

Evaluation of the Research Councils UK public dialogue on UK energy research

Final report

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1. Introduction

In March 2007, Research Councils UK (RCUK) commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a major public engagement exercise to elicit and understand the public's priorities for energy research. The aim of the process was as follows:

To identify public priorities for energy research to inform the Research Councils' strategic decision-making. This addition to the current stakeholder input streams will increase accountability for the direction of Research Council-funded energy research.

The Research Councils are interested in a wide range of energy issues such as research on low carbon energy technologies, and issues surrounding energy security and sustainability, markets, infrastructure, consumption and lifestyles and analysis of the economic, social and environmental impacts of energy options. They decided to undertake public engagement activity around energy research because this is an area of science and technology where basic research is addressing a significant societal challenge - the secure supply of affordable, sustainable power. Following a stakeholder workshop in December 2005, Research Councils UK commissioned a public dialogue activity to inform their decision-making around energy research.

The engagement process consisted of three regional workshops held during June 2007 (in Birmingham, Oxford and Cardiff), with a proportion of those attending those workshops being reconvened for a two-day Summit event over a weekend in Warwick at the end of June 2007.

The findings from the dialogue exercise were presented in a final report by Ipsos MORI to Research Councils UK in early October 2007; this report was then circulated to all public participants. The findings were to be considered by the Research Councils UK's Energy Programme Co-ordination Group and the Scientific Advisory Committee in November 2007. Outputs were also intended to be presented to other relevant strategy boards within Research Councils.

Research Councils UK generally consult widely on their work with government, business and industry, academics and NGOs but explicitly including public views in this process is not routine. In order to capture the lessons from the experience, and assess its effectiveness and value, Research Councils UK commissioned an independent evaluation study, which started in April 2007.

This report presents the evaluation of the public dialogue exercise. It summarises the methodology of the evaluation, the purpose and objectives of the dialogue process, feedback on the main activities within the public dialogue, considers the extent to which the objectives have been achieved, identifies the elements of the process that worked particularly well and less well, and identifies some lessons for future practice in the light of these findings. The final section concludes the report by identifying the particular value the process provided for public participants, other stakeholders and Research Councils UK themselves.

2. The evaluation study

2.1 Introduction

Research Councils UK generally consult widely on their work with government, business and industry, academics and NGOs but explicitly including public views in this process is not routine. In order to capture the lessons from the experience, and assess its effectiveness and value, Research Councils UK commissioned an independent evaluation study, which started in April 2007.

The evaluation does not assess the content of the policy outputs or implications from the process in any detail; it focuses on the engagement processes and assesses the extent to which the activities met the objectives set, and the effectiveness and value of the process. Policy issues are touched on in this report, but only where relevant to assessing the effectiveness of the engagement.

The evaluation was commissioned in April 2007, and the evaluation research was completed in November 2007 (so that interviews could take into account participants' and others' feedback on the final Ipsos MORI report, which participants received in November 2007). Final evaluation reports were agreed in February 2008. Details of the evaluation methodology are given in section 2.4 below.

2.2 Aims and objectives of the evaluation

There were no formally agreed objectives for the evaluation other than to monitor and report on the progress and outcomes of the project. The brief for the evaluation suggested that the evaluator was expected to:

- Work alongside the contractors for the duration of the project, and provide feedback during the process which can inform and improve stages as they occur.
- Produce a report following completion of the project enabling Research Councils UK to assess the robustness of the process and provide learning for any future similar activity.

The evaluation has focused on those tasks, with analysis focusing on the effectiveness and value of the different processes, what worked well and less well, and lessons for the future. It also specifically assessed the extent to which the process met the aim established for the process.

2.3 Approach to the evaluation

Evaluations of engagement can range in approach from a mechanistic 'audit' approach, focusing on quantitative assessment of achievement against formal targets or goals, to approaches that focus much more on 'learning' from the experience, focusing on qualitative description and interpretation of more 'subjective' data (e.g. from interviews, stories, observation etc) to explain why and how certain outcomes were achieved.

The audit approach can be summarised as asking questions such as:

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

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

- were the methods and design appropriate to the objectives, and were the objectives the right ones?
- what have the impacts been (e.g. on the participants, participant satisfaction, policy outcomes, decision-making processes, etc?)
- what are the lessons for the future?

The approach to this evaluation has used elements of both approaches. It focuses on a learning approach, while ensuring that the quantitative and audit elements required are also delivered (e.g. targets and objectives met).

Therefore both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed against a range of frameworks (including the stated objectives of the engagement process) and lessons have been distilled from the evaluation research as well as measuring the effectiveness and the overall achievements of the process.

The style Shared Practice adopts for evaluation is collaborative. However, the evaluators also recognise their responsibility for ensuring the independence and rigour of the evaluation process, and to reporting findings openly and honestly to appropriate audiences at appropriate times.

2.4 Methodology for the evaluation

The evaluation methodology was made up of the following elements:

- **Detailed design and planning of the evaluation.** This involved work with Research Councils UK to agree the detailed parameters of the evaluation and the programme of work, especially the main themes and questions for the evaluation.
- **Evaluation research.** This included the following:
 - **Observation** of a sample of events, including informal interviews with a range of participants. Evaluators attended, observed and conducted informal interviews with the public at two of the three regional workshop meetings, the entire reconvened Summit event, and the final Advisory Group for the project in August 2007.
 - **Development and use of questionnaires at all public events.** Questionnaires were distributed at all three of the regional workshops, and at the reconvened Summit. Detailed analyses of these questionnaires has been undertaken and can be found in the annexes to this report.
 - **Interviews.** Interviews were used to complement the data gained from questionnaires, and provide deeper and richer data on some of the key issues. Interviews were carried out with:

- **Public participants.** This is particularly important to examine their learning from the exercise, as well as to test the quality of the process from their perspectives. A total of 15 interviews were carried out with public participants as follows:
 - 3 people from each of the three regional workshops (i.e. 9 interviews)
 - 6 people from the reconvened Summit.
- **Other stakeholders.** This was to gain their perspective on the value and quality of the events they attended, the design of the process overall, and whether their involvement affected their views of public engagement. Interviews were carried out with:
 - 2 expert speakers from the Summit;
 - 4 members of the project's Advisory Group (convened by Research Councils UK), which played a major role in commenting and advising on the process and content of the public engagement, as well as on the content of the final report of the process.
- **Decision-makers** using the outputs of the process. Normally Shared Practice would interview a sample of the policy or decision-makers who have used the outputs of the engagement process, after they have considered and used the outputs. In this case, the final report of the process had not been presented to the relevant committees at the time of the evaluation research (at the request of Research Councils UK), so questions about the policy value of the outputs were put to two members of the Advisory Group who were also members of the relevant policy committees.
- **Those commissioning and delivering the process** (Research Councils UK and Ipsos MORI), to fully understand the approach to the design of the process, what happened in practice, and the lessons identified by those involved for future practice. Interviews were conducted with the one person from each organisation most heavily involved in commissioning, designing and delivering the process.
- **Analysis of data.** Quantitative and qualitative analysis of questionnaires and interview transcripts has been undertaken to provide statistics, overall qualitative feedback and some illustrative quotes from those involved. The final analysis for this report focuses on achievement of the agreed aims and objectives, and the effectiveness and value of the process.
- **Final reports.** The final evaluation report was presented to Research Councils UK in draft form in November 2007, and finalised for publication in February 2008.

2.5 Background and context

Energy and climate change issues have been increasingly covered by broadcast and print the media over recent years, and the wide range of energy issues covered by the research supported by Research Councils UK covers the full range of topical and contentious issues, as well as longer term and less well understood issues.

However, there were no specific major policy initiatives or campaigns during the time that the public dialogue process was being undertaken, so media coverage was not a major issue.

The more specific context for this dialogue was the interest of the Research Councils UK's Energy Programme in identifying public priorities for energy research to inform their strategic decision-making. The timing of this dialogue was particularly important as the Programme was due to make decisions about the funding of research areas for the next three years in autumn 2007. The aim was for information on public views to be provided to these decision-makers alongside academic, industry and government views, to help them shape their thinking and decisions on future energy research priorities.

There was also a more general interest within Research Councils UK in the use of public dialogue in their work. Research Councils UK generally consult widely with government, business and industry, academics and NGOs, but explicitly including public views in this process is not routine. They decided to focus a public engagement project around energy research because they felt this was an area of science and technology where research is addressing a significant societal challenge - the secure supply of affordable, sustainable power. Although work had previously been done on public attitudes to specific energy technologies, there had not been any work that covered energy issues overall, and that focused on energy *research*.

3. Aims, objectives and summary of activities

3.1 Introduction

This section provides a brief overview of the aims and objectives of the public dialogue process, and an overall picture of the activities that took place. Subsequent sections analyse each set of events in more detail.

3.2 Aims and objectives of the public dialogue

The aim of the process was as follows:

To identify public priorities for energy research to inform the Research Councils' strategic decision-making. This addition to the current stakeholder input streams will increase accountability for the direction of Research Council-funded energy research.

The focus of public engagement was therefore on 'consultation' to inform decision-making.

3.3 The main activities of the public dialogue

The overall dialogue process was in three main parts, followed by the production of a full report on the findings:

- Three one-day regional workshops held in Birmingham on Saturday 9 June 2007 (attended by 29 public participants), Oxford on Saturday 16 June (attended by 32 public participants) and Cardiff on Saturday 16 June (attended by 25 public participants).
- A 'tasking' phase, during which time participants could use a pack provided by Ipsos MORI to answer further questions and follow up other sources of information through signposted websites etc.
- A reconvened two-day Summit workshop over the weekend of 30 June - 1 July 2007, held at Warwick University. This was attended by 30 people who had also attended regional workshops.
- A full report on the findings from the dialogue by Ipsos MORI. A draft report was produced in July 2007 and considered by the project Advisory Group in August 2007. The final report was sent to Research Councils UK, and circulated to all participants and stakeholders, in early October 2007.

3.4 Project Advisory Group

The process was guided by a project Advisory Group which was made up of Research Councils UK staff and external advisers. The members of the Group were:

- Dr Alison Wall, Joint Head, Energy and Climate Change, EPSRC
- Mr Gary Grubb, Associate Director of Research, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

- Professor Nicholas Jenkins, School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering, University of Manchester
- Mr John Loughhead, Executive Director, UK Energy Research Centre
- Mr Duncan McLaren, Director of Friends of the Earth Scotland and a member of Research Councils UK's scientific advisory committee on the energy programme
- Professor Judith Petts, Head of School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham
- Professor Andy Stirling, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex.

These members provided a mix of expertise on energy research and public engagement processes.

The Advisory Group were expected to provide the following guidance (as outlined in the formal terms of reference for the Group):

1. Oversee the project – assist the Research Councils to work with the contractor by providing oversight of the process, ensuring the appropriate research framings are set etc
2. Provide guidance and agree the final form of the background information for participants prepared by the contractor
3. Comment and agree the reports and evaluation, prepared by the project contractor and the independent evaluator respectively.

The Group was invited to agree details of the process; help develop, finalise and agree background information; note and comment on the reports from the project and attend dissemination meetings for outcomes as appropriate.

The Group met formally on two occasions, and provided extensive feedback between meetings via email etc, particularly on draft information materials to be used in the public events, and on the overall design and planning of the process. They also contributed to other activities, such as attending the project events and dissemination. This provided Research Councils UK with access to significant expertise, and also to a level of external legitimacy for the materials and process through effective stakeholder involvement.

4. Regional workshops

4.1 The purpose of the exercise

The first part of the public engagement work took place in three separate workshops on Saturdays in June 2007. These workshops were designed to bring together a mix of participants from various geographical locations within reach of the Summit location (Warwick) to deliberate on issues around energy research.

Research Councils UK specified that a qualitative and deliberative approach should be taken to the public engagement in this instance. As the Ipsos MORI final report explains (section 1.2): "The deliberative approach to research is used to gradually inform participants about the topic, and expose them to the debates and uncertainties that surround it, as the process unfolds. This allows (for both) spontaneous and informed opinions ...".

The objectives of these workshops were to:

- understand spontaneous perceptions of energy and energy research
- inform participants about the scope of energy opportunities and challenges, and nature of energy research
- gauge spontaneous and prompted priorities for energy research and 'criteria' for selecting priorities
- prepare participants for the tasking phase and looking forward to Summit.

4.2 The nature of the exercise

- **Recruitment.** The participants were recruited to provide a target number of around 30 participants in each location.

Recruitment was undertaken face to face on the street, at different times of day. The potential participants were told about the subject of the workshop as being: "Exploring how, through R & D, we will meet our future energy needs by discovering new ways to power our homes, infrastructure and industry. The event will contribute to an important piece of work looking at people's priorities for meeting our future energy needs and how we can achieve them. This is an important opportunity for people to have an impact on the way in which public money is spent on research." Potential participants were asked various demographic, attitudinal and behavioural questions to ensure those actually invited to the workshops met the quotas set, aiming for the following:

- **Gender.** An even split of men and women, and of age ranges from 18 to 75 years old.
- **Black and minority ethnic representation.** At least 4 black and minority ethnic (BME) participants per regional workshop: 13% of target audience which is higher than the national average of 8%. This was to ensure that black and minority ethnic participants had the opportunity to express their views and to reflect the fact that BME representation in the Birmingham area is higher than the national average.
- **Social class.** The same number of people from social classes ABC1 and C2DE.

- **Attitudinal and behavioural quotas.** Recruitment also aimed to ensure a representative range of opinions on energy-related issues, so potential participants were asked questions as follows:
- Attitudinal questions: potential participants were asked about which factors were important for electricity production; those 'not at all concerned' about these issues were excluded on the grounds that they were unlikely to be willing to give up the time required.
- Behavioural questions: potential participants were also asked questions to identify whether they were 'socio-political activists', with the aim of recruiting no more than two of this category of people to each workshop; socio-political activists were defined as people who have done five or more activities from a given list, which included activities such as helping fundraising drives, making a speech to an organised group, and voting in the last election.

The aim of recruitment here was not to provide a statistically representative sample of national public attitudes, but to engage a diverse set of the public with a spread of views on energy-related issues. In opinion and market research it is often seen as preferable not to alert people to the topic to be discussed. Ipsos MORI therefore used a recruitment process designed to stimulate participant interest without providing so much information it could bias responses in advance. Potential participants were asked if they wanted to take part in a series of events covering:

- how, through research and development, we will meet our future energy needs by discovering new ways to power our homes, infrastructure and industry;
 - research contributing to an important piece of work looking at people's priorities for meeting future energy needs;
 - research representing an important opportunity for people to have an impact on the way in which public money is spent on research.
- **Attendance.** The actual attendance at the regional workshops was as shown in the following table.

	TARGET	Birmingham	Oxford	Cardiff
Total	30	29	32	25
Gender:				
• Men	At least 13	14	15	13
• Women	At least 13	15	17	12
Age:				
• 18 - 39	At least 9	11	16	14
• 40 - 59	At least 9	14	14	4
• 60 - 75	At least 9	4	2	7
Social class:				
• ABC1	At least 13	16	19	17
• C2DE	At least 13	13	13	8
BME	At least 4	4	4	2

These figures show that:

- The targets were met in terms of overall numbers and gender mix.
- The Birmingham workshop had fewer 60 - 75 year olds than planned (only 4 instead of target of 9).
- The Oxford workshop also had fewer 60 - 75 year olds than planned (only 2 instead of target of 9).
- The Cardiff workshop also had fewer 60 - 75 year olds than planned (7 instead of target of 9), and also fewer 40 - 59 year olds (4 instead of 9). It also had fewer participants overall than the target (25 not 30), and had fewer from social classes C2DE than the target (8 instead of 13).

Overall, this resulted in fewer people overall taking part from older age groups (60 - 75), and fewer from social class C2DE than had been planned.

- **Incentives.** Participants were paid £65 each for attending for the day, plus £25 each was available for travel and childcare expenses. This is normal practice in any form of deliberative research, and helps ensure that those who cannot afford to attend because of the costs of travelling etc can be encouraged to take part, thus ensuring a greater diversity of people at the event.
- **Information presented at events.** Tailored presentations on key energy research issues were made at the event by Ipsos MORI. These 'stimulus presentations' were agreed and produced (by the science journalist Martin Ince - appointed by Ipsos MORI) through iterative discussions and debate between Research Councils UK and Ipsos MORI. In addition, Research Councils UK staff presented information on the purpose of the dialogue process, and how the Energy Programme was going to use the results in coming to decisions about funding priorities for future energy research in autumn 2007.
- **Process.** The first workshop, in Birmingham, was run as a pilot, to test the process and methodology. The process outlined below was the slightly revised version used in the Cardiff and Oxford workshops. The main changes after the Birmingham event were to reduce the general sessions on energy issues at the beginning, and to get people into small discussion groups and talking to each other earlier.

Each workshop lasted one whole day, from 9.30am (start 10am) to 4pm. The process worked through a set of carefully designed exercises as follows:

- Plenary introduction to the purpose of the event.
- Small group discussions to get spontaneous responses to ideas of 'energy' and 'energy research', carefully structured to cover definitions of energy types, trigger points for interest / concern, how it compares in importance to other issues; any changes in attitude over last 5 - 10 years, and key players; then consideration of energy research.
- A broad cross-section of people, based on known demographics from the recruitment questionnaire, were allocated to specific groups in the formal small group discussions.

- Presentation by Ipsos MORI facilitators in plenary of key debates on energy opportunities and challenges (32 powerpoint slides over 20 minutes) around three themes: energy for society, energy for the home and energy for transport.
- Discussion in three small groups of issues raised in presentation; each group took one of the three themes and was led by the Ipsos MORI facilitator who had presented the information on that issue; each facilitator then added extra information to provide further context. Groups were asked to consider energy opportunities, energy challenges, and energy research issues. Points raised in the groups were written up on flip charts and participants were then given 5 dots and asked to allocate them by sticking them against the energy research ideas that were most important to them. Participants were asked to think about the criteria they were using to allocate their dots, as they would be asked about them afterwards. They were then asked to identify their criteria and those were noted on flip charts as 'criteria for research into transport / home / society energy' issues.
- After lunch, a further presentation was made by Ipsos MORI facilitators in plenary on energy research (21 powerpoint slides over 20 minutes) covering different types of research, differences in cost etc. There was then plenary feedback and questions on the presentation.
- Discussion in small groups (broken into the same themes with the same people as before) to consider the issues from the presentation. Within the groups, participants were then shown research categories each written on a separate post-it hexagon. Referring back to the criteria developed before lunch, participants were then asked to decide as a group whether each category was high, medium or low priority; notes were kept of points made in this discussion. Participants were then given more dots and could vote for specific research categories and to allocate proportions of a specific budget to high, medium and low options, and discussed the results.
- Plenary session during which a spokesperson from each discussion group explained their conclusions and reasons for choices, and the similarities and differences between groups were discussed. The actual figures for Research Councils UK expenditure were then presented to the group, with questions and discussion.
- Questionnaires were circulated to capture the views of participants on the issues at the end of the workshop, and were collected.
- A 'tasking pack' for participants to take away and complete was handed out.
- **Tasking pack.** The tasking pack was designed to provide public participants at the regional workshops with more information on issues related to energy research, and also included questions for them to answer. The Ipsos MORI final report describes the pack as follows: "The tasking exercise built on emerging criteria for judging energy research developed at the regional workshops. It acted as a safety check against the workshops by providing a 'private space' in which people could consider the issues and their priorities away from the influence of group dynamics and time restrictions ... [It] was also intended to allow those participants that chose to gain more knowledge and insight on the topic at hand and to potentially enrich the summit workshop".

The tasking pack contained material and questions on the recently published Energy White Paper, the speed of climate change, who does energy research, wind power, energy in buildings, carbon capture, clean cars and nuclear power. It also included 'portraits' of two academic energy researchers.

The pack questions were designed to be completed by all participants, not just those who were returning to the Summit. Participants were asked to complete and return the pack to Ipsos MORI.

Everyone who completed and returned the tasking pack (in a Freepost envelope provided) was sent a £10 high street voucher. 24 packs were returned from the 86 participants who were given copies, which is a good response rate of 28%.

- **Recording and reporting.** Detailed notes were taken by Ipsos MORI at the workshops using laptops as well as comments recorded on flip charts. Audio recordings were made of all plenary and small group discussions to be used as back up to fill gaps in other notes and materials.

The findings from the whole process of engagement were presented in a single report by Ipsos MORI to Research Councils UK. A draft report was presented in July 2007, revised in August 2007 and a final report was presented in October 2007. This report was also circulated to all participants which they received (after delays caused by postal strikes) in November 2007.

4.3 The effectiveness and value of the workshops

The assessment that follows is based on observation of two of the workshops, and analysis of a questionnaire that was circulated to all participants at all three workshops. Also, interviews were carried out with participants (three from each workshop). The regional workshops were also covered in interviews with some Advisory Group members and those in Research Councils UK and Ipsos MORI responsible for the process.

4.3.1 General feedback

Questionnaires were distributed to all participants in the three regional workshops, and there was a 99% return rate overall (100% for Cardiff and Oxford, 99% for Birmingham).

A full analysis of the findings from the three workshops covered is given in Appendix 1, and the overall results are outlined in summary below.

This analysis shows good positive feedback from participants, who clearly enjoyed and valued the experience, and were more likely to get involved in future such events as a result, which shows a positive attitude to their involvement here. They clearly learnt a lot and the experience helped them clarify their thinking. They could understand and use the information provided and found it fair and balanced.

Overall:

- 99% were satisfied with the workshop overall; 74% were **very satisfied**. No-one was dissatisfied at all. There was generally more satisfaction with the workshop in Oxford (78% were very satisfied) and Birmingham (75% were very satisfied) than Cardiff (68% very satisfied).
- 100% were satisfied with the way the event was run on the day; 75% were **very satisfied**. Again, no-one was dissatisfied at all. Here there was little difference between the different locations.

- 97% were satisfied with the information provided; 62% were **very satisfied**. Here, those in Birmingham were more satisfied (71% were very satisfied) than Cardiff (56% were very satisfied) or Oxford (59% were very satisfied).

In more detail, the feedback from questionnaire respondents was:

- 99% agreed that they had enjoyed taking part (68% strongly agreed).
- 95% of participants agreed that all participants were treated equally and respectfully (58% strongly agreed). Here there was less satisfaction in Birmingham (50% strongly agreed) compared to Oxford (63% strongly agreed) and Cardiff (60% strongly agreed).
- 95% agreed that they understood the purpose of the consultation (41% strongly agreed); 86% said they understood how the results of the consultation would be used. Here too there were differences - 50% of the Birmingham respondents agreed strongly that they understood these points, compared to far less in Cardiff and Oxford (24% strongly agreed in Cardiff that they understood how the results would be used).
- 91% agreed that they were more likely to get involved in these sorts of events in future (59% strongly agreed).
- 90% agreed that they had learnt something they did not know before (62% strongly agreed).
- 89% agreed that the information provided was helpful and unbiased (33% strongly agreed); 90% said they understood and could use the information provided. However, 68% also said that they would have liked more information on the issues (34% strongly agreed with this).
- 87% agreed that no single view was allowed to dominate (45% agreed strongly).
- 82% agreed that they were able to say everything they wanted to say (38% strongly agreed).

From observation, these very positive findings reflect the enthusiasm and energy that participants invested in the discussions. Overall, the majority of participants were not going through the motions for their incentive fee and expenses. There was a good quality of discussion, questioning and engagement with the issues as participants worked hard to understand and discuss the issues.

There was slightly less positive feedback on there being enough time, although this was still largely seen as working well:

- 73% agreed there was enough time to discuss the issues properly (but only 13% of these strongly agreed, plus 14% were uncertain and 13% disagreed).

From observation, the problem with time would *not* have been solved by simply extending the length of the day, as it was already quite a long day for people. One participant remarked, it was "*A long session for a weekend*" (participant in Cardiff).

Also from observation, any problems with time actually seemed to be associated with the length of time for small group discussions compared to information input and in plenary: time for discussions and undertaking the

complex tasks required was quite limited and a sense of those discussions being quite complicated and thus somewhat rushed. Participants said it was *"Trying to get too much in the time available"* (participant in Oxford), and *"Huge issues for a short while"* (participant in Birmingham). The balance of time spent on information input compared to time for group discussions is considered in more detail below (see 4.3.4).

4.3.2 Impact of participation on people's views

Almost all participants (92%) agreed that being involved in the workshop had made a difference to what they thought about energy research:

- 56% agreed strongly that it had made a difference
- 36% agreed that it had had made a difference
- 1% were uncertain / didn't know, and 2% said it had not really made any difference.

There were some differences between the different workshops. Being involved in the workshop made a difference to more respondents in Oxford (where 69% strongly agreed) than in Birmingham (where 43% strongly agreed).

In addition, the great majority of respondents (90%) agreed that attending the workshop had helped them think more clearly about the issues (55% strongly agreed).

Comments from participants on the questionnaires provide some insight into what made a difference to people's views, and why. For example:

"I didn't realise the small amount of funding available for research. I expected it to be small but not minimal" (Birmingham)

"I heard other people's views on how they felt about energy research and it has made a big difference" (Birmingham)

"It has made me think much more about the need for this type of research" (Cardiff)

"Thought about saving energy, production and how much is actually spent on research" (Cardiff)

"I realise that research is important to us" (Cardiff)

"Very interesting about energy research and how it works and where the real work in the future is" (Oxford)

"Learning where the money goes raised my awareness of the difficulty in prioritising" (Oxford)

"Surprised at how little spent on energy research" (Oxford)

"I have learned a lot about different fuel resources and how hard the researchers work" (Oxford)

"I'm concerned that we don't spend enough on energy research and that the current research funding focuses so highly on nuclear" (Oxford)

"Finding out how much is spent on energy research and in my humble opinion should be increased substantially" (Oxford)

"Helped me understand where the money is spent" (Oxford)

Not everyone was wholly positive about the need for energy research. One said: *"Money is being wasted on research rather than doing" (Cardiff)*

There were also several comments about how the process had contributed to participants' understanding more about specific energy sources including biomass, about energy use around the home, energy requirements in the future, energy conservation, environmental impacts etc. This suggests that there was interest in energy issues generally as well as in energy research.

However, given the complexity of the subject, the quotes listed above show that there was actually quite a good understanding of the focus on energy research among at least a good proportion of the participants.

4.3.3 What worked best

The elements of the process that the participants valued most were:

- **Hearing views** from other participants. In Birmingham, 10 respondents (35%) mentioned this in answer to an open question about what the best aspects of the workshop were: in Cardiff 4 respondents mentioned this (16%) and in Oxford 8 respondents mentioned it (25%).

One participant mentioned that the exchanges between participants were the most successful aspect (Cardiff), another said the best part was *"Exploring other workshop members views' and reasoning"* (Birmingham). Two mentioned that the level of interest of others had affected how they thought about the issues: one mentioned the best thing was *"How passionate people are about energy"* (Birmingham) and another mentioned it was *"Seeing how interested others were in all of it"* (Oxford).

In addition, in answer to an open question about what was the most important benefit for participants personally in taking part in this workshop, sharing and hearing others views was mentioned most often by respondents in Birmingham (by 5 of them), 6 in Cardiff, plus 2 who mentioned opportunity to give their own views, and 6 in Oxford, plus 2 who mentioned being listened to. Comments included:

"As an electrical engineer, it was nice to hear other people's views of the industry" (Cardiff)

"The ability to present my views ... enabled me to relax and listen to others' point of view ... also, able to ask if uncertain" (Cardiff)

"Reviewing my own opinions in the light of discussion with others" (Oxford).

"I certainly got a greater awareness. It forced me to look at the matter with a great deal more attention and I gained a lot of confidence in my fellow man. I tend to be a pessimist but I was impressed by the performance of the participants." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

From observation (and experience of similar events), the value that public participants place on the opportunity to discuss important and interesting issues with others, particularly people that they do not usually meet in their everyday lives, is almost always a feature of feedback from deliberative processes. It links to the learning that emerges from the process (see below), and is about the participants being given the time and space to explore and develop their own views in the context of hearing the views of others. The participants in this process clearly valued this opportunity.

- **Small group discussions.** This is clearly related to the previous point. In Oxford 10 respondents mentioned this (31%) in answer to an open question about what the best aspects of the workshop were, in Birmingham 5 mentioned it (18%), and in Cardiff 4 mentioned it (16%).

From observation, the discussion groups did work well in general. People were able to talk easily to each other and the welcoming and informal style of the Ipsos MORI facilitators made people feel comfortable and relaxed about giving their views.

As usual in these types of public dialogue processes, some participants arrived with more knowledge than others of the subjects being discussed. Energy research does not have immediate connections to most people's lives (unlike health or diet), so participants cannot draw on personal experience so easily. However, from observation, the differences in levels of knowledge among participants was, if anything, a benefit to the process as it maximised opportunities for sharing learning, especially as few people knew about *all* the issues being discussed, so everyone felt their views were valid.

Comments on how small group discussions were the best aspects of the workshop, from questionnaire and interview respondents, included:

"Mutual respect and the welcoming atmosphere - the organisers were very courteous. It was precise and to the point with no long chat. The presentation and organisation was very good." (Oxford participant).

"They made us feel comfortable and relaxed - although some people weren't quite sure why we were there, it wasn't long before we relaxed and knew what it was all about." (Cardiff participant interviewee)

"The best thing about it was that everyone was allowed to have their say. I have been to events before where a couple of people have hogged the floor. The facilitators involved people without making them feel pressured, which was good." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

"It was a really enjoyable day and the people running it were lovely." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

However, from observation and informal interviews at the workshops, the complexity of the design of the event overall, and of some of the tasks for the discussion groups, did cause some difficulties as some participants did not always grasp what they were supposed to be doing and how each session of plenary and small group discussions related to each other - there was sometimes some confusion about the logical progression of the process.

From observation, this was handled well by the more experienced facilitators, who could explain clearly to their groups what needed to be done and how it related to the previous task and the day's work overall. However, some participants in groups with less experienced facilitators did clearly feel

a bit lost at times and needed to have more 'signposting' than was provided, to help reinforce their understanding of where they were in the process. One interviewee specifically mentioned that "*The quality of chairmanship varied between groups*" (Oxford participant).

Also from observation, when the purpose of the discussion and the specific task were really clear, the quality of the debate among participants was much higher. This happened with the discussions about who did energy research (where some useful insights emerged from the public about distrust of government but even greater distrust of private sector / industry-funded research), and about priorities for funding energy research. These sessions worked very well both in terms of enthusiasm and engagement from participants, and in terms of clear outputs from the dialogue overall.

The initial exercise to develop criteria (for assessing the priority of research topics that should be given funding support) also worked well, and participants were able to identify objective criteria easily and effectively. These criteria were used again later in the day at the regional workshops (and again at the Summit). From observation, the links between the initial criteria identified and other exercises (e.g. on funding allocations) worked less well, as the detailed criteria tended to be forgotten in the later discussions when people focused more on the costs / budgets involved for each project. They remained useful, however, for Summit discussions and for Ipsos MORI's final report, as they provided a useful summary of the public's priorities in decision-making.

- **Learning**, including gaining information and ideas. In Cardiff 5 respondents (20%) mentioned this in answer to an open question about what were the best aspects of the workshop, in Birmingham 4 respondents (14%) mentioned it and in Oxford 7 respondents (22%) mentioned it.

In addition, in answer to the open question about what was the most important benefit for participants personally in taking part in this workshop, learning was mentioned by 11 respondents in Oxford, 10 in Cardiff and 5 in Birmingham.

The learning benefits clearly continued for participants after the workshop, and several reported that they had continued to discuss the issues with others. Comments from interviewees included:

"I have developed a keen interest in energy since going" (Oxford participant interviewee)

"Actually I have discussed the whole event with several of the voluntary groups I'm involved with, about the way government is at least trying to consult. I have lent the document to a friend as well. They have all been very much interested." (Birmingham participant interviewee)

"[Learnt] about some of the projects in the pipeline, how we fit into the world stage of energy research, the options in terms of energy generation and the hugely insufficient budget for energy research ... it made me more aware of what can and can't be achieved and realistically what our options are" (Birmingham participant interviewee).

"I suppose I became more aware of the concept of research and the difference research could make. Also the importance of research as part of a process of saving the planet." (Oxford participant interviewee).

"I was surprised how little spending went on energy research and also about specific projects and future plans for projects." (Oxford participant interviewee).

- **Taking part in an important discussion, and having an impact.** Each workshop included a short presentation from Research Councils UK on their reasons for running the dialogue process, and how the results would be used to inform decision-making in the autumn 2007 on priorities for future funding for energy research. This usefully clarified the potential impacts of the process for participants.

It was clearly important to participants that they were taking part in a discussion of some value, and that what they had to say was being listened to and taken seriously by those who would finally make decisions about energy research. This came across particularly strongly in the interviews, where almost all those interviewed mentioned that being asked for their views was the most important benefit to them.

Comments on questionnaires in answer to open questions about the best aspects of the workshop, and about the most important benefits to them personally, included:

"Contributing to future energy research issues and development" (Oxford)

"Taking part in discussing very important issues" (Birmingham)

"Awareness of a very important issue" (Oxford)

"Knowing that people's views do count" (Birmingham)

"The opportunity to give an opinion and feel it is valued" (Cardiff)

"Made me feel what I had to say was important and that someone might actually care what the public thinks" (Oxford)

"I am pleased that my opinions may influence the direction of future funding" (Oxford)

"Having my views heard and listening to others' interesting points of view" (Oxford)

Interviews with public participants produced similar feedback:

"The satisfaction of having the public voice heard" (Birmingham participant interviewee).

"I was very pleased someone took the trouble to ask us and pleased to take part in it." (Oxford participant interviewee).

"It was nice to take part and to feel like the public have been asked ... I felt a bit more part of it and it was an opportunity to influence key people who are investing in energy research." (Oxford participant interviewee).

"I liked the idea of taking part in consultations and of my view being listened to. I liked the whole setup and the mixed groups ... it did change my attitude towards perhaps me thinking they paid attention to my opinion." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

- **Presentations of information.** Overall, the presentations of information were clearly much appreciated by the public participants; some mentioned that the best things about the event were the presentations, which were seen as knowledgeable and useful. One specifically mentioned that "*the gradual introduction of information / statistics made these [small discussion groups] better*" (Cardiff).

However, one also said that "*Some of the presentations were a bit rushed. We would have benefited from more information on certain areas to be better advised in our discussion groups*" (Oxford). This point should not necessarily be interpreted as asking for more information overall, but was more likely asking for more information 'on certain areas' i.e. more information relevant to the specific discussions in groups.

- **Recording of points made by the public.** There were various arrangements for recording the points made by the public participants. There were note takers as well as facilitators, which allowed for full note taking without disrupting the facilitation of the discussions. During the discussions, facilitators wrote up the main points made by participants on flip charts which could have been seen by all participants which helped make the process transparent. In addition, audio recording was made of all plenary and small group discussions, to be used to check any points at which there were felt to be any gaps in notes taken.

This is a very thorough and effective approach to recording the process. The use of quotes from the process in the final report was very much appreciated by participants, and helped to build trust in the process overall. One participant interviewee mentioned that "*I can pick out statements in the report that I said and that others in my group said. I am quite happy with the way the words were recorded and used.*" (Birmingham participant interviewee).

- **Feedback to participants.** Almost all the participant interviewees had received the final report and had read it (some very thoroughly) by the time the evaluation research interviews took place. This clearly increased people's positive feedback about the process overall. Comments included:

"I'm never quite sure if [public engagement is] being done because the funders say it should be and just to get a tick in the box, or whether they actually listen ... I feel quite buoyant about this as there has been lots of feedback along the way." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

Some interviewees wanted still more feedback, and some were keen that there should be a follow-up event to continue the discussions. Several of the interviewees remarked that they would have liked to have gone to the Warwick Summit but it had been fully explained to all participants at the regional workshops that not everyone could be invited to the Summit.

4.3.4 What worked less well

- **No problems.** The biggest comment from respondents at all three workshops in answer to an open question about what worked least well was 'none' (29% of questionnaire respondents from Birmingham said this, 25% from Oxford and 20% from Cardiff).

- **Appropriate information.** Some participant respondents' main concerns were with lack of information before the event and not enough information to contribute fully, and lack of time to discuss issues properly. There were also a few remarks on presentations (of information by facilitators) being rushed, and several interviewees mentioned that they would have like to have had more information in handouts. Comments included:

"There was a very large amount of information - it was very good but unless it's put down [on paper] it'll go in one ear and out the other." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

"...[wanted] more statistics about who was doing what in energy research ... it would have been nice to have some existing statistics to work from and compare what's going on in different areas of energy research. And also we didn't have handouts - it would have been nice to have something on paper to work from" (Oxford participant interviewee).

"There needed to be more information that put things into context and someone we could ask. We were doing it slightly blind, with a lack of reference points." (Oxford participant interviewee).

"...it could have been a bit quicker to get going if we had been given more information prior to the event ... When I was stopped in the street there was only the briefest of information - more information beforehand would have been better. I suppose they wanted people to go in cold but I nearly didn't go because of it." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

"To be honest it was little more than sound bites. I would say no - we weren't given access to information on the things we were asked to discuss." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

"Pure facts and figures on different energy types such as biofuels would have been good, rather than the situation as it is now and the pot of money. It would have been nice to be informed beforehand so that we could comment better." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

Overall, therefore, there was a demand from participants for more information *before* the event, information that was specifically relevant to the discussions and tasks they were working on, and more information on handouts that could be referred to throughout.

In the view of the organisers (Ipsos MORI and Research Councils UK), providing more information before the event would have stifled the opportunities for spontaneous debate at the workshops. This approach to providing minimal information before events is common to various interactive opinion and market research and other social research methods for gaining views from the public without undue influence or bias, and is therefore often seen as good practice.

However, in assessing deliberative public engagement processes in particular, it may also be argued that any sample of the population will arrive at events of this sort with different levels of knowledge, so providing no information in advance does not in any way create a level playing field of knowledge.

Certainly, some public participants at this event did want more information in advance so they could be better prepared. It may therefore be appropriate in future to consider what information is best provided in advance (and indeed at the events e.g. in the form of handouts etc) to meet the needs of participants as well as to best support the overall objectives and design of the process.

- **Recruitment and representation.** Overall, there was a reasonable mix of participants. However, the summary assessment of attendance figures against targets (see 4.2) shows that several of the target quotas were not met, particularly those related to older people (across all three workshops), and to social class C2DE (in Cardiff). From observation at two of the three events (Birmingham and Oxford), there did seem to be an over-representation of well-educated middle class people. This was particularly apparent in the very well-informed comments made by interviewees in the follow-up evaluation research process.

Although participants generally felt quite happy with the mix of people there, comments included:

"[Should] have [had] a broader cross-section [of participants] - we had a good mix but a larger number of people would have been better and would have given a broader cross-section." (Oxford participant interviewee).

"I was quite surprised that the people there were all remarkably articulate. In that sense there didn't seem to be much of a cross-section. Whilst there was a mix of people they were all clearly intelligent." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

"They need to be very careful about the demographics and I don't know how that is to be achieved. I got the feeling there was a bias towards category A and B - there were university people, business people and retired people - the demographic needs looking at." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

Observation and informal interviews at events identified quite different levels of knowledge among participants, with some very knowledgeable individuals and some who clearly knew very little about the issues. This may help explain some quite divergent feedback on the process, with some favouring, for example, sessions to consider the complex setting of priorities for funding research, and some favouring the open introductory sessions where people could draw on their own general (and often personal) experience. Comments included:

"I was a bit bored in the first session as it was very basic, but other than that it was good." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

"People tended to go towards groups by the end of the day, groups of a similar educational level. I ended up in a good group by the end and we even pushed the facilitator out of his comfort zone in terms of the level of the issues we were discussing." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

"I did feel that a couple of people there didn't understand the subject ... and didn't really understand what we were discussing." (Birmingham participant interviewee).

This also led to a sense that not all the conclusions reported from groups reflected the richness of the discussion. For example, one said that *"Grouping things by importance didn't reflect the whole group's view brilliantly"* (Cardiff), and another said that *"The feedback by individuals at the end was a curate's egg!"* (Cardiff).

Although the process was not expected to be a fully demographically representative sample of the UK population, it was intended to bring together a diverse set of the public with a spread of views on energy-related issues and there were clearly some gaps in this case. Ipsos MORI felt that

recruiting people for two weekends in a month (one Saturday, plus another Saturday and Sunday if they attended the Summit as well) would always be a major challenge, especially for a subject such as energy research, which may not be top priority for the general public.

- **Balance of information input and deliberative discussions.** The basic premise of deliberative public engagement is that it requires information to be introduced to people to enable them to work together to share ideas and come to their own considered views which they are given the opportunity to express.

Too much time spent on providing information can shift the focus of the event from allowing people to use their own experience and values to address the problems and concerns they are considering, to getting them to understand what *others* identify as the issues and problems.

This can be a particular problem when the amount of time spent giving information is almost as much as the time available for people to talk among themselves and develop their own thinking. In this case, 46% of the time was spent in small group discussions, according to Ipsos MORI figures. This time and space for people to develop their own thinking is the core of deliberation and in this case it was rather squeezed by the amount of time taken to 'give' information. One participant said:

"More time to think it through would have been useful." (Cardiff participant interviewee).

This balance of time also affects the perceptions of the public participants of the purpose of the exercise - several respondents referred to the event as a 'course', and to the facilitators as 'tutors', which suggests that they saw it as primarily an educational exercise, rather than an opportunity for them to develop and express their own views. In addition, the initial sessions (and some of the small group discussions) were focused more on questions and answers from the facilitators rather than in depth discussions among participants. One participant mentioned that what was missing from the day was:

"Possibly more chance for us to ask questions during the day, rather than just be asked." (Oxford participant interviewee).

The perception among some participants that they were being 'educated' rather than 'engaged' affects the feelings among some participants that they were being asked to provide a 'right' answer (which would result from an educational approach), rather than openly exploring the issues (an engagement approach). One participant remarked:

"I would like to know whether the aim of was to test the knowledge of the public or to get their opinions - if it was the latter then they ought possibly to have made more of an effort to give us an informed choice." (Oxford participant interviewee).

Good deliberative public engagement will always have an 'educational' element and, indeed, it is one of the aspects of the process that public participants particularly value ('learning' is seen as a key benefit from taking part), as well as often being an implicit objective for those commissioning engagement processes.

The point here is about balance and style within the stated aim of the process - which was to identify public priorities for energy research; not to educate the public about energy issues.

This is not to underestimate the complexity - and difficulty - of the task in this case. Energy research is an extremely broad and, for the public, fairly abstract set of issues. There clearly needed to be some provision of information to enable participants to discuss the topic. However, in this case, the balance of emphasis on information presentation perhaps slightly overwhelmed the opportunities for the public to discuss the issues among themselves.

- **Facilitators presenting information.** Facilitators presented the bulk of the information at the workshops (as agreed with Research Councils UK). It can be useful for facilitators to present very brief, very basic and entirely uncontentious facts to support participants' discussions. However, it works best to separate such 'facts' from opinions and in energy research (as in so many fields), a great deal of 'information' is contested. If facilitators present the information, it can make it more difficult for participants to express views disagreeing with what is being presented as 'facts'.

This is not a comment on the quality of the content or delivery of the presentations of information at the workshop, nor on the evident neutrality of the Ipsos MORI facilitators, but on clarity of roles: facilitators need to be seen to be completely neutral and independent and focused on delivering the process, and not seen as associated with particular views on issues.

It therefore tends to work best for information to be presented in ways that allow for a range of (potentially opposing) views from clearly identified individual experts or sources. This approach worked very well at the Summit (see 5.3.2). Equally importantly, 'dialogue' processes ideally include direct contact between 'experts' and the public so that mutual understanding can develop. If facilitators present information, such opportunities for dialogue are not available.

This was not a major issue in this case, but is worth bearing in mind in future public engagement activities.

4.4 Overall conclusions on the regional workshops

Overall, the workshops worked well. Participants clearly enjoyed the experience and learnt a lot from it, and left the event saying they were more enthusiastic to participate again in such events in future. Indications of participants' enthusiasm for their involvement are that:

- 95% of questionnaire respondents said it is important to involve the public in discussing these sorts of issues: 79% said it is **very important**.
- 91% of questionnaire respondents said they were **more likely to want to get involved** in these sorts of events as a result of attending this one; and all interviewees said they were more likely to get involved again as a result.

This is very positive feedback on the general impact of the process on the public participants, and shows a real impact in terms of active citizenship among these people.

In addition, the workshops provided useful information for Research Councils UK on public opinion on energy research, especially on the criteria that people felt were important in assessing priorities for future energy research, and their own priorities for budget allocations.

However, as described above, there were some specific concerns and questions raised about the links between different parts of the workshop events (e.g. in terms of inadequate signposting as the events progressed) and delivery (e.g. in terms of variability of facilitation skills and achievement of recruitment / representation targets), provision of appropriate information (e.g. more information in advance, more use of written handouts, and more relevant information to support the specific questions being discussed) and the balance between time taken to input information and available for discussion among participants.

5. Reconvened summit

5.1 The purpose of the Summit

The second part of the public engagement work took place in a summit workshop over a weekend, 30 June to 1 July 2007. This event was designed to bring back together a proportion of the participants from the three regional workshops to deliberate further on the issues around energy research.

The deliberative approach used in the Summit was the same as had been used in the regional workshops: "The deliberative approach to research is used to gradually inform participants about the topic, and expose them to the debates and uncertainties that surround it, as the process unfolds" (Ipsos MORI final report explains, section 1.2).

The objectives of the Summit were:

- To condense, clarify and refine the public criteria for evaluating energy research outlined in the regional workshops.
- To test and develop these criteria further using a 'real world' trade-off exercise, using hypothetical energy research projects to force trade-offs and identify areas of agreement / disagreement.
- To further test and develop the application criteria under a range of possible future conditions, using a range of energy scenarios.

5.2 The nature of the Summit

- **Overall scale and recruitment.** This was a meeting over one and a half days (Saturday morning to Sunday lunchtime). The aim was to bring back together about half of those who had participated in the local workshops (i.e. a target of 45 people). In practice, 30 people attended; 20 men and 10 women.

The aim was, as in the local workshops, to provide a diversity of views, not a rigorously representative demographic sample of the UK population. However, the imbalance of men and women did not perhaps provide the diversity that had been aimed for.

The decision to hold the Summit over a whole weekend was understood by Ipsos MORI and Research Councils UK to be a challenge to achieving both the overall attendance targets and the mix of men and women (recognising that child care and domestic responsibilities would almost certainly preclude more women than men from attending). However, it was decided that a whole weekend event was necessary in order to cover the full range of issues. In retrospect, it may have been more effective to have had a shorter event with a larger number of people and a better social mix.

There were a number of 'experts' attending this workshop, in addition to the Research Councils UK staff and evaluators who had attended the regional workshops as well. The experts were:

- Dr Jonathan R. Gibbins, Imperial College and Principle Investigator, UK Carbon Capture and Storage Consortium
- Mr Gary Grubb, Associate Director of Research, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

- Mr Robert Heathman, Associate Programme Manager for the energy programme at the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
 - Mr John Loughhead, Executive Director, UK Energy Research Centre (and Advisory Group member)
 - Professor Catherine Mitchell, Professor of Energy Policy, University of Warwick
 - Professor Judith Petts, Head of School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham (also a member of the Advisory Group for the process)
 - Dr Paul Upham, Research Fellow at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of Manchester.
- **Incentives.** Participants were paid £100 each to attend, plus £25 each was available for travel and childcare expenses. This is normal practice in deliberative research, and helps ensure that those who cannot afford to attend because of the costs of travelling etc can be encouraged to take part, thus ensuring a greater diversity of views at the event. Travel was organised by coach to and from the venue, and overnight accommodation was provided for one or two nights (Friday and Saturday), depending on where participants came from, at the University of Warwick.
 - **Process.** Prior to the meeting, from the discussion groups, participants had all attended one of the one day regional workshops, and had been given the 'tasking pack' to complete.

The Summit lasted one and a half days, from 9.30am to 4.15pm on Saturday, and from 10am to 1pm on Sunday. The main elements of the event were:

Day 1:

- Introduction and welcome, and reminder about the purpose of the process
- Plenary presentation (20 minutes) on findings from regional workshops (including the funding criteria) and reflections on what has happened so far, followed by plenary discussion, and a plenary exercise to cluster the funding criteria developed at the regional workshops
- Small group discussions to refine and define the criteria, and deciding on the factors for prioritising 'real world' energy research projects, followed by plenary feedback by participants
- Plenary introduction, with introductions to 'experts' attending, followed by small group discussions on allocating an energy research budget of £100 million using the criteria they had discussed earlier. The 'experts' acted as 'advisers' to the groups during these discussions, moving between groups as the exercise continued (continued after lunch). Groups were also asked to identify their 'news headlines from 2050', to illustrate the outcome of their spending decisions.
- Plenary for groups to feedback their funding decisions and rationale.
- Question and answer session with 'experts'.

Day 2:

- Reflections on previous day's activities
- Plenary to introduce the next exercise to consider the impact of a set of four scenarios on the criteria they had developed earlier. These scenarios were: big is beautiful, making do, small is suitable and industrial revolution. There was then a further short question and answer session with 'experts'.
- Each of four groups took one scenario each and considered the advantages and disadvantages of the scenario.
- Final plenary session with feedback from group work on scenarios, and final questions. In response to a request from participants, there was also a short presentation from one of the experts on climate change, followed by a question and answer session.

- **Recording and reporting.** As with the regional workshops, detailed notes were taken by Ipsos MORI using laptops as well as comments recorded on flip charts where appropriate during group work. Audio recordings were made of all plenary and small group discussions to be used as back up to fill gaps in other notes and materials.

The findings from the whole process of engagement were presented in a single report by Ipsos MORI to Research Councils UK. A draft report was presented in July 2007, revised in August 2007 and a final report was presented in early October 2007. This report was also circulated to all participants which they received (after delays caused by postal strikes) in November 2007.

5.3 The effectiveness and value of the Summit

The assessment that follows is based on observation of the Summit, informal interviews with participants, and analysis of a questionnaire that was circulated to all participants. Interviews were carried out with 6 participants, and interviews with those in Research Councils UK and Ipsos MORI responsible for the process also covered this event. Interviews with experts and Advisory Group members also fed into the analysis below.

5.3.1 General feedback

Questionnaires were distributed to all participants at the Summit (30) and 27 were returned, which provides a good sample for analysis. A full analysis of the findings is given in Appendix 2, but the overall results in summary are outlined below.

This analysis shows similarly positive feedback from participants to that from the regional workshops. In general, the participants enjoyed this experience, and said they were more likely to want to get involved in future such events as a result, which shows a positive attitude to their involvement here. They learnt a lot and the experience helped clarify their thinking. They could understand and use the information provided and found it fair and balanced.

Overall:

- 100% (27) of respondents to this question were satisfied with the event overall; of these, 89% (24) were **very satisfied**. No-one at all was dissatisfied.
- 100% (27) were satisfied with the way the weekend event was run; of these, 74% (20) were **very satisfied**. Again, no-one at all was dissatisfied.
- 93% (25) were satisfied with the information provided; of these, 74% (20) were **very satisfied**. 2 people (7%) were uncertain.
- 100% (27) said they were more likely to get involved in these sorts of events as a result of attending this one; 59% strongly agreed this was the case.

These results are even more positive than at the discussion groups, which were themselves fairly positive. They do show a high level of participant satisfaction with the process overall.

In more detail, the findings from the participants questionnaire responses were:

- 100% (27) agreed that they had enjoyed taking part; 63% (17) strongly agreed
- 92% (25) agreed that they had learnt something they did not know before; 59% (16) strongly agreed; 2 were uncertain
- 92% (25) of participants agreed that all participants were treated equally and respectfully; 59% (16) strongly agreed
- 82% of participants (22) agreed that no single view was allowed to dominate unfairly; 41% (11) strongly agreed

From observation, these findings certainly reflected the general level of enthusiasm and energy that participants invested in the discussions. There was no sense that they were going through the motions for their incentive fee and expenses. There was a good quality of discussion, questioning and engagement with the issues as participants worked to understand and discuss the issues.

Strength of agreement was less evident on some other issues:

- Although overall 78% (21) agreed that they were able to say everything that they wanted to; only 22% (6) of these strongly agreed, plus 6 were uncertain.
- There was uncertainty that the structure of the event enabled participants to fully discuss the issues properly. Although overall 74% agreed that the structure had enabled the discussions, only 18% (6) of these agreed strongly, plus 3 were uncertain, and 4 disagreed (1 disagreed strongly).
- There was also a lack of clarity about the purpose of each activity. Again although 78% overall agreed that there was clarity, only 22% (6) of these agreed strongly, plus 4 were uncertain and 2 disagreed.
- There was less expectation here than at the regional workshops that Research Councils UK would take these discussions into account in deciding on future energy research: 56% agreed but only 15% (4) of these agreed strongly, plus 10 were uncertain and 2 disagreed.

This feedback shows that some participants were unclear or uncertain about the specific activities, and there was not strong agreement that the structure had enabled participants to fully discuss the issues. Some were uncertain that they could say what they wanted and there was less expectation than in the regional workshops that Research Councils UK would take account of these discussions in making future decisions.

5.3.2 What worked best

The elements of the Summit process that the public participants, Advisory Group and expert speakers valued most were:

- **Working in small groups and talking with other participants:** 20 of the 27 public participant questionnaire respondents (74%) felt that this way of working was the most rewarding and interesting. In addition, 6 respondents (22%) identified this as the best aspect of the event in answer to an open question.

In addition, 9 participants (33%) identified meeting others with a range of views, and listening to others, was the best aspect of the event in answer to an open question. And 6 respondents (22%) identified meeting others and hearing different views as the most important benefit to them personally. Comments on what worked best in terms of participants working together included:

"Interacting with different people and learning so much" (questionnaire response)

"Hearing wide range of views and expert information and discussions" (questionnaire response)

"Getting views from other people, from different backgrounds, around the UK" (questionnaire response)

"Meeting and exchanging opinions with other group members" (questionnaire response)

"It was a safe environment in which to get my feelings out, which was very helpful" (participant interviewee).

"It was heart-warming in a way - people have turned into robots but when you give them a chance to sit down and talk they really open up and reach their own insights" (participant interviewee).

"The people there were genuinely 'off the street' and they enjoyed it. I was surprised at how many of them were engaged. One or two were overly dominating but they weren't allowed to affect things too much. People started off with little information, but the all the fundamental questions were coming out. The event made the participants think about the issues" (expert speaker interviewee)

- **Learning.** As with the regional workshops, learning was seen by public participant respondents as an important benefit. It was seen as the most important benefit for participants personally in taking part in the workshop, with 11 participants identifying it (41%) in answer to an open question. Comments included:

"Learning more about types of research" (questionnaire response)

"I got answers and a clear understanding of energy research" (questionnaire response)

"Being able to hear the views of people who make decisions on energy and the environment" (questionnaire response)

"It certainly made me more aware of the need to do more research in order to supply the energy needs of the future" (public participant interviewee)

"Learning more about the research being done, how the money is currently being spent and listening to people's attitudes" (public participant interviewee).

Even those participants with quite strong criticisms of the Summit agreed that they had learned from it:

"I enjoyed the weekend and I did learn, but it didn't change my viewpoints. It is the methodology I'm very concerned about but they can change that for next time, and I hope there will be another time" (public participant interviewee).

- **Listening to the experts:** 11 of the 27 respondents said that listening to the experts was the most rewarding and interesting way of working. Within this, the respondents thought that the most useful contribution from the experts was (some chose more than one option):
 - Answering specific questions (16 respondents identified this)
 - Taking part in small group discussions (11 respondents)
 - Presentations to the whole group (8 respondents)

In addition, 5 respondents (19%) identified information and clarification from experts as the best aspect of the event in answer to an open question.

Although this had not originally been planned as part of the process, the facilitators were flexible enough to respond to the requests of the participants to continue what had been envisaged as just an introduction to the 'experts'. This opportunity lifted the mood of the meeting and opened up discussion on a range of issues which had not been fully expressed before and was a very positive addition to the design of the process overall.

In particular, the organisers provided space, in response to a request from participants, for one of the experts (Jon Gibbins) to give a brief explanatory presentation on Sunday morning on climate change, followed by questions and answers. From questionnaire feedback, observation and organiser feedback, this worked very well indeed and provided a shared knowledge base for later discussions which included consideration of climate change issues - participants mentioned that this presentation helped reduce doubt and scepticism that climate change was happening and that it was influenced by human activity.

From observation, the opportunities to question the 'experts', both on the Saturday afternoon and the Sunday morning after the presentation on climate change, were very popular and highly valued by the participants, and worked very well.

Public participant interviewees clearly valued the input from the experts highly overall. Comments included:

"The best sessions were the ones at Warwick where the academics set the scene" (public participant interviewee).

"[The information] was very good and the experts were very approachable. They gave a clear picture and I was not limited in what I could ask them ... The one with the most technical knowledge was available throughout and listened to everyone whatever they had to say without judging them - that really helped me with the learning process" (public participant interviewee).

"The question and answer session with the experts worked well. It was interactive and engaging and allowed people to enter into the debate. A real effort was made to be objective and explain different views" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It was interesting how 'hungry' the public participants were for information. It was good to have experts there, but we could have had a stronger mix of academics and perhaps left more time for discussion or question and answer between the public and the experts. There was an improvised session of this kind on the day but it could have been better" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

From observation, the diversity of views from the experts helped open up the potential for questions and issues for debate. This was also mentioned by one of the expert speakers in interview, who said *"Make sure that you have experts with different views because this gives 'permission' to the participants to express their own differences"* (expert speaker interviewee).

There was also some positive feedback about the information provided by the facilitators. One public participant interviewee said *"I was most impressed by the knowledge of the MORI people - they had done their homework and helped to make it understandable"* (participant interviewee).

There were some suggestions from respondents that, because this worked well, it could be used more in future engagement processes. For example:

"It might have been better to have had a more even distribution of experts. We should have thought through the role the experts were to play more clearly" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

In summary, both observation and the feedback above suggests that the involvement of expert speakers worked very well, both in terms of holding impromptu question and answer sessions and in the role the experts played in supporting the discussions in small groups and in fully engaging in dialogue with the public. This was seen by some respondents (especially Advisory Group member interviewees) as an element of public engagement that could be developed and used even more effectively in future.

- **The exercise on allocating budgets.** This was the single most popular exercise with questionnaire respondents: 12 respondents (44%) identified this as the most useful and interesting activity at the Summit.

The success of this activity was also noted by some other respondents:

"The exercise I found most illuminating was where groups were asked to allocate the then £70 million energy research budget to different possible research projects. Watching my group unhesitatingly throw out nuclear fusion for its capacity to consume enormous funds, and biofuels because they had watched David Attenborough lamenting the loss of orangutans to palm oil plantations on TV the night before was very interesting indeed! ... the group I was with was very confident with their decision making. I was surprised that they took quite an ethical stance: they were trying to be both green and practical at the same time, and I thought they made a good job of it ... The budget allocation session was outstanding - it went to the heart of the matter. I'm not sure what information they had, but they brought this information together with their ethics to shape their decision-making. I'm not sure how other groups played out, but in this one the ethical stance was notable" (expert speaker interviewee).

"The exercise involving allocation of funds between different projects worked pretty well. This produced very rich results and could have been given more time. We could have spent more time developing the results of this exercise further" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

In summary, from observation and feedback from respondents, the budget allocation exercise worked very well in terms of gaining enthusiastic engagement from participants, and in creating useful outputs for Research Councils UK and others. This was a clear task which participants understood, and to which they could bring all the information they had been given, their previous work in this and the previous workshop on developing criteria, and their own insights and experience to bear. This task clearly worked well to develop some in depth deliberative engagement among participants.

- **Restoring faith in public institutions.** The public participants did value the experience of being consulted in this process, and the main lesson that emerged from the interviews with participants was simply to 'do it more'. Comments included:

"Involve the public in more issues, because the public would feel less disenfranchised if you did. ... It was certainly a very interesting experience and has restored to a certain extent my faith in the Government. At least if the Research Councils are doing this kind of thing then they can push the Government to take more notice of the public" (participant interviewee).

Although restoring faith in public institutions was not an objective of the process, it is interesting to note the public enthusiasm for being involved in consultation. It is also interesting to note the extent to which this relatively small and specific consultation can increase public willingness to believe in public bodies' willingness to consult and listen to the public. This is borne out by the more general feedback (above) that people from both parts of the process (the regional workshops and the Summit) were more likely to want to be involved in future as a result of their involvement in this process.

- **Feedback to participants.** Here again, as from the regional workshops, interviewees from the Summit appreciated receiving the report on the process. Comments included:

"The mere fact that those involved have had follow-up speaks well of the process" (participant interviewee).

"It was very good. Another good thing was that the promises were kept. For example they said they would send out the report and they did, a very nicely bound copy" (participant interviewee).

This process did provide good and timely feedback to the participants, and the feedback here shows the importance of such feedback to the views of participants of the quality of the process overall.

Although not specifically requested by participants, it is often seen as good practice in public engagement exercises to also let participants know the final outcome of their involvement. In this case, that would be a further report back to participants on the final decisions taken by Research Councils UK, and the extent to which those decisions were influenced (however broadly) by the input from the public.

- **Listening to public views.** The process worked well to gather public views on energy issues. There was a slight problem in maintaining the focus on energy research, but policy users felt that there was value in the process in terms of finding out what people think about energy. Comments included:

"The real information came from listening to people: we need to understand what people are thinking and we learned that from talking to them. The MORI report is rather dry, it is not an engaging thing to read. A report is not going to be engaging because it has to include all the information about what happened" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The value of the process is in the text and what people said" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The public stayed engaged with the subject throughout. This was very important to the process" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"Actually hearing what people said was much more useful than reading the report, although it is also more difficult to feed outputs in this form into decision-making" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It would have been useful if some members of the Scientific Advisory Committee had been there ... it would have been useful to have engaged others in this" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"I came away thinking 'what a lot of sensible people'" (expert speaker interviewee).

This feedback suggests, and observation of other similar events supports this, that listening directly and in person to the public deliberations was as valuable to those who would be using the outputs of the process as any final report. The value of actually 'being there' was recognised by Research Councils UK, which had invited relevant individuals to take part (including the Scientific Advisory Committee), but none of them had been able to attend. It was also explicitly mentioned by at least one Advisory Group member, who suggested that other potential users of policy outputs would find it useful to attend any future such events to hear public views first hand.

- **Value to decision-making.** The feedback from participants at the Summit was less positive about the level of impact they thought their input would have on final decisions by the Research Councils than the feedback from participants at the regional workshops. However, to some extent, participants expected and even welcomed this limited influence as they felt they were still learning about the issues.

There was also considerable feedback from Advisory Group members about the level of influence of the results of the public deliberations. For example:

"A lot of what came out confirms or re-affirms what we are already doing – it didn't suggest radically changing things. This is a valuable outcome in itself, to know that we're using the right criteria and so on" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It was important that we exposed ourselves and opened ourselves to scrutiny. We now know that the public does have views on this" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The output from this is more general than the input we usually get from other sources. The usefulness of this is more as underpinning evidence, providing checks and balances rather than specific information" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"We got useful information on some criteria, e.g. equity. At the moment we don't explicitly apply that criterion. These results are important but we need to set them alongside the views of others, e.g. of the scientific stakeholders" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"[The main value of public engagement is] Legitimacy. We're spending public money so we need the public's views on what we're doing. There are some lessons about how we could spend our money. There's also the question of communication: there is clearly the potential to do more. It is clear that it is possible to engage" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It is helping us to think through our reasons for funding different kinds of research and to sharpen up the justification for what we're doing ... We were realistic that we were unlikely to get input [from the public] that could sit alongside policy documents. We weren't expecting definitive results [but] ... it has enriched the RCUK's decision making" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It won't hugely change what we do. There is nothing that came out of the process that suggested that we should. It's provided some input on time scales and the balance of funding: for example, fusion requires long term research while research in other areas could provide results in 3 – 4 years. We know this but we tend to explain our portfolio mix in different terms" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The research was done for RCUK but its findings still had to be interpreted to make them relevant to the Research Councils. We know what people think about energy. It is difficult to know what the public thinks about spending public money on research into energy" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The results won't tell us what we should do in terms of spending. It will provide views about what concerns people have about energy. It will also provide reassurance that there weren't strong views coming out against the research councils' approach ... It provides useful background ... It shouldn't be used directly because it doesn't give that kind of information" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

From this feedback it seems that the real value of this public engagement exercise to Research Councils UK's decision was around confirming existing knowledge and approaches as it did not provide any completely new ideas or insights. It also suggests that involving the public does provide legitimacy and helps decision-makers sharpen up justifications for final decisions. The feedback does suggest a level of disappointment among the Advisory Group that there was not more of substance from the public deliberations that could be used. However, a complete consensus among the public participants was never expected or sought, and the process did generate a good diversity of views.

Interview feedback also suggests that the close involvement in the process of decision-makers (in this case, Research Councils UK's Energy Programme Co-ordination Group) was vital to maximising value. To some extent, the greater the involvement of decision-makers, the more value the

process was able to deliver to them. In this case, members of the project Advisory Group and other Research Councils UK decision-makers attended events and listened closely to public discussions, and the report of the findings from the public deliberations was considered by Research Councils UK's Scientific Advisory Committee and the Energy Programme Co-ordination Group.

The process did clearly provide some important insights to Research Councils UK on the most important criteria for the public in making decisions about energy research (e.g. ethical issues especially equity). The main value seems to be in terms of providing underpinning evidence, checks and balances to existing and developing views and approaches within Research Councils UK, rather than indicating any need for radical changes. This is of significant value to decision-makers as they can continue their future planning and decision-making based on a real knowledge of public opinion on the issues.

- **Learning about public engagement.** It was clear that public participants, expert speakers and others all learned about public engagement processes from participating in this process (as did the evaluator). Comments included:

"We've got to think about what came out of this and how we can do engagement in the future. A deliberative process may not always be the right approach. An alternative might be to have a standing panel to inform the research councils, with public participants who would change every two years (otherwise they would stop being representative). Other new approaches which need to be discussed might be to have lay members on the Research Councils [or] to hold open meetings. The Research Councils may need to commission some research on this" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"We have to give credit to the Research Councils. They've done their best to engage everyone ... We've learnt a lot in the process" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It was a very good attempt. Ipsos did some useful exercises. But the process raises questions about how you can talk to the public about research - the Research Councils need to sit down and think these through" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"I benefited from seeing the level of engagement with the subject and the extent to which people were prepared to engage with the subject of funding as well as with the topic of energy itself. It dissipated some concerns that the public wouldn't be able to engage. Participants made some thoughtful contributions on the criteria" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It was a bit of a learning experience for all" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

Interview feedback also suggests that this type of process is relatively new for many energy researchers, and that being involved had been extremely useful in understanding the potential (and limits) to public engagement, as well as gaining insights into public opinion on priorities for energy research.

It was also suggested that some energy researchers may have little time to fully consider the social and ethical dimensions of their work, and this process provided a valuable opportunity to consider such matters in direct dialogue with ordinary members of the public.

Overall, therefore, the process was a very useful learning process for all those involved, with some important lessons for any future public engagement activities.

5.3.3 What worked less well

- **The tasking pack.** Only 2 of the questionnaire respondents identified the tasking pack as the most rewarding and interesting way of working in this process. There was also some quite negative feedback from one respondent:

"The use of homework [the tasking pack] didn't work well (this is really another design issue). Not much use was made of the homework material in the summit nor did it influence the result very much. Some participants at the summit complained that they had had difficulty accessing the websites" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

Although the actual form of the tasking pack was not necessarily ideal, from observation and informal interviews with participants, it is clear that participants did value having something to take away from the regional workshops, and Summit participants had something to refer to between the two events.

The focus on 'tasking' and 'homework' (as it was referred to in some events) was perhaps not ideal as it did encourage the idea that the whole process was about education, and about answering questions, rather than contributing to a longer term deliberative process.

In summary, therefore, it was important and useful to have a resource of this sort to provide a link between the two stages of the process.

- **Recruitment and representation.** There was an issue for this event that the participants were not as demographically diverse as was envisaged. Not only were there twice as many men as women, from observation there also seemed to be largely older and younger people attending, with fewer in their 30s and 40s.

From the feedback to the questionnaires and interviews from participants in the regional workshops, in which respondents mentioned that they would have liked to have attended the Summit but could not manage weekends generally or that particular weekend, it seems that holding the event on both Saturday and Sunday led to parts of the potential sample being excluded (especially women).

The value of an event across an entire weekend was not clear. Given that the participants were all recruited to be located relatively near Warwick, they could have probably still have managed to have travelled to and from the venue within reasonable times of day even if the event had been only one day, or with at most one overnight (possibly Friday). This is likely to have achieved a greater level of diversity of participants, as well as potentially lower costs.

This potential lack of diverse representation is important. Although there was a mix of participants, it was not as diverse as it could have been. This was a problem for some of the participants themselves, but also for some Advisory Group members. Comments included:

"The public were consulted but the sample was extremely small" (public participant interviewee).

"I have a concern that the group was small. One third of the participants pulled out at short notice; these were mainly married women. Maybe the weekend away was difficult for this group of participants. The socio-economic mix was good [but] there seemed to be an awful lot of Guardian readers ... the group was self-selecting. Some people had very specific agendas. I was left with doubts about whether it was representative of public opinion" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"We could have had a better mix of people and given them better preparation ... There were a good number of people [but] the mix was not quite right in terms of gender balance ... I'm not sure how representative they were" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"This is not a quantitative or representative methodology. But having a good spread of people – in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background - is important" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It has to be representative in the sense of having a broad range of participants. But a small event will never be able to be fully representative so we wouldn't expect that" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

It is clear from this feedback that the actual diversity of the participants at the Summit did raise questions in the minds of various Advisory Group members as to whether there was a sufficient mix for robust research. A couple of respondents suggested complementing this sort of deliberative public engagement with more quantitative, survey, work:

"If a body is consulting the public, it needs to use the results with care and not read into them more than is actually there. This kind of event only shows one side of the picture. I would like to see the RCUK also do a large-scale attitudinal survey to provide quantitative information" (expert speaker interviewee).

"[There was a] relatively small number of people involved. This was not a survey. And its also important to remember that the purpose was to understand what people think and why, and not to get numbers. It may have been good to also do a survey" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

Complementing deliberative work with the public with a public opinion poll or other survey work is quite usual, although such an approach clearly adds another layer of cost and data analysis to the process.

- **Balance of time for information input and deliberative discussions.** As in the regional workshops, there were some problems in the balance of time taken for information input and for group discussions (see also section 4.3.4).

6 questionnaire respondents (22%) identified lack of time for discussion as a problem. They mentioned problems including *"Being rushed for answers"* and *"I would have liked longer on some discussions"*. Similar responses were received from public participant interviewees; comments included:

"Generally there was a lack of information and time to absorb the information we were given" (public participant interviewee).

"For the group discussions I don't think the time was long enough" (public participant interviewee).

"The group sessions - there was too much crammed in" (public participant interviewee).

From observation, this lack of time was not because the overall event was too short; rather the reverse. However, timekeeping throughout was not effective, with sessions starting late and running over. One respondent specifically proposed a solution to this problem: *"Possibly the days could have started a bit earlier at say 9.30 so we could finish a bit earlier, or had more time to ask expert questions"*. On the Sunday, this was a particular problem as breakfast had to be finished by 8.30am and the first session of the second day of the Summit was not scheduled to start until 10am, so participants were sitting around waiting.

Overall, therefore, there were some problems both with time management within the design overall, and also with the balance of time given to the public to deliberate among themselves.

There was also a rather more serious impact of the lack of time to absorb and consider the information provided, in that a few interviewees felt that they did not know enough for their views to be taken into account in decision making in some areas, particularly around the issues discussed in the morning of the first day. One said: *"[We] began hoping that our input wouldn't be that influential as we were still learning about the subject"* (participant interviewee).

This was also noticed by one of the expert speakers interviewed, who said *"[there was] some frustration among the participants in that several were saying in the morning that they just didn't have enough information to make the right decisions and they were hoping RCUK wouldn't take their views too seriously"* (expert interviewee).

The basic premise of deliberative public engagement is that it requires information to be introduced to the public, so that they can develop their understanding of the issues they are discussing together.

Finding the right balance of time and effort between introducing information and supporting people to discuss the issues among themselves is difficult. From observation and feedback from interviews, in this case the balance seems to have been not quite appropriate - with possibly a little too much time spent giving information and not quite enough time for discussion.

This imbalance can lead to confusion about the overall purpose of the process - and the extent to which it is primarily about public education, and how much it is about public engagement. One Advisory Group identified this specific problem:

"They should have avoided confusion about the aim: was it to educate or to establish the degree to which the participants had concerns about energy research? ... Ipsos tried to combine education with feedback - there was too much to cover to get any meaningful feedback" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

- **Lack of clarity about the links between some activities within the process.** As has been outlined above, the feedback from the questionnaire respondents was that although the majority of respondents were clear about the purpose of each activity (78%), only 22% (6) of those agreed strongly, plus 4 were uncertain and 2 disagreed. There was also some uncertainty that the structure of the event overall enabled participants to fully discuss the issues properly. Again, although 74% agreed that the structure had enabled the discussions, only 18% (6) of these agreed strongly, plus 3 were uncertain, and 4 disagreed (1 disagreed strongly).

There was also a sense from some interviewees that too much complexity was introduced to the discussion groups, and too much was expected from the groups, without sufficient guidance and signposting so that participants always knew what they were supposed to be doing and how it fitted in with the overall plan for the event. Comments included:

"Some group discussion tasks were too complex / detailed to handle successfully" (public participant interviewee).

"The summit tried to cover complex issues in a short time. The groups weren't able to focus ... A problem was that the public didn't grasp the [discussion groups] logic: they seemed to see it as a sequence of disconnected events" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"During some discussions we would have 10 - 15 individual concepts all together on the wall, which was too much ... [the information] was generally useful but it was too detailed and too much to assimilate" (public participant interviewee).

From observation, the problems of the complexity of the Summit process, and the number of issues introduced, were compounded by the lack of written information for participants. One said *"It would have been nice to get a pack prior to the weekend outlining the tasks and objectives ... hard copy of the programme, tasks, timelines and so on"* (public participant interviewee).

There were also problems with some specific activities provided for the participants, particularly the work on scenarios:

"Giving scenarios to each group of participants in the morning exercise didn't work. There was a bit of confusion about how to use the scenarios ... this was the exercise on the first day, but it didn't work well. Participants lost their focus on the criteria for decision making in the course of the exercise. There was no opportunity to go back to the criteria later on. Not all of the exercise was completed so we lost some planned outcomes such as looking at the "what ifs" in small groups and considering different scenarios. There was some confusion about the purpose of the scenarios" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

From observation, there was the same variation of experience and knowledge in facilitating the small groups that was observed (and remarked on by participants) at the regional workshops, which meant that some tasks were not completed as quickly or effectively by participants as they could have been. This was reflected in several comments including:

"The facilitation was a bit variable from group to group" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"Some facilitators were better than others" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"Some of the group discussions were not well structured. In one particular discussion it took us a long time to get to what we were actually trying to get to - there wasn't strong leadership" (public participant interviewee).

"The group sessions [were what worked least well] - a combination of time, structure and in some cases the way they were managed" (public participant interviewee).

"Some of the preparation and execution was deficient ... The standard of facilitation was very variable. Some of the facilitators 'lost it' and let the discussion veer off the point ... some of the groups didn't come to an agreement or even establish their differences ... the session on allocating budget had clear outputs but the other sessions didn't. They didn't bottom out the discrepancies between people" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

All public engagement processes will use facilitators with a range of skills and experience. In this case there were some excellent facilitators but also a few facilitators who were not able to support their groups and enable them to fully contribute to the process.

- **Recording and reporting.** As with the regional workshops, the general approach to recording and reporting the views and conclusions of the public at the event by Ipsos MORI was generally very good.

However, there was also some lack of clarity (and some suspicion) among participant interviewees about how the information collected at the event would be used, and about the effectiveness of the methods to collect the information. Comments included:

"I did get the report but I would like to have know exactly what they were looking for and at what level it will be used." (participant interviewee)

"I don't know what the ramifications of our input are" (participant interviewee)

"There is an issue with regard to methodology and people being cut off, and I don't think the people running it had the time or the skill to pick up on what people were saying. For example, sometimes things would be stated and used from the facilitator's perspective rather than them clarifying what people actually meant - I think this over-simplified people's responses" (participant interviewee).

There were also some specific criticisms of the draft Ipsos MORI report of the process from Advisory Group members, including:

"I was disappointed with the [draft] Ipsos MORI] report ... The written version doesn't give a good sense of the richness of the event ... The report struggles to capture differences between views and gives the impression of consensus, but I'm not sure that there was that consensus. The 'summary' doesn't always reflect the day. The final version is much better and more accurate" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"Quite a bit of time needs to be spent interpreting or translating the results. Ipsos MORI's style is to focus on the topline headings and this is what they did with the report. We had to spend quite a bit of time on improving the report" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

It is always very difficult for a report of a process of human interaction to fully reflect the richness of all the conversations that take place. In this case, there were some specific problems with the initial draft reports, although these were revised and the final versions are seen to be much improved. This does suggest, however, that written reports can only ever be one form of feedback to decision-makers and process commissioners, and that some direct involvement in the process (e.g. attending events) will add significant value for them.

- **Lack of clarity of focus on research.** Feedback, particularly from the Advisory Group members interviewed, suggests that the engagement process focused more on energy issues than energy research. However, all materials and programming was discussed in advance and, in practice (from observation and participant feedback - see section 4.3.2), the emphasis in discussions was largely focused on energy research. Nevertheless, Advisory Group members clearly felt the emphasis was not entirely what they hoped for or expected. Comments included:

"We need meaningful feedback. In this case it would have been comments on why certain kinds of research are more important and reasons for investing in different kinds of research" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It was difficult to get people talking about energy research. The design didn't make the focus clear enough and the Ipsos team didn't insist enough on this focus. The team should have insisted - or else thrown their planned timetable out of the window and tried something else to get the workshop on course" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The facilitators play a crucial role in getting results. Some were more impressive than others ... keeping the focus on research required exceptionally strong facilitation and not all the facilitators managed that ... The discussion did not provide evidence about people's views on research, it provided evidence of their views about energy" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"The experts were appreciated by the members of the public. But they didn't help with the questions about research. They could have been asked to contribute to that, perhaps by giving a description of how they go about their research, what it involves" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It didn't deliver any new insights. I had hoped to get insights but the participants were less well informed than I expected, though they were concerned ... I went into it with a genuine desire to get some insights. But it was disappointing. Some form of public engagement is critical. But not this form" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"It was a very good attempt. Ipsos did some useful exercises. But the process raises questions about how you can talk to the public about research - the Research Councils need to sit down and think these through" (Advisory Group member).

"I'm not sure that there is an answer to the problem about the poor quality of the discussion in relation to research. The discussion did not provide evidence about people's views on research, it provided evidence of their views about energy ... The research was done for RCUK but its findings still had to be interpreted to make them relevant to the Research Councils. We know what people think about energy. It is difficult to know what the public thinks about spending public money on research into energy ... The results won't tell us

what we should do in terms of spending. It will provide views about what concerns people have about energy. It will also provide reassurance that there weren't strong views coming out against the research councils' approach ... It provides useful background" (Advisory Group member).

As mentioned above, from observation and feedback from participants, the views above do not entirely reflect the experience of participants. The participants seemed clear that they were talking about energy research and not just energy issues.

However, it is difficult to separate public discussions about energy and energy research because the priority that people give to certain energy research projects are likely to be at least in part due to their views on the energy source itself (e.g. if people are anti-nuclear power, they are likely to be anti-nuclear power research). It was a very difficult task to design a deliberative process that would focus specifically on energy research, and that would be meaningful to the public. Feedback from the Advisory Group member interviewees reflected on these difficulties and suggested some ways forward, including:

"Some people don't grasp the concept of research. This does take a long time because there are so many variables. It would have been better to have focused on a particular area, for example how much money should go into research on renewables given that we have to maintain existing research programmes?" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

"Perhaps you could get better feedback by having a discussion about what research to discontinue" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

Two Advisory Group members concluded that the best approach was to focus in future not on the general public but on those who are already engaged in considering the issues:

"I've come away wondering what we are trying to do and whether we should just go away and consult people who are engaged?" (Advisory Group member interviewee)

"The process has made me wonder whether we would get a more useful input if we went to an informed section of the public like the NGOs, rather than trying to engage with the general public" (Advisory Group member interviewee).

From experience of other stakeholder and public engagement projects, it is acknowledged that working with NGOs and other engaged 'publics' could potentially provide a more knowledgeable view on energy research priorities. However, such an approach would not deliver what this process did - which was a sense of the issues that concern the public around energy research (and energy issues more generally).

Gaining such a sense of public enthusiasms and concerns is essential if the purpose of the process is some degree of public accountability and legitimacy for decisions about public money. It is this outcome that provides the overall value of the exercise for bodies like Research Councils UK. One expert speaker made this point:

"It was successful but not necessarily for what it was intended, i.e. for setting priorities for energy research. It was valuable as a way of looking at what people think ... Public engagement is hugely important. The Research Councils should go on doing it; more money should be spent on it" (expert speaker interviewee).

5.4 Overall conclusions on the reconvened Summit

Overall, as is clear from the questionnaire feedback above (section 5.3.1), the participants enjoyed and appreciated the process. This was borne out by further feedback from interviews with public participants from the Summit. One indication of the participants' enthusiasm is that 24 out of 27 of questionnaire respondents (89%) said it is important to involve the public in discussing the future of energy research; 18 of these (67%) thought it very important.

Essentially, the use of the Summit to bring together the key strands of the work from the regional workshops, especially the continued development of the public's criteria for setting energy research priorities, worked well.

There was also significant learning for participants about the issues in energy research, and for all those involved in the events about public engagement - as well as an opportunity for researchers to explore the social and ethical dimensions of their work in dialogue with the public. Public engagement is still relatively new to many energy researchers, and this process provided a valuable learning opportunity. Public participants particularly valued the opportunities to learn from each other, and to listen to and work with the experts / researchers, they enjoyed the exercise on allocating budgets, were pleased to receive Ipsos MORI's final report, and to some extent felt their faith in public institutions was restored simply by being asked for their views.

The expert speakers and project Advisory Group valued listening to the public views directly, and valued the input to decision-making - although the public views did not necessarily tell them anything new, they were able to know that their future decisions could take account of real knowledge of actual public opinion on these issues - providing greater confidence and legitimacy for future decisions.

Qualitative participant feedback (in questionnaires, interviews and informal interviews at the event) was both more positive and more critical about the Summit than about the original workshops. This may have been because they were expecting more from the Summit and were thus disappointed, although from observation there were more difficulties with the Summit design and delivery than with the workshops.

For example, the overall design of the Summit was not always clear and understandable to the participants (or observers) as the event progressed, and more signposting in plenary and small group discussions may have helped. In addition, the quality of facilitation of the small group discussions varied, with some excellent facilitators who motivated and supported the groups to have valuable discussions but also some who lacked the full set of skills and experience to manage their group discussions effectively. Some variation in the abilities of facilitators is always to be expected, but the complexity of issues around energy research perhaps required a particularly high quality of facilitation to enable effective discussions.

There were also some problems with representation and diversity at the Summit. The event did not attract sufficient participants to gain a sufficiently diverse sample of backgrounds and views (with more than twice as many men as women, and only 30 participants in total compared to a target of 45).

Overall, the Summit did contribute to meeting the Research Councils UK's objectives for the process. However, feedback from participants and the project Advisory Group members, suggests that it was also something of a missed opportunity to get the most from some knowledgeable, enthusiastic and interested public participants, as well as a good selection of 'experts', to provide valuable research findings on public views on energy research.

6. Assessment of activities against overall aim

6.1 Introduction

The aim for the overall process was as follows:

To identify public priorities for energy research to inform the Research Councils' strategic decision-making. This addition to the current stakeholder input streams will increase accountability for the direction of Research Council-funded energy research.

6.2 Assessment against overall aim

Key elements of the overall aim	How each element of the overall aim has been met
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify public priorities for energy research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The process did identify public priorities for energy research by articulating criteria generated by the public participants, and using those criteria to establish high, medium and low priorities in a range of different contexts and scenarios.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public priorities inform the Research Councils strategic decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public priorities have been reported on by Ipsos MORI and will be considered by various committees and groups within Research Councils as they make strategic decisions on the future of energy research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase accountability for the direction of Research Council-funded energy research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The process enabled a public discussion of the current Research Councils UK categories of energy research The public were provided with information on energy issues and energy research to enable them to deliberate on priorities for energy research in future The public were thus able to consider the relevance and criteria for future energy research and feed those into Research Councils UK Members of the project Advisory Group and other Research Councils UK decision-makers attended events and listened closely to the public discussions The report of the findings from the process was considered by Research Councils UK's Energy Programme Co-ordination Group to enable them to understand public opinions on these issues, as part of their work to set

	<p>priorities for future energy research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research Councils UK's Scientific Advisory Committee also considered the report of findings and found it valuable to learn more about public views• Accountability has been achieved by Research Councils UK considering and taking account of the public input in their decisions on the direction of their funding of energy research.
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6.3 Conclusion on achievement of overall aim

The brief analysis of the elements of the overall aim of the process above suggests that the aim has clearly been achieved overall.

7. Lessons for the future

7.1 Introduction

This section summarises some of the main lessons from the evaluation, across the whole public engagement process. Each of the preceding sections also identifies lessons from the specific activity covered in that section.

7.2 What worked well

- **The process worked well for participants.** Overall the participants were very satisfied with the process and the way it was run. It engaged people effectively overall and the participants felt the process was enjoyable, educational and worthwhile. Participants particularly enjoyed and valued talking to and listening to each other, as well as hearing from specific 'expert' speakers.
- **Recording participant views.** Overall, the process for recording the views of participants during the two stages of the process (the regional workshops and the Summit) worked well. A mix of flip charts, note takers who were separate from the facilitators (so that note taking did not disrupt the facilitation of the participants' discussions), and audio recording of both plenary and small groups discussions provided a very thorough record of the participants' deliberations.
- **Informal and relaxed atmosphere.** Participants commented on the ability of the facilitators to make the public feel relaxed and able to express their views in a safe environment.
- **Specific group activity to develop criteria and to allocate budgets.** At the Summit and the regional workshops, exercises were used to provide information and then support small groups of participants to develop their own criteria for deciding on energy research priorities and then to allocate a given research budget. This budget allocation work was the most popular activity among participants, and provided clear outputs for the final report and for decision-makers attending the events.
- **Input from experts.** The involvement of experts in a range of specialist subjects at the Summit was highly valued by participants, and worked very well to open up and stimulate debate. The plenary open question and answer session with a panel of expert speakers worked very well, and so did the use of experts sitting in on small group discussions and acting as 'advisers' to the public deliberations.
- **Learning.** There are two aspects to this:
 - **Learning among participants.** Participants provided feedback that they had learned a great deal from the process, especially about energy research and the levels of funding for that research.
 - **Learning among other stakeholders.** Feedback from expert speakers and members of the Advisory Group who attended the Summit clearly indicated that they felt they had learned some significant lessons about public engagement from the process.

- **Feedback to participants.** Participants highly valued being sent the final report by Ipsos MORI on the results of the public discussions. Interviewees saw receipt of the report as fulfilling a promise that had been made, and this clearly contributed to their positive views about the process overall.
- **Contribution to decision making.** There were few significant new ideas or insights from the process, other than the importance of ethical, particularly equity, issues for the public participants in developing their criteria for assessing energy research projects.

More significantly, the process did clearly provide useful underpinning evidence that confirmed existing knowledge, and contributed to the existing checks and balances used by the Research Councils in its decision-making. This public involvement was therefore seen as providing legitimacy, by asking the public what they thought of the issues the Research Councils are grappling with in making decisions, and helped decision-makers have more confidence in the decisions they make.

7.3 What worked less well

- **Representation and diversity.** The regional workshops largely met their targets overall in terms of overall numbers and gender balance, although there was a slight under representation of people over 60 and those from social groups C2DE. The Summit had less diversity, with twice as many men as women, and only 30 participants from a target of 45. This may have been because it was held over a whole weekend.

While the aim of the recruitment was never to obtain a demographically representative sample of the UK population as a whole, it was intended to bring together a diverse group of people from a range of backgrounds, and this was not entirely achieved at the Summit. The group of public participants at the Summit was diverse, but not as diverse or as large as had been expected.

- **Appropriate information.** Public participants at the workshops appreciated the presentations of information that were made by facilitators but also said they would have liked more information in advance (although it is Ipsos MORI's view that this could have biased proceedings), and more information that was directly relevant to the activities and discussions they were undertaking. They also wanted more simple basic handouts that they could refer to throughout their discussions.
- **Balance between information input and deliberative discussions.** Deliberative public engagement is designed to allow for the introduction of sufficient information to support the discussions among the public participants. In this case, there was perhaps too much information for the public participants to absorb and use in the deliberative discussions, and too much time was taken up delivering this information which reduced the time available for deliberative discussions.
- **Variable quality of facilitation.** Some facilitators were excellent, but some lacked the full set of skills and experience to focus the small group discussions sufficiently clearly. Energy research was recognised to be a highly complex and very broad subject area, and perhaps required an even higher than usual level of facilitation skill to enable effective discussions among ordinary members of the public.

- **Lack of clarity about the links between some activities within the process.** The logical progression of how the different activities within the workshops, and particularly at the Summit, related to each other was not always clear. Also, some activities (e.g. the use of scenarios) did not entirely work to stimulate effective discussions, and added to the complexity and confusion. Clearer signposting in plenary sessions and small group discussions by facilitators may have overcome these problems.

7.4 Lessons for the future

From the points above, the process provides some overall lessons for public engagement processes in similar circumstances in future:

- **Ensure that the methods used overall, and the specific activities, are designed to achieve clear and specific aims and objectives.** Develop a detailed design for the process, and specific methods and activities, which enable the purpose to be achieved (whether that is public engagement, public education or a mix of the two). In particular, it is important to find the right balance between information input and time for deliberative discussions among public participants to enable them to come to their own considered views. In this case, there was perhaps slightly too much emphasis on information input, which left less time for deliberative discussions among the public participants.
- **Ensure that the process design and delivery makes best use of the of the public, experts and other stakeholders attending engagement events, and uses these resources effectively so that the public can make the most effective contribution possible.** This requires intense **collaboration** and constant communication both between internal and external staff (including within the commissioning organisation), and with stakeholders. In this case, the involvement of the project Advisory Group (which included some key decision-makers), helped link the design and desired outcomes well. Also, the input of experts to the Summit, and the dialogue they developed with the public participants, worked very well.
- **Provide sufficient different opportunities for public participation to meet the aims and objectives.** A single public engagement process may not provide all the input that is needed to support decision-making. In some cases, a **range of methods** and approaches may be needed to get the maximum diversity of views from different constituencies. In this case, the mix of regional workshops and a reconvened summit worked well; the tasking pack in between was a good idea for bridging the two main elements of the process.
- **Early and full feedback to participants helps build support for the process, and trust in engagement processes generally.** That worked very well in this case.

8. Overall conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This section summarises the conclusions of the evaluation in terms of the value of the process to the various parties in the consultation (public participants, stakeholders, policy makers and more widely), and suggests some overarching conclusions.

8.2 Value for public participants

The two main benefits identified by public participants as having arisen from their involvement in the consultation were learning and influence:

- **Learning.** Public participants identified learning as a major benefit from the process, particularly listening to the experts and gaining other information, sharing their own views and listening to each others' views. They clearly enjoyed taking part and gained a lot from it, as can be seen from their very positive feedback.
- **Influence.** The other key benefit that participants felt the process could provide was influence on final decisions. Participants were realistic about levels of influence but did expect that their views would be listened to, considered and taken into account in decision-making. In this case, participants were clear that the process would only have value if their views were taken into account. For example:

"If the workshop wasn't actually useful for them [Research Councils UK] then it was a waste of time and money for everyone involved ... I would just like to know what next, what's going on now and whether the workshop was actually useful for them." (Oxford participant).

"[Value] really depends on what comes out of it. If it was useful and our input gets used, then yes [it is money well spent], but if it is just a tick box then no" (Birmingham participant interviewee).

8.3 Value for other stakeholders

- **Learning.** Several expert speakers and Advisory Group members said they had learned about public engagement from being involved in this process. The learning was about specific activities and methods for working effectively with the public, and also about the enthusiasm and quality of the discussions among the public themselves even on very complex issues.
- **Opportunities for dialogue.** Expert speakers and Advisory Group members clearly valued the opportunities for talking to and listening to members of the public. It was also noted that some energy researchers may have few opportunities to discuss the social and ethical dimensions of their work, and this provided a valuable opportunity to discuss these issues in direct dialogue with the public.

8.4 Value for Research Councils UK's decision makers

The main value of the consultation process for those in Research Councils UK responsible for decision making on future priorities for funding was providing some guidance on public opinion on issues of energy policy. This provided two specific benefits for the quality of their decision:

- **Confidence.** The consultation process and its outputs increased the confidence with which they could take future decisions, as they were reassured that they understood public opinion more fully and were clear that these views did not contradict their own existing views and expectations. The value to decision makers was therefore in providing underpinning evidence, checks and balances to their own existing and developing views.
- **Legitimacy and accountability.** The willingness of Research Councils UK to open up their decision-making processes to include feedback on public opinion was designed to provide an additional level of legitimacy and accountability, to complement their work with institutional and academic stakeholders. One expert speaker said:

"You need a public mandate for spending public money. The results were reliable, obtained in robust ways and meaningful. People felt that they were being engaged in meaningful ways and had enough information to be able to engage" (expert speaker interviewee).

8.5 Final conclusions

Developing effective public engagement processes on a very broad, technical and complex topic such as energy research was expected and proved to be a major challenge. Unlike topics such as health or diet, public participants cannot easily draw on their own personal knowledge and experience and thus rely more on information provision, which needs to be balanced with time and opportunities for them to explore their thinking together.

Overall, this process met the aims set for it. It has provided a good learning opportunity for all involved, and has delivered some useful outputs on public views on the future of energy research investment, particularly some thoughts on the criteria on which such future decisions could be made that would make them more acceptable in terms of public opinion.

There were some problems with the design and delivery of the process, as identified in this report, but also some useful innovative approaches were developed that provided findings of real value to Research Councils UK's decision-making processes. Overall, the process delivered good value to participants, other stakeholders and policy makers.

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