation met the first two of its aims well – it was a useful tool in terms of accountability for action under the Strategy, and it produced useful learning for the Welsh Government about how they improve their ability to evidence the effects of their programming and how the scale, diversity and continuum of programming may need to adapt to better address the issues.

However there have been broader benefits from the evaluation. By conducting the evaluation Welsh Government were able to raise the profile of the Strategy through consultation and by publishing the results openly. They have also been able to gather further momentum behind programmes which are more narrowly focused on child poverty issues such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant.

Importantly, the findings from the evaluation have contributed to a revised version of the Strategy. In fact the recent consultation on the revised version of the Child Poverty Strategy states: *'We [Welsh Government] will continue to reflect on the findings of the evaluation – to ensure the policies and programmes we are taking forward to tackle poverty can have maximum impact and maximum benefit for those in need of support. It is essential departments continue to develop and adapt the work they are taking forward, based on the best available evidence, to directly address child poverty.'* (Welsh Government, Consultation on revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, 2014)

By conducting the evaluation, the Welsh Government were able to raise the profile of the Strategy through consultation and by publishing the results openly.

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