

A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR GREATER CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT – SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Summary of Responses
8 January 2009

Contents

Introduction	2
Background	3
Summary of Responses	4
Annex A – List of respondents	16

Introduction

1. This document provides a summary of responses to the discussion paper *A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement* issued by the Ministry of Justice in July 2008
2. The comments received broadly fell into a number of key themes and issues.

Historical and Constitutional Context

The historical background and causes of disengagement set out in the document were generally recognised by most respondents, with additional elements such as the functioning of the political system and the behaviour of politicians as well as the changing nature of problems faced, being discussed. The document also elicited some broad points and differing views on the definitions and limits of representative and participative democracy and about how and where decisions should legitimately be taken without undermining the fundamental principles of our political system.

Scope

The majority of respondents sought a broader scope to the document, to go beyond strategic aims and objectives and include practical guidance as part of the framework. Many respondents expressed a desire that the framework be expanded to include good practice from across government and provide a single reference point to access guidance on engaging the public.

Criteria

Comments under this theme largely supported taking a principled approach to ensure effective public engagement. Some additional criteria were proposed which could together be seen as ensuring the legitimacy of the process. These included:

- the need to make clear the degree of influence people would have,
- the need for an independent process,
- the need to take advantage of existing networks and forums hosted by bodies outside government, and;
- the need for professional design and delivery of engagement exercises.

However, over and above specific criteria, many saw a conducive environment, one which was positively open to engagement and involvement, as a necessary prerequisite to successful public engagement.

Methodology and Techniques

The dominant view from respondents was that a tailored approach needed to be taken and as such, many respondents felt that the numerous other engagement mechanisms beyond citizen' summits and juries, should be included to ensure that techniques were chosen which were more appropriate to specific policy issues and circumstances.

However in terms of specific issues or areas, respondents considered that constitutional issues, or long-term, cross-cutting or future issues such as climate change might be most appropriate for deliberative engagement.

Background

3. *A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement* was published as a discussion document in July 2008. It invited comments and discussion on the Government's proposals for a more systemic approach to citizen engagement as part of the national policy-making process.
4. The discussion paper was published alongside the Communities and Local Government White Paper: *Communities in Control*. Both the White Paper and *A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement* aim to increase opportunities for people to take part in decision-making – in their local communities and by influencing national Government.
5. The discussion paper set out a proposed constitutional framework, compatible with the principles of representative democracy, within which national public engagement activities could sit and take strength. It also set out the Government's commitment to explore new methods of involving the public in debates and decision-making on national issues and set out some suggested principles and criteria which would underpin their use.
6. The main proposals within the Framework include:
 - The more systemic use of deliberative engagement techniques such as citizens' summits and juries in national policymaking;
 - The Government's support for a strengthened petitioning facility through which certain petitions might lead to a debate in Parliament.

The Government invited views on:

- draft criteria for how we should engage: on what issues and at what stage in the policy process;
- proposals on the use of citizens' summits including what sorts of issues would benefit from the use of this mechanism and what should be included in any assessment criteria;
- proposals on the use of citizens' juries including what sorts of issues would benefit for the use of this mechanism and what should be included in any assessment criteria;
- a petitioning mechanism for Parliament.

7. Comments were requested by 1 October 2008. An online discussion was also held on the Governance of Britain website between 8 July and 9 October 2008. A total of 27 responses were received, from engagement organisations and consultants, voluntary and community organisations, academics, local authorities and individuals. There were also 22 contributors to the online discussion, making 28 posts between them.
8. The quality of the arguments and ideas in the responses was extremely high and we are most grateful for the thoughtful and well-considered material that was provided to us throughout the process. We are now considering how best to take the ideas expressed in them forward.

Summary of responses

9. The Ministry of Justice received 27 responses to the discussion paper from a variety of perspectives. All responses were detailed submissions, mainly from organisations and individuals with expertise and insight into public engagement theory and practice. A list of respondents can be found at Annex A. There were also 28 posts on the online discussion forum from 22 individual contributors. These responses provided a wealth of qualitative input and evidence to the discussion paper

10. Overall, there was considerable support for the document, the underlying objectives and government's willingness to look at this issue.

"An excellent starting point on the path towards reinvigorating our national level democracy in Britain" [Involve]

"An erudite appraisal of the decline in formal democratic participation in the UK" [Electoral Reform Society]

11. For many, the discussion paper was recognised as a much needed first step. Many also felt that more work needed to follow, particularly in relation to the production of practical guidance, and many respondents kindly offered support and assistance in taking this forward.

12. Finally, respondents referenced lots of good examples of what valuable and innovative engagement with the public looked like. The Government undertakes a huge variety of successful engagement activity and this summary contains some useful case studies which illustrate this good practice.

Historical Context

13. The discussion paper provided an overview of the causes of decreasing engagement in the formal political process and argued that profound changes in the economy, society and technology were creating a new political culture. Respondents built on the document's exposition of the causes behind the current level of disengagement, the challenges set out and proposals identified to address them.

14. Respondents generally supported the Government's analysis of the causes of declining engagement and added issues such as the performance of politicians and the political system and the changing nature of problems that public policy has to address - such as globalisation, the challenges of an ageing population, immigration trends, energy use. These broader causes and influences led one respondent to redefine the issues where public engagement would be suitable to include areas where there is 'profound change' not just constitutional change.

15. Although most respondents supported the use of deliberative engagement as a positive approach to tackling declining engagement, there was some scepticism as to the extent the mechanisms being advanced would lead to more informed participation in the political process.

"They [Citizen's Juries] will not have the same personal interest in a responsible approach and caring about the issues being judged. So what confidence could there be in the process having any meaning?" [Individual]

16. Some respondents highlighted the wealth and vibrancy of *civic* activity in the UK, clearly distinguishing this from more mainstream and formal political engagement, such as through voting, and therefore believed that the overall picture, particularly in relation to engagement through volunteering, campaigning etc., was much more positive.

Constitutional context

17. The discussion paper set out the Government's view that providing more innovative means for the public to participate in the policy and decision making process will assist in re-invigorating and strengthening representative democracy.
18. A number of respondents put forward views on the role of elected representatives and the relationships between representative, participative and direct democracies: some respondents welcomed the explicit links made in the paper between representative and participative structures of democracy, arguing that this would encourage interaction between decision-makers and public by bringing them into face-to-face contact. In terms of where decision-making should lie, some responses took the view that it was the role of elected representatives to take decisions whereas others found the balance of power in terms of initiating engagement exercises far too weighted towards government.

'On issues where competing priorities and needs are to be assessed, representatives elected to represent the views of their constituents or mandated to follow a policy through their election manifesto should deliberate and take decisions'. [Electoral Reform Society]

There is too much discretion to be allowed to core decision-makers about what issues are to be debated. Surely the government should have an open mind at all times? It's up to the participators to decide what topics upon which they wish to debate.' [Professor Peter John]

19. The Sustainable Development Commission put forward the term 'decision-specific democracy' whereby our democratic structures could be adapted in different ways to deal with specific decisions. This system of governance would contrast with representative democracy by relating engagement (of citizens, consumers or stakeholders) to specific decisions.

Scope

20. A number of comments were received on the scope of the discussion paper's objectives and coverage. The comments received implied that any Framework needed a number of interlocking elements, starting with the strategic rationale for the greater use of engagement in policymaking, whether engagement is appropriate and its extent, drilling down to criteria and guidance on specific mechanisms.
21. Most respondents agreed that the overall strategic benefits of engaging the public were many. The Sustainable Development Commission particularly highlighted the use of engagement in improving decision making and implementation of decisions. Others referred to:
- **policy development and implementation** informed by the wider public's views;
 - **improving public knowledge and education** on policy issues;

- **encouraging trust and understanding** of the parliamentary process and politicians; and
 - **empowering participants** through providing opportunities to have real influence.
22. Most respondents felt that in order to ensure that these benefits were realised, the framework should be underpinned by a **set of principles** which would encourage policy makers to engage well.
23. Going beyond guiding principles, others suggested the scope for much more practical guidance, in short a **'how-to' guide** to engagement. Suggestions included a **single point of reference** which would include principles, criteria, information on different mechanisms, good practice and advice. Respondents stated that there was much in the way of guidance and good practice already in existence which could be usefully brought together in this way.
24. More specific suggestions included the need for **clear definitions of deliberative engagement**, and the different types of engagement. This would set out the distinction between deliberative research, dialogue and decision-making.
25. One particular area where respondents sought reference and potential guidance was around the **involvement of the media**. The Sustainable Development Commission felt that the Framework should actively look at new ways to design and use new and traditional media in three ways:
- “how new processes can be designed and run collaboratively to reach a critical mass of millions;
 - how to harness existing debate and opinion ‘bottom up’ in a systematic manner;
 - how to alert people to central Government deliberative processes”.
26. Finally, some respondents highlighted the need to **build capacity**, both within government and within the public, in order to make these opportunities more accessible but also to generate awareness, interest and enthusiasm for citizen engagement. Suggestions ranged from more training for policymakers to linking this to pre-existing educational strands such as Citizen Education.

“we encourage the [Ministry of Justice] to continue to work closely with your colleagues at the Department for Children, Schools and Families to ensure that young people have an opportunity to learn about these and other forms of engagement through the Citizenship curriculum, both in the classroom and in the wider life of their school and community.” [The Citizenship Foundation]

Criteria

27. The criteria set out in the Framework received general support as representing a principled approach to public engagement. Comments focussed on the relevant criteria relating to the policy environment in which public engagement would happen. Respondents also highlighted the relative importance of the different levels of criteria.

Degree of influence

28. Respondents highlighted the need to clarify at the outset the degree of influence people could have on decisions. Policymakers need to be clear about the **scope of the exercise**, which would in part be informed by identifying **where and when in the policy cycle engagement was taking place**. Some respondents

suggested criteria to be satisfied in deciding whether engagement is actually appropriate, including:

- what is the nature of the issue and does the government have a policy position,
- the point in the policy cycle, e.g. green paper, white paper or implementation stage where the engagement would take place,
- the purpose of the engagement, e.g. identifying, testing, agreeing or implementing options,
- where there is a decision or group of decisions to be made,
- the outcome of the process has a chance to influence the decision.

29. Some respondents thought that participants should be aware about any pre-defined limits or constraints at the start of any engagement process.

Your Health Your Care Your Say Seeing the Public's Influence

This engagement exercise aimed to gain views on how to improve the health and social care services provided in the community by the NHS and others. It effectively replaced the production of a Green Paper and involved the public in developing ideas rather than commenting on more specific and pre-defined options.

The Department of Health had identified three key areas for discussion, but a fourth issue was added to this list during the course of the engagement process.

The exercise was multi-stranded; including the creation of a citizen advisory group, regional deliberative events, a citizens' summit, self completion core questionnaire available online and on paper, local listening exercises, magazine surveys – distributed through widely read magazines 'Take a Break' and the NHS publications 'Prime' and 'Fit'.

Over 41,000 responses were received through the various methods used over the course of the three months that the main work took place (September to December 2005).

By undertaking the engagement at a point in the process where the issue was still very much open to new ideas and options the public had an influence on what specific proposals were taken forward and which were dropped. The issues of mental health, the need for better information provision, support for carers, transport, loneliness and isolation among older people, and the health MOT / lifecheck were suggested by the public and were subsequently added or given a higher priority in the White Paper. Conversely the issue of the option to register with more than one GP was dropped given its lack of public support.

For more information see the Research Report

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4127357 and the Evaluation Report

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4138622

Legitimacy

30. It is vital that a public engagement process conveys **legitimacy and commands the respect** and belief of the population at large. Respondents raised a variety of points on this issue including ensuring that a sufficient number of people representing the appropriate sections of society are included in any exercise, that they have been provided with clear, unbiased material and had appropriate time to consider, deliberate and think through the issues.
31. Many respondents made comments on the potential participants involved in any engagement process. The Citizenship Foundation sought clarification on eligibility; with a number of different citizenship statuses in Britain, they felt it was important to be clear who was eligible to take part and were keen for eligibility to be broad rather than narrowly defined. Buckinghamshire County Council also sought clarification as to whether exercises were open to residents as well as citizens and to children and young people.
32. Even with broad eligibility criteria, there was concern that certain groups might be less likely to participate as a result of the choice of specific mechanisms. Large face-to-face events were seen as off-putting and daunting to both young people and older people, and the provision of electronic channels could favour younger people while excluding older people. These points were often linked to comments about using a mix of methods and were often accompanied with specific requests for more practical guidance about how harder to reach segments of the population could be included.

“In particular it [the Framework] recognises that certain groups, especially younger people and people in deprived areas, are much more disengaged than the rest of the population. It does not however go on to propose any specific measures to support their engagement or methods to involve them” [The City of Edinburgh Council]

WOMENSPEAK
Engaging a Hard to Reach Group

This was an online consultation and engagement project designed specifically to hear the view of survivors of domestic violence. Womenspeak was conceived by Margaret Moran MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Domestic Violence, and was developed by the APPG in partnership with the Women's Aid Federation of England, eQuality Networks and the Hansard Society.

The Womenspeak online consultation was set up to gain the views of survivors of domestic violence. By enabling survivors of domestic violence to contribute evidence and information about their experiences direct to MPs via the Internet, the aim of the consultation was to gather evidence about the needs and experiences of these women and highlight the key issues in providing effective responses. This then informed the work of the All Party Group on Domestic Violence, and Women's Aid, and raised awareness of domestic violence and its impact on women and children amongst parliamentarians and government to influence the development of public policy. It also aimed to test how new information and communication technologies could be used to obtain the views of a vulnerable group of citizens who have been traditionally socially excluded.

The project was online based, and not only had to provide internet access, but also address issues of security, safety and support: the project had to ensure that respondents could not be traced through effective security mechanisms, and also ensure that they received practical and emotional support. This was achieved through the partnership with national domestic violence charity Women's Aid. Not only did the Womenspeak project access survivors of domestic violence through the charity's national network of local refuge and outreach services and other publicity outlets and provide them with dedicated safe passwords, Women's Aid local and national services also provided practical and emotional support to participants. 44% did not have access to the internet before the consultation started. 57% had access to the internet either at home or through a refuge. 31% intended to use a public point for the discussion.

Nearly 1,000 messages of evidence were received from women survivors of domestic violence, some of whom were "...voices largely unheard by hon. Members, including Irish women travellers and Bangladeshi women". The methods used were highly rated by contributors, with one respondent saying "I believe this form of communication is an invaluable tool that all MPs should use.... I applaud MPs who have logged on and actually spoken to us". 92% of respondents had never taken part in a consultation before.

The Womenspeak report was written by the Hansard Society and Women's Aid, and edited, published and distributed by Women's Aid. Unison (public service union) & KPMG sponsored the project and BT funded the report.

33. Many respondents pointed out the need to support and assist people in taking part whatever mechanism is chosen. Thought into making these processes attractive to those who might be disengaged needs to be given, and how to ensure there is awareness. Suggestions included consideration of some kind of **reward and recognition** particularly for younger people and questions over proposed incentives for all participants.

The document “mentions funding but it doesn’t explain whether selection for Citizen’s juries will be compulsory, if ‘jurors’ are to be remunerated, given paid time off work, expenses, child care provision etc.” [Undergraduates at the University of Gloucestershire]

34. One of the key elements needed to ensure that engagement is legitimate is that it should enable **genuine two-way communication**; as one respondent suggested, the criteria should include encouraging “interaction between decision makers and participants through direct contact.” **Responsiveness** was also key to ensuring that engagement was legitimate and outcomes should be communicated quickly to participants.

35. Respondents also felt strongly that participants would need **appropriate time and space** to consider the evidence put to them. They need to be able to deliberate and think, not just to be presented with evidence.

“The process has to be given enough time to reflect and be deliberative. The reasons these processes are both interesting and useful for the development of public policy is that they allow for in-depth study of an issue... We recognise that this has cost implications but if there is not enough time to allow adequate reflection and deliberation the danger is that all you’ll get is a snapshot of opinion”. [Unlock Democracy]

“Participative mechanisms should create space for deliberation based on reflection and discussion”. [Professor John Stewart]

36. Several respondents pointed to the fundamental need for **a supportive environment and culture**, both within the commissioning authority and civic society, which was prepared for and positive towards engagement generally. Such a positive environment would assist in embedding an engagement approach in the normal working processes of organisations.

“Solutions lie in many areas: a cultural shift within government such that the views of citizens are not only sought but valued and given equal states” [Director e-Democracy Programme Hansard Society. Online Discussion]

Transparency and Independence

37. Issues of transparency and independence were suggested by respondents. This might include Government stepping back once a summit or jury had been initiated and allowing the participants freedom to decide whom to take evidence from. This could be further formalised with possible scrutiny by an organisation like the Electoral Commission.

Quality and accessibility of information

38. Respondents recognised that getting people to attend an engagement exercise is only the beginning. People need to understand the subject which they are being asked to discuss and this means that they need access to information which is **clear, understandable and unbiased**:

“Bias can arise from the questions asked in referendum or in the way issues are posed in other mechanisms... in information given or in evidence heard, in the conduct of proceedings, in reporting results and in other ways. In designing mechanism for particular situations such dangers must be guarded against”.

[Professor John Stewart]

39. Involving people early and providing them with **access to source material prior to events** was also seen as a way of helping the process succeed and where groups of experts or witnesses are asked to give evidence this ought to represent the breadth and range of opinion on an issue.

Involving stakeholders and advocates

40. A number of respondents put forward criteria which covered the involvement of others in the process. Undertaking public engagement alongside stakeholder engagement was seen as beneficial in gaining consensus, particularly in exposing the views of experts or interest groups to scrutiny and debate beyond the usual suspects.
41. DEFRA submitted comments as a result of a meeting it held with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and the Food Standards Agency which suggested keeping engagement going by working with consumer and public interest organisations and representatives.
42. Intermediaries could also play a key role in reaching out to certain, hard-to-reach parts of society and this approach was strongly supported by respondents. Respondents commented that it would be necessary to go where people are already congregating and discussing issues – particularly online – rather than developing new spaces for discussion. Involving people in the design of the process was also suggested, to improve ownership and buy-in and build a more meaningful process.

Professional approach

43. Other criteria focussed on the organisation and content of any engagement exercise. Exercises should be professionally managed, planned, designed, facilitated and evaluated. The design should factor in interaction between decision makers and participants and provide time and space for deliberation, reflection and thought. It should be supported by and involve relevant experts in deliberative research and dialogue and be designed to avoid the danger of bias with balanced information as well as considering ethical sensitivities.

Evaluation

44. A number of respondents touched on the issue of evaluation. One respondent stated that individual exercises should be assessed against specific evaluation criteria, drawn up for that particular circumstance. There were also ideas about how to structure evaluations; looking at the source of responses (how representative), and the quality of responses (how informed they were); or considering the exercise against different dimensions: “the political dimension, the democratic dimension, the civic dimension and the technological dimension” [Fraser Henderson: Director, ParticiTech].

Publicity

45. All these steps also need to be clearly seen by the broader public; in other words, those not participating in a Summit or Jury or other deliberative exercise. Respondents stated that the process should be well publicised, potentially through making information available and providing some opportunities for

members of the general public to participate in the broader process. Many suggested working with a media partner to help publicise the process.

Methodology and Techniques

46. In terms of the methods and techniques, most respondents commented on the actual process of developing an engagement strategy and choosing methods on a case by case basis.

A tailor-made approach

47. A large number of respondents **strongly supported a tailor-made approach** to developing an engagement strategy in light of individual circumstances; using a principle-based approach and working through a number of questions to arrive at the appropriate choice of mechanism or mix of mechanisms. This would therefore involve a much larger range of techniques.

“The fundamental concept of an ‘off the shelf’ process is alien to recognised deliberative citizen engagement and runs contrary to all good practice guidelines nationally and internationally”. [Sciencewise]

“...our research and experience in this area points to the necessity of using the method that takes into account the purpose and context of each engagement activity”. [Involve]

“Every engagement process has to be designed according to its purposes and the people it seeks to engage”. [Andrew Acland: Engagement Designer and Facilitator]

48. One fundamental part of this tailoring was the need for consideration and indication of **where in the policy cycle** engagement would occur. Such a decision would have an impact on what mechanism would be appropriate.

“The question of which engagement mechanisms to use should sit within an understanding of the policy making process”. [Electoral Reform Society]

“...the first step in considering engagement alongside representative democracy must be to understand how, where and when participative input best fits within the policy making cycle (in a way that improves decision making/implementation)”. [Sustainable Development Commission]

A multi-method process

49. This process of tailoring the engagement process to the individual circumstances led a number of respondents to advocate a multi-mechanism approach.

“It is important that a combination of these [deliberative] methods is used when engaging citizens rather than just using one of them. The reason for this is that different approaches will appeal to different people. For example some people may prefer to contribute to an e-petition whilst others would welcome a more active involvement through a Citizen’s Summit or Jury”. [Buckinghamshire County Council]

“The means of engagement determine who is included and who is excluded in the process, and often the best approach is to adopt a mix of methods to ensure that the diversity of the older population is captured.” [Help the Aged]

50. Many respondents also made reference to the range of mechanisms available and that smaller scale techniques are used where appropriate to help ensure involvement by hard to reach groups which might not engage with large-scale operations and given issues of cost.

“..it is recommended that recognition is given to the much wider range of available and long-used mechanisms e.g. Planning for Real®, Visioning etc.¹ [Undergraduates at the University of Gloucestershire]

51. The Sustainable Development Commission also suggested the use of consensus conferences, drop-in session and surgeries – both online and face-to-face – and online deliberative consultation.

Appropriate issues

52. Some respondents suggested topics suitable for deliberative engagement, many of which reflected the general areas outlined on page 11 of the Framework. These included issues which were not obviously politically divisive or issues where there was no clear view from government. One respondent suggested suitable issues as those on which there is usually a free vote in Parliament – free votes are usually taken on moral and ethical issues. Others suggested that decisions about how we make decisions were suitable, such as issues of significant constitutional change which have the potential to impact equally on everyone, or issues of national significance, for example:

“As far as national summits and juries are concerned then perhaps the assessment criteria for what should be debated at such events has to be policy issues of true national concern such as Health, Crime and Children’s policies. Constitutional issues could also be considered at such events e.g. electoral reform, regional development of government”. [Sunderland City Council]

Youth Citizenship Commission Deliberative Research on Constitutional Issues

The Youth Citizenship Commission (YCC) was announced as part of the *Governance of Britain* agenda in July 2007 and is chaired by Professor Jonathan Tonge. The YCC will focus on the views of young people aged 11- 19, on a range of constitutional issues:

- what citizenship means to young people;
- how to increase young people’s participation in politics; the development of citizenship amongst disadvantaged groups; how active citizenship can be promoted through volunteering and community engagement; and how the political system can reflect the communication preferences of young people;
- the minimum voting age.

During October 2008, 2CV (a market research company) carried out number of public events in six locations, London, Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow, Newcastle and

¹ See People and Participation website for more mechanisms and descriptions.
<http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Home>

Birmingham. Each event was made up of two groups, young people and adults from all backgrounds. In total 90 young people and 90 adults were involved in the exercise.

Initially all participants were asked to complete deliberative homework tasks (gathering evidence from their local community, friends and families) involving a range of issues from defining a vision of citizenship, the importance of citizenship, the barriers to citizenship, engaging young people as active citizens and barriers to political participation.

At a later date, the groups were then invited to an exposure session, bringing their homework. At the session young people discussed their findings, watched by the adults; after 30 minutes the two groups swapped roles. Further deliberations also took place where young people and adults joined together as a bigger group and discussed their findings.

Later in Jan 2009 2CV will provide a report to the Commission outlining the findings from all fifteen public engagement sessions.

Citizens' Summits

53. Many respondents supported the use of summits given that they involved a high degree of deliberation, although they were seen as a costly mechanism and agreed with the discussion paper that they should therefore be used sparingly.
54. There was no consensus on the make-up and selection of summit participants with both random samples and representative cross-sections of society being suggested. The issue of the size of summits also attracted a variety of views, with some respondents seeing the need for larger summits to avoid decisions being taken by unrepresentative groups, while others warned that large groups could be off-putting to particular sections of society. Some felt that a larger group could make in-depth discussion and the development of rapport and consensus harder, as well as being a more costly exercise. Certainly, respondents felt that a careful balance would need to be struck between these elements to ensure that a large-scale deliberative exercise was fit for purpose.

Citizens' Juries

55. Citizens' juries were seen as providing a good mix between decision-making, informed debate and deliberation. They were felt to be helpful mechanisms for considering the values that are at stake on an issue and result in a clear view of the informed position of the public, rather than a snap-shot of opinion.
56. A range of views were received on the type of issues which may be appropriate for this mechanism, some of which crossed over with those applicable for citizens' summits.
- “issues which...may be considered by a jury were those around “what should we/could we do about this?...trade off scenarios whereby the Government faces an either or position”. [Powys County Council].
57. There was concern over how citizens' juries could be used for national issues, particularly holding a number of juries across the country.

“We are also unconvinced about proposals to hold citizens juries on the same subjects but in different parts of the country. It is likely that there will be different opinions in different areas, how will these views be mediated?” [Unlock Democracy]

58. One particular issue which arose with regard to citizens’ juries was that of definition and purpose. If the jury was not given formal decision-making powers, with a clear yes or no view being recorded, but was instead tasked with forming a consensus, then the term jury could be misleading.

“The term Citizens Jury is one that is rather misleading as many of us are aware that juries are decision making bodies which do not (under normal circumstances) have their decisions overturned. If your desire is to create a body to offer advice and provide influence to help the Government make good decisions, the term jury is rooted in language that many will find inconsistent with the experience that you will be able to offer them”. [Individual]

59. Others pointed to differing definitions of juries in terms of size and time frame. The discussion paper suggested juries involving 50-100 participants sitting over 1-2 days, depending on the complexity of the issue. A number of respondents considered that juries involved a smaller group and last longer. Respondents felt that it was important that the role of a jury was distinct from that of a summit and that this role was consistently applied.

Petitions

60. There was a range of feedback on the value and efficacy of a strengthened petitioning function in Parliament. Views on this mechanism were rather mixed, with some respondents seeing it as simply a non-deliberative lobbying tool, which can serve to champion single-issue campaigns or trivial matters, while others saw it as a possible trigger for issues to gain attention and lead potentially to more detailed consideration and debate within Parliament.
61. Some respondents pointed out the need to have the supporting culture and mechanisms to deal proactively and positively with petitions and to try and move away from their potential adversarial nature.
62. Both the e-petitioning system of the Scottish Parliament and that proposed by the House of Commons Procedure Committee received some expressions of support, although some respondents argued that the proposed Westminster system should include the creation of a committee to review petitions akin to the Petitions Committee in the Scottish Parliament.

ANNEX A

List of Respondents

Responses were received through two key channels; providing written (including email) comments, or through an online discussion forum held on the Governance of Britain website.

Written Responses

27 written responses were received from engagement organisations and consultants, voluntary and community organisations, academics, local authorities and individuals.

1. Involve
2. Sustainable Development Commission
3. Fraser Henderson – Engagement consultant ParticiTech
4. Andrew Acland – Engagement Designer and Facilitator
5. Electoral Reform Society
6. Unlock Democracy
7. Citizenship Foundation
8. Help the Aged
9. NVCO
10. UK Youth Parliament
11. Ian Chisnall – Churches Together in Sussex
12. Professor Peter John – Co-Director Institute for Economic and Political Governance, University of Manchester
13. Professor John Stewart – Emeritus Professor, Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham University
14. Dr Matthew Flinders – University of Sheffield
15. University of Gloucestershire Undergraduates
16. Peter Browning
17. Maurice Frank
18. David Martin
19. James McKenzie
20. Jeremy Tickle
21. Powys County Council
22. Sunderland City Council
23. Buckinghamshire County Council – Children and Young People’s Services
24. Edinburgh City Council
25. The Association of Electoral Administrators – London Branch
26. Sciencewise
27. DEFRA: comments resulting from a meeting on Consumer engagement between DEFRA, Veterinary Medicines Directorate, BERR and the Food Standards Agency

Discussion Forum

28 comments, from 22 individual participants.