



VIEWFINDER: A POLICY MAKER'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

*Transforming Public Services
A Civil Service that delivers*

VIEWFINDER: A POLICY MAKER'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

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1) INTRODUCTION

This section explores:

- 1.1 Public involvement in government policy-making
- 1.2 The benefits of public involvement
- 1.3 Overcoming risks associated with public involvement
- 1.4 Aims of Viewfinder

1.1 Public involvement in government policy-making

Viewfinder has been designed to help policy makers at all levels to improve policy design through undertaking public involvement initiatives¹.

In recent years, the Government has attempted to raise the profile of consultation and improve the way it is undertaken, for example by producing the Code of Practice on Written Consultation in November 2000². The Code set out minimum standards of written consultation for central government. Quoted in the forward to the Code, the Prime Minister Tony Blair said “*I believe that the message is spreading throughout the administration that better consultation means better results*”. A report by the National Audit Office argued: “*it is important that in order to develop a clear understanding of the issue, departments consult...those who will benefit from the policy or those affected indirectly and those who may have to implement the policy*”³.

While the Code has sought to improve the standards of formal written consultation processes and helped alert policy makers to the need to consult widely, that is only part of the answer. We now need to encourage the use of more diverse methods of public involvement (including e-consultation techniques) to engage a broader range of people, and to do so effectively. To help policy makers achieve those aims they require assistance in understanding how public involvement can be used to improve policy-making and choosing methods that most closely match their purpose. The purpose of *Viewfinder* is to introduce to policy makers the issue of public involvement, provide practical advice on principles, planning activities and selecting methods.

1.1 The benefits of public involvement

Involving the public and civil society groups in the work of government has become an integral part of the policy-making process. It is not simply about more open-government, although that too is important, it is also about making policies more effective by listening to and taking on-board the views of the public and key stakeholder groups.

¹ This might be involvement in policies, programmes or draft legislation.

² www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/consultationcode.htm

³ National Audit Office (2001) *Modern Policy-Making: ensuring policies deliver value for money*, p. 38.

Furthermore, providing genuine opportunities for the public to influence democratic processes between elections forms an important part of the Government's programme for democratic renewal⁴.

Public involvement contributes to evidence based policy-making. But it is only one source of evidence. The advice and decisions of policy makers will involve balancing evidence from a wide range of sources, including existing and new research; economic modelling; regulatory impact assessments⁵; evaluation and scientific, technical and expert advice.

Public involvement also has a number of specific benefits that are summarised below, it:

- allows government to tap wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, and improves the quality of decisions reached;
- alerts policy makers to any concerns and issues that may not be picked up through existing evidence;
- helps to monitor the performance of current policies and whether there is need for change;
- fosters working partnerships between stakeholder groups and the Government in addressing issues and seeking solutions;
- genuine public involvement symbolises the Government's commitment to listening to the public and stakeholder groups when developing policy;
- helps build public trust in government and the legitimacy of decisions reached.

1.3 Overcoming public involvement risks

Sometimes it is felt that involving the public can be risky or present unwanted hurdles in finalising a policy. For example, that public involvement will take too long and delay matters; that there will be too many administrative burdens; public expectations of what can be achieved through citizen involvement will be too high; that campaigns will try to hijack the consultation and focus opposition; or that the exercise will produce unrepresentative views. **But the benefits of public involvement far outweigh these risks.** And by following the guidelines in *Viewfinder* the risks can be minimised. For example, good forward planning should enable you to design the public involvement exercise in a way that does not impose disproportional burdens or unduly delay finalising the policy. Setting clear parameters for the public involvement exercise will help you to manage public expectations. Sound analysis will ensure that the pronounced views of a minority will not dominate in an unrepresentative way. All these approaches are set out in greater detail in *Viewfinder*.

⁴ See Cabinet Office (2002) *In the Service of Democracy. A consultation policy for electronic democracy.* www.edemocracy.gov.uk

⁵ Cabinet Office (2000) *Good Policy-Making: A Guide to Regulatory Impact Assessment.* www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation

1.4 Aims of Viewfinder

Viewfinder aims to help policy makers undertake effective public involvement activities. Illustrated with good practice examples from government and other sources, it:

- defines what is meant by public involvement;
- explains that there is no single “correct” method. The approach should fit the purpose;
- describes a range of involvement methods available (including e-consultation);
- explains how to effectively plan public involvement;
- sets out some principle guidelines for e-consultation;
- describes how to ensure involvement includes different groups and individuals;
- answers the questions frequently asked by policy makers undertaking involvement initiatives.

2) PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: DEFINITIONS, TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES

2.1 Defining the term public involvement

It is important to understand what is meant by public involvement when being given the task of engaging with people or groups about policy. There is often confusion about the language of public involvement and without a clear understanding of the terms used, inappropriate approaches can be adopted. This section therefore briefly sets out a definition of public involvement.

Citizen:government relations take different forms and not all these relations can be described as 'public involvement'. It is helpful to think of citizen:government relations falling into four broad categories: 'information', 'research', 'consultation' and 'participation'. As the broad descriptions below illustrate, only consultation and participation are forms of public involvement. Information and public opinion research are not.

Information: a one-way relationship in which government disseminates information to citizens. Information might be used when publicising a new policy initiative or a change in procedures by featuring information on the Internet, distributing leaflets, advertising campaigns and exhibitions. This is not public involvement.

Public Opinion Research: a process by which policy makers capture the opinions of specific sectors or groups of the population through mainly quantitative methods to inform policy-making. Research might be used when testing public views on different policies under consideration, for example by undertaking a survey or running focus groups. This is not public involvement.

Consultation: a two-way relationship in which government asks for, and receives, citizens' feedback on policy proposals. Typically, consultation might be used when extensive responses are required to a specific policy proposal in order to gather views from the public and civil society groups⁶ (CSGs), for example, through publishing consultation papers, organising public meetings, or deliberative polling. This is a form of public involvement.

Participation: a relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively participate in defining the process and developing the policy. Participation activities might see citizens involved directly to draw up policy proposals and develop solutions to a problem. They might include CSGs working with a government department to help develop new operating frameworks by co-opting CSG representatives on to government bodies or stakeholder committees. Methods for engaging the public include referenda, citizens' juries, citizens' panels, or direct delegation of authority to citizens to make decisions. This is a form of public involvement.

The decision by government to 'inform', 'research', 'consult' or 'engage' with the public in policy-making will be determined by the specific issue under consideration (see Section 3.1 'What are your objectives?') Examples of situations where these four forms of citizen:government relations are used is given at Appendix 1.1.

Viewfinder focuses on the use of consultation and participation activities to involve the public in the processes of policy-making, not information or opinion research.

⁶ The term 'Civil Society Groups' refers to the full range of formal and non-formal stakeholder groups, from trade unions, to business associations and those in the voluntary sector. It also encompasses pressure groups and informal, and often temporary, groupings.

2.2 Public involvement techniques

A range of involvement techniques is available to policy makers, with some of the most commonly used outlined in Appendix 1.2. The guiding principle when selecting a technique is to *match method to purpose*, an idea which underpins all of the activities described in *Viewfinder*, and which we will explore in more detail in the next section.

2.3 Guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation of citizens in policy-making

In order to maximise the benefits of public involvement, policy makers might like to follow the OECD guiding principles for success set out below⁷:

Commitment

Leadership and strong commitment to information, consultation and participation in policy-making is needed at all levels – from politicians, senior managers and public officials.

Rights

Citizens' right to access information, provide feedback, be consulted and actively participate in policy-making must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens when exercising their rights must also be clearly stated.

Clarity

Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and active participation during policy-making should be well defined from the outset. The respective roles and responsibilities of citizens (in providing input) and government (in making decisions for which they are accountable) must be clear to all.

Time

Public consultation and active participation should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of policy solutions to emerge and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective. Information is needed at all stages of the policy cycle.

⁷ OECD (2001) *Citizens as partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation & Public Participation in Policy-Making*. www.oecd.org

Objectivity

Information provided by government during policy-making should be objective, complete and accessible. All citizens should have equal treatment when exercising their rights of access to information and participation.

Resources

Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed if public information, consultation and active participation in policy-making are to be effective. Government officials must have access to proper skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports their efforts.

Co-ordination

Initiatives to inform, request feedback from and consult citizens should be co-ordinated across government units to enhance knowledge management, ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of consultation fatigue among citizens and civil society organisations. Co-ordination efforts should not reduce the capacity of government units to ensure innovation and flexibility.

Accountability

Governments have an obligation to account for the use they make of citizens' inputs received through feedback, public consultation and active participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny and review are crucial to increasing government accountability overall.

Evaluation

Governments need the tools, information and capacity to evaluate their performance in providing information, conducting consultation and engaging citizens, in order to adapt to new requirements and changing conditions for policy-making.

Active citizenship

Governments benefit from active citizenship and a dynamic civil society, and can take concrete actions to facilitate access to information and participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens' civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity building among civil society organisations.

3) PLANNING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Experience shows that policy makers can maximise their chances of success in public involvement through good planning. We identify three different stages that make up this planning process: ‘*pre-involvement*’, ‘*identifying methods and resources*’, and ‘*after involvement*’. To get the best from *Viewfinder*, think about the following questions and then follow up the more detailed guidance in the relevant sections.

PRE-INVOLVEMENT

- What are your objectives in involving the public? How do these fit with both the government’s objectives and organisational objectives? (*See 3.1*)
- When will you involve the public? At what stage of the policy-making process? (*See 3.2*)
- Which groups will your policy affect, directly or indirectly? And who will you involve? (*See 3.3*)
- How will your involvement activities fit with your general communications strategy? (*See 3.3*)
- Will you need to reach diverse groups as part of your involvement strategy? (*See Section 5 Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making*)

IDENTIFYING METHODS AND RESOURCES:

- How will you involve the public? What methods will you use? (*See 3.4*)
- Will e-consultation techniques help? (*See Section 4 E-Consultation*)
- What resources are required and available? (*See 3.5*)

AFTER INVOLVEMENT

- How will you analyse responses? (*See 3.6*)
- How will you give feedback? (*See 3.7*)
- How will you evaluate? (*See 3.8*)
- Any other questions? (*See Section 6 Frequently Asked Questions*)

PLANNING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: THE PRE-INVOLVEMENT STAGE

3.1 What are your objectives?

Public involvement can support the development of a policy at a number of different stages. However, before embarking on any public involvement activity, policy makers should be clear about their reasons for doing so, where it fits into the policy-making cycle (see 3.2), and what benefits it will bring.

Managing expectations

It is important to be clear about what participants can contribute to the process, what they will gain from taking part and the extent to which their input can influence decision-making. Participants need to be properly informed about these issues to ensure they are realistic about both what is expected of them, and what can change as a result of their involvement.

Setting objectives

An early dialogue with stakeholders can help you to determine objectives and generate support for the process (see Appendix 2.2 for a case study on this issue).

Objective setting will also be shaped by the context in which the policy is being developed. Clear objectives help policy-makers identify the target audience, choose the right public involvement method and also assist with evaluation.

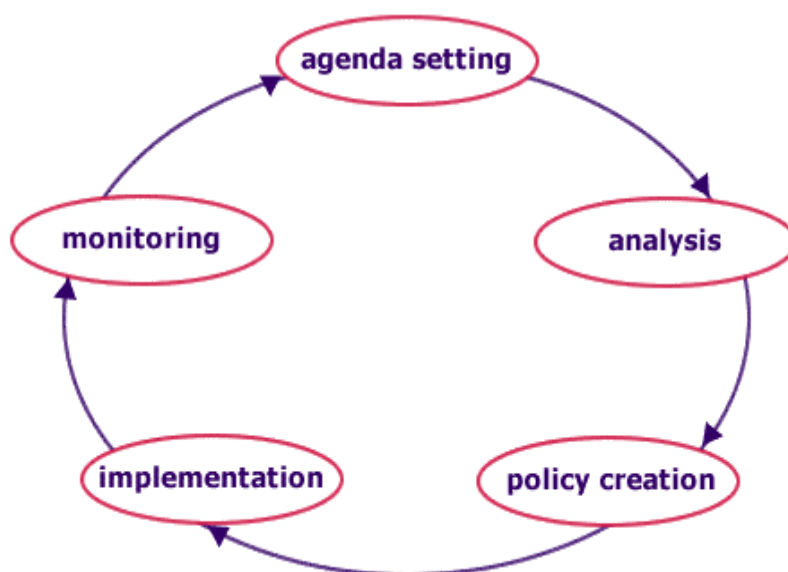
3.2 When will you involve the public?

The policy-making cycle

Viewfinder uses a model of the policy-making process which includes *agenda setting*, *analysis*, *policy creation* and *implementation*, and where results from *monitoring* and *evaluation* are used to change existing policies or shape new ones.

The following diagram of the policy-making cycle sets out these five key stages of policy-making⁸.

Diagram 1: The Policy-Making Cycle



Policy makers undertake involvement initiatives to ensure that their policies take account of the views and experience of those affected by them. It is therefore crucial that exercises are planned and timed effectively in order for the outcomes to feed into decision-making at the appropriate point of the cycle. (See Appendix 2.3 for a case study demonstrating early planning of a programme of public involvement).

Table 1 gives typical examples of involvement tools which could be used at each point of the policy-making cycle with examples from government departments. It should be noted, however, that certain methods of public involvement can operate at different stages of the policy-making cycle, depending on the agreed objectives. For example a workshop could be convened to consult or engage the public at any of the ‘agenda setting’, ‘analysis’ and ‘policy creation’ stages. A glossary of public involvement techniques can be found at Appendix 1.2.

⁸ Diagram 1 and Table 1 adapted from Macintosh A (forthcoming 2002) *Using information and communication technologies to enhance citizen engagement in the policy process*, OECD Government Project.

Table 1: Explaining the Policy-Making Cycle

Stage in policy-making cycle	Objective of this Stage	Methods	Case Studies
Agenda setting	Establishing the need for a policy, or a change in policy, and defining what the problem to be addressed is.	Useful techniques are those that provide opportunities for citizens and organisations to develop their ideas and express viewpoints, that government might engage in or respond to. Methods might include focus groups, visioning exercises, internet discussion forums, petitions and surveys.	<p>The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit: The Community Forum</p> <p>The Community Forum is made up of 20 members with direct experience of living or working in deprived areas.</p> <p>One of its key aims is to help stimulate new ideas to make Government policies on neighbourhood renewal more effective and ensure they meet the needs of community groups and residents in the most deprived areas.</p> <p>www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/commforum.asp</p> <p><i>See also Section 5 - Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making</i></p> <p><i>See Appendix 2.4 for the Finnish Government's use of internet discussion forums to influence this stage of policy-making.</i></p>
Analysis	Defining the challenges and opportunities associated with a particular issue more clearly in order to produce a draft policy document.	Appropriate techniques are those that allow relevant people, stakeholders and decision-makers to come together to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by a specific issue. Methods include focus groups or workshops, citizens' juries and visioning events.	<p>Department for Education and Skills : Community Finance and Learning Initiative (CFLI)</p> <p>CFLI aims to provide resources to local community based organisations to deliver services to tackle financial exclusion in their area. The DfES team in the Strategy and Innovation Unit talked to a number of leading community based organisations active in this area, the Financial Services Authority (FSA), and the British Banking Association (BBA). The aims of these discussions included exploring how their target providers (small, local community organisations) would view</p>

			<p>the general approach of the policy, its objectives and potential for success or failure, and how organisations like the FSA and the BBA could assist the pilots.</p> <p>Contact: Nick Oatley, Nick.oatley@dfes.gsi.gov.uk</p>
Creating the policy	Ensuring a good, workable, policy document.	<p>Approaches that can provide the public with opportunities to learn and discuss the pros and cons of a range of policy options are appropriate here. Methods include citizens' juries, deliberative polls and internet discussion fora.</p> <p>Formal government discussion papers also provide opportunities for the public to have an input at this stage.</p>	<p>Social Exclusion Unit: Report on Young Runaways</p> <p>The SEU held a number of consultation events with young people and their parents to test out the emerging recommendations for its project on Young Runaways. These events occurred after the formal consultation period for the project. The process of finalising the project's recommendations involved the SEU working in collaboration with the voluntary sector, academics and government colleagues to develop solutions in specific policy areas.</p> <p>www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/young_people/runaways.htm</p>
Implementing the policy	Developing legislation, regulation, guidance and a delivery plan.	Public involvement activity is less frequent at this point, which is about implementing a policy that has been agreed. Focus groups, however, can be used to refine the selected policy.	<p>Home Office: Implementation of the Human Rights Act</p> <p>A taskforce involving key non-governmental organisations working in human rights and civil liberties and Ministers from the Home Office, Lord Chancellor's Department and the Attorney General's Office was established to lead preparations for the implementation of the Human Rights Act. The taskforce activities included contributing to the production of guidance and publicity and advising individual departments on their implementation strategies.</p>

			<p>For a full project description see Cabinet Office (2001) <i>Better Policy-Making</i>, CMPS, p25: http://www.cmps.gov.uk/default.asp?loadframe=press_release_01_173.asp</p>
Monitoring the policy	Evaluation and review of the policy in action.	Surveys of users and opinion polls, internet discussion forums are tools that can be employed to monitor a policy in action. They can be supplemented with focus groups to gain a deeper insight.	<p>Brent Health Action Zone: Citizens' Voice</p> <p>Brent Citizens' Voice consists of a panel of eleven residents from Brent, North London. They were recruited from the local authority's citizens' panel to assess Brent HAZ performance against its guiding principles. Participants received information about the HAZ and its five principles and then decided the following aspects of the involvement process: questions it would address, how it would be structured and the most appropriate people to hear evidence from. After five days of hearing evidence, and a further two to review evidence, Citizens' Voice developed recommendations for the HAZ.</p> <p>Although this example focuses on monitoring performance against guiding principles, this approach could be applied to monitoring performance on key policy indicators.</p> <p>For more information contact: Ganesh.Sathyamoorthy@brentpct.nhs.uk or www.brenthaz.org.uk</p>

3.3 Who will you involve?

Policy makers using public involvement need to have an understanding of the different groups affected by the issue at stake before deciding who to involve and which methods to use.

It is important to think broadly about your target audience beyond the direct users of the policy you are developing, or organisations that have a known interest: your policy might impact on other sections of the population (see Section 5 *Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making*).

A variety of factors, such as available resources, time available, and the nature of the policy issue, will influence decisions around which sections of the public are involved.

Categorising the public

Several ways of categorising people have been recommended⁹. Policy makers might find it useful to view the ‘public’ as falling into the following categories:

- **The public as ‘users’ and ‘citizens.’** The public will generally offer different perspectives on policy or service delivery issues according to whether they are involved in their capacity as users or citizens. Involving the public as citizens will often provide a longer term or broader view on a particular issue, whereas the views of users of particular services or those who are affected by policies are likely to be shaped by their direct experience of them.
- **Specific groups of the population** such as disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic groups, young people and older people (see Section 5 *Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making*).
- **Civil Society Groups.** This term encompasses the full range of formal and non-formal stakeholders including different representative organisations (e.g. the CBI and TUC), pressure groups and informal temporary groupings¹⁰.
- **Staff/Employees**¹¹ from front-line staff to chief executives.

Consulting and communicating policy

The way public involvement is handled will reflect on the policy itself. Public involvement needs to be viewed as integral to departments’ communication strategies for policies. By undertaking involvement processes to develop a particular policy, departments alert and inform the public of their proposals.

⁹ See for example *Seargeant, J. and Steele, J. 1998; Scottish Executive, 2002; IDEA, Best Value and Consultation*).

¹⁰ An example of an informal temporary grouping is Jubilee 2000. It was a campaign to cancel the debts of the poorest countries by the year 2000, and was wound up once this objective had been achieved.

¹¹ See the report *Involving front-line staff in policy development* for guidance on this area (www.policyhub.gov.uk).

It is necessary to report involvement results and how they affected decision-making back to citizens and civil society groups as part of your general communications strategy (see also 3.7 *How will you give feedback?*).

Recognising participants' contributions

It is important to remember that organisations and individuals give up their valuable time, skills and resources to participate in involvement initiatives, and this should be recognised and respected at all times. Policy makers need to be clear how participants will gain from taking part in a particular exercise and what the parameters are, and this needs to be communicated effectively (see also 3.1 *What are your objectives in involving the public?*).

The following case studies on identifying and reaching target audiences in involvement exercises are relevant:

- Department for Education and Skills: gathering the views of a mix of children and young people on a White Paper (Appendix 2.5)
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology: an internet discussion forum involving a range of people on flooding issues (Appendix 2.6).

PLANNING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: 'IDENTIFYING METHODS AND RESOURCES' STAGE

3.4 How will you involve the public?

The purpose, or objective, of your public involvement should inform your choice of method, along with a number of other factors, including the needs of your target audience, resources and the time-frame of a specific policy.

A mix of methods

It is best not to rely on one method. Depending on the type of issue you are seeking to involve the public in, a range of methods is likely to be required if you are to reach your different audiences and meet your objectives. Using e-consultation tools (for example, internet discussion forums and e-citizens' juries) alongside other approaches (such as workshops and written consultation) can be effective in this respect.

E-consultation is discussed in Section 4. A list of public involvement techniques can be found at Appendix 1.2. Appendix 2.8 and 2.9 give examples from departments using a diverse range of methods to consult with different sections of the public.

You will also need to consider:

- how to publicise involvement opportunities to maximise participation levels (see Appendix 2.7 for a case study on effectively publicising involvement);
- whether training or other support is needed to enable people to effectively participate (see Section 5 *Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making*).

Designing methods to meet your objectives

The following considerations may help policy makers select approaches or design public involvement methods that are appropriate to their objectives:

- **Purpose**

Are you consulting so that people feel they are involved in the development of the policy? Are you consulting in order to develop innovative policy options?

- **Duration**

Do you want an exercise that unfolds over a period of time (e.g. an issue forum), or a one-off (eg a one-day workshop)?

- **Use of information**

Do you want to provide participants with information? Or do you want to know their immediate responses to a particular issue?

- **Time**

Have you built in sufficient time to allow adequate input from participants?

- **Group deliberation**

Do you want participants to debate issues with others?

- **Types of response**

Do you want qualitative or quantitative responses? If it is quantitative information that is sought, it may be better to undertake research, in which case policy makers might want to seek the advice of in-house social research analysts.

The answers to these questions will help identify features necessary to public involvement tools. For example, in circumstances where the policy that is subject to an involvement exercise is complex and where the target audiences' understanding of the issue is limited, the more likely it is that respondents will need time, discussion opportunities and information in order to respond.

3.5 What resources are required, and available?

Resource considerations

You will clearly need to consider what resources you require to undertake a public involvement project. For example, there are costs associated with the following activities:

- planning and running exercises (e.g. recruiting participants, paying expenses and incentives and hiring venues);
- staff time spent planning/managing activities;
- analysing results;
- disseminating and publishing results;
- evaluating the exercise.

You will also need to consider whether to appoint contractors to undertake some of the above activities (see section below on *using external contractors*). The allocation of resources should be proportional to the scale of the project, to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The City of Edinburgh Council has developed a database to store information on current and past consultation initiatives. A key advantage is that it avoids duplication of activities on consultation and, in doing so, promotes cost effectiveness. See Appendix 2.10 for more details.

Time and money: using different methods

Cost is likely to be an important consideration in the choice of methods. It is, however, possible to carry out an effective programme of public involvement, and select appropriate methods to fit budgetary constraints, so long as there is clarity about objectives.

Some methods are more time and resource intensive than others. For example, it is recommended that organisers allow up to three months to plan citizens' juries¹², which involves making arrangements for expert witnesses to attend and recruiting participants for up to four days, whereas it is usually possible to set up focus groups within a few weeks once a discussion guide has been agreed.

Using external contractors

Policy makers will need to decide whether the skills exist internally to undertake public involvement activities, or whether it is necessary to bring in external organisations (e.g. research agencies, consultancies, academic institutions) to manage different aspects of the process.

For a discussion of some of the issues to consider when working with external contractors, see Appendix 3.

¹² Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2000) *Using People's Juries in Social Inclusion Partnerships: Guidance for SIPs*.

PLANNING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: 'AFTER INVOLEMENT' STAGE

3.6 How will you analyse responses?

The precise method of analysis will depend on the public involvement technique used. The following broad steps can be applied to most exercises:

Step 1: Ensure that accurate and complete records are kept of all responses, whether through a formal written consultation or more interactive dialogues.

Step 2: Try to sort the responses into particular types, for example, the views of business groups in one, employees' representative groups in another, individual views in a further category. This will help you to identify variations in perspectives on particular issues.

Step 3: Develop a 'framework grid' for analysis by identifying the key policy issues, themes and proposals, and then summarise the primary viewpoints on each aspect.

Step 4: Examine the primary viewpoints and consider the implications for the policy. Are there new ideas that are worth further scrutiny and attention? Separate the practical/realistic solutions from those that you know cannot be pursued.

Step 5: Draw together the three facets of the consultation analysis (i.e. the different strands of viewpoints; an assessment of the implications for the policy; and an outline draft government response) into a single 'outcome' paper.

Step 6: Deliberate with relevant stakeholders in government to develop a clear position on the ramifications of the public involvement analysis as set out in the outcome paper.

Another aspect to bear in mind in the analysis is that when selecting methods, policy makers must anticipate the kind of results they expect to have at the end of the process, and how these will be processed and analysed, in order to feed into decision-making. Otherwise, there is a danger that decision makers will become preoccupied with the mechanisms used to involve the public at the expense of how they will actually use the end results to support the development of a particular policy. A timetable that identifies completion dates for key tasks associated with the involvement project might be a useful approach to employ.

In circumstances where a number of methods (including e-consultation approaches) have been used to involve the public to develop a particular policy, the different responses will need to be integrated.

The Women's Unit

The Women's Unit 'Listening to Women' exercise involved over 30,000 women. It used a number of methods – regional roadshows, People's Panels groups, 'talk back' postcards, and meeting organisations representing women. The results of the entire consultation were drawn together and published in a document entitled *Report on Government's Consultation with Women (2001)*, available from the Women and Equality's Unit (www.weu.gov.uk).

See also Section 6 Frequently Asked Questions on *how do you weigh different responses gained from involving different groups?*

3.7 How will you give feedback?

People take time out of their busy lives to contribute to involvement exercises and it is therefore important for them to know how their views were taken into account. Without feedback, people will assume that you are not listening.

Feedback should include two elements:

- the outcomes of the exercise and
- any resulting decisions.

Feedback to participants and others with an interest in the particular policy - such as other government departments, organisations, and the wider public - can enhance the legitimacy of the final policy by showing that it was subject to a public involvement process. It should also be viewed as an important part of the communication strategy for the policy, both internally and externally.

3.8 How will you evaluate?

*“To evaluate is to assess the worth or value of something”*¹³

How you will evaluate should be considered at the planning stages of a public involvement exercise, with an emphasis on evaluating in good time, cost effectively, proportional to the scale of the project and resources invested in it.

Why evaluate?

The evaluation of public involvement exercises can help you to:

- find out what worked and what did not;
- uncover unanticipated outcomes;
- apply learning to improve future practice in involvement activities;
- know whether involving the public actually contributes to improved decision-making;
- assess whether the exercise was cost effective in terms of time and resources.

Evaluation need not be complex, expensive or time-consuming. Addressing some key evaluation questions on whether the public involvement achieved its objectives with regard to **process** and **outcomes** is often adequate. This is a task made easier when good practice has been followed.

You need to include those involved in the public involvement in its evaluation (such as members of the public, policy makers and key stakeholders). The evaluation then needs to answer the following key questions:

Evaluation of process

- Did the individual exercise or programme of involvement achieve its objectives?

Did participants understand the objectives?

How far did participants feel it achieved its objectives?

What were the participants' views about the effectiveness of the involvement exercise (in terms of information and support material provided, training provided, approach used, etc)

Did the individual exercise or programme of involvement provide all participants with equal opportunities to participate?

¹³ Robson C (2000) *Small scale evaluations*. Sage Publications, London, p.3.

- Did it reach the target audience?
- Was the timetable clear and kept to – if not, why not?
- Were the selected methods appropriate for your objectives?
- Was appropriate feedback given?
- What resources were used (planned/unplanned)?

Appendix 2.11 shows a case study from the Scottish Executive illustrating the evaluation of an involvement process.

Evaluation of outcome

If one of the objectives of your public involvement programme is to have an impact on policy-making, you (and members of the public taking part) may want to know whether it is meeting that objective. It needs to be measured, but this is not always easy when there are so many other factors and influences that Ministers will consider when reaching decisions about a particular policy issue. Nevertheless, it is important for organisations to measure as best they can the impact public involvement has had on their policy and practice. Clearly it is not always possible to measure impact in every case. However, it is possible to evaluate the overall impact of public involvement collectively on an organisation's policies. For example, Lewisham Council looked at the impact on policy of a large number of consultations (see case study referenced at Appendix 2.13).

One way of approaching this issue is to consider the impact of the public involvement on two main areas:

1. **Those taking part** (e.g. What do participants feel they gained from the process? What do they see as the outcomes of the involvement? Do they feel their contribution has had an effect on policy-making?)
2. **Policy-making** (e.g. What proposals were altered as a result of the involvement? Did the involvement activities lead to a review of particular aspects of the policy? Was the Minister or key stakeholders influenced by views given, if so how and what was their response?)

See Appendix 2.12 for examples from government departments on the impact of public involvement on specific policies.

See Appendix 4 for examples of evaluation frameworks that have been developed.

Methods

As with all public involvement, your method of evaluation should suit the purpose. Thus, your questions will largely determine the methods of data collection you use.

Commonly used methods include questionnaires, structured/unstructured interviews, focus groups, observation, and surveys. Policy makers should use methods to reflect the scale of the project and resources deployed.

For more information on methods for evaluation, see for example:

Weiss C (1998) *Evaluation. Methods for studying programs and policies*. Second edition. Prentice Hall, West Jersey.

Robson C (2000) *Small scale evaluations*. Sage Publications, London.

Independent evaluation

You will need to decide whether to contract independent evaluation experts to design and/or carry out the evaluation. External evaluation may increase the legitimacy of the findings. Moreover, some circumstances might make it more appropriate to conduct an independent evaluation (for example where there has been external criticism of a particular project). Although there are number of guides available to help organisations to plan evaluations, some recommend that you seek the advice of an experienced evaluator¹⁴

Dissemination

Evaluation findings can help other policy makers to learn from experience, and should be documented in a written report. You might also consider publicising them via a media campaign, presentations, workshops and seminars and the use of websites. Again, activities in this area need to be proportional to the scale of the exercise being evaluated.

¹⁴ Robson, C. (2000) *Small scale evaluations*, Sage Publications, London (p.22).

4) E-CONSULTATION

Contents:

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Benefits of e-consultation
- 4.3 Challenges presented by e-consultation
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- 4.6 Using e-consultation at different stages in decision-making
- 4.7 The need for specialist input
- 4.8 Rules of engagement
- 4.9 Registering participants for e-consultation
- 4.10 Accessibility and usability
- 4.11 Using a mix of 'on-line' and 'off-line' consultation tools
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- 4.13 Feedback
- 4.14 Analysing on-line responses
- 4.15 Evaluating e-consultation activities
- 4.16 Creating e-engagement spaces on websites

4.1 Introduction

New technologies open up new channels for the public to be engaged in the processes of policy-making. This section aims to support policy makers' use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for consultation. It will define e-consultation; set out some of the potential benefits of using e-consultation; identify some of the challenges presented by e-consultation as well as suggestions for tackling these. **This section is focussed on internet based consultation.**

By e-consultation we mean using ICT to support a two-way relationship in which citizens contribute their views and opinions to government. ICT that could be used for e-consultations include the internet and email, telephones (including mobile phones), interactive digital television (DiTV) and video conferencing. E-consultation is particularly valuable when used in conjunction with other public involvement tools.

Good practice guidance on planning public involvement, outlined in *Viewfinder* (section 3), also apply when using e-consultation approaches. However, there are specific issues that accompany the use of e-consultation, the most significant of which are discussed in this section.

4.2 Benefits of e-consultation

E-consultation has many potential benefits including:

- opportunities to reach a wider audience;
- offering a range of techniques to meet the diverse technical and communicative skills of the target audience;
- enabling more informed consultation by making information accessible to participants, for example, by directly providing, or linking to, relevant on-line resources;
- allowing, where appropriate, on-line deliberation to take place. By providing opportunities for the target audience to engage with one another, policy makers are able to see the development of different issues;
- enabling on-line analysis of contributions;
- enabling relevant and appropriate on-line feedback to citizens in response to their comments.

4.3 Challenges presented by e-consultation

Some of the potential challenges include:

- need to involve more people in the design of the e-consultation – such as web experts, facilitators;
- new types of promotion of the consultation exercise – there is a need to reach the target audience electronically;
- depending on target audience there could be issues concerned with the management of a large number of responses;
- non-universal access may mean that other consultation tools should additionally be used;
- technology is viewed by some as enabling a “faster” process, therefore quick feedback and responses may be expected;
- the need to evaluate the technical aspect of the consultation in order to build best practice.

The case for e-consultation was made in the consultation document *In the Service of Democracy*, which outlines the objectives of the Government’s policy on ‘e-democracy’, see www.edemocracy.gov.uk

4.4 Specific issues related to e-consultation

Drawing on the above challenges, we explore the following key issues which need to be addressed in order to design and manage effective e-consultation processes:

- Clarifying the objectives and parameters of citizens’ input
- Using e-consultation at different stages of the policy-making cycle
- The need for specialist input
- Rules of engagement
- Accessibility and usability
- Using a mix of ‘on-line’ and ‘off-line’ consultation tools
- Promoting e-consultation exercises
- Feedback
- Analysing on-line responses
- Evaluating e-consultation activities
- Creating e-engagement spaces.

4.5 Clarity of objectives and parameters of citizens’ input

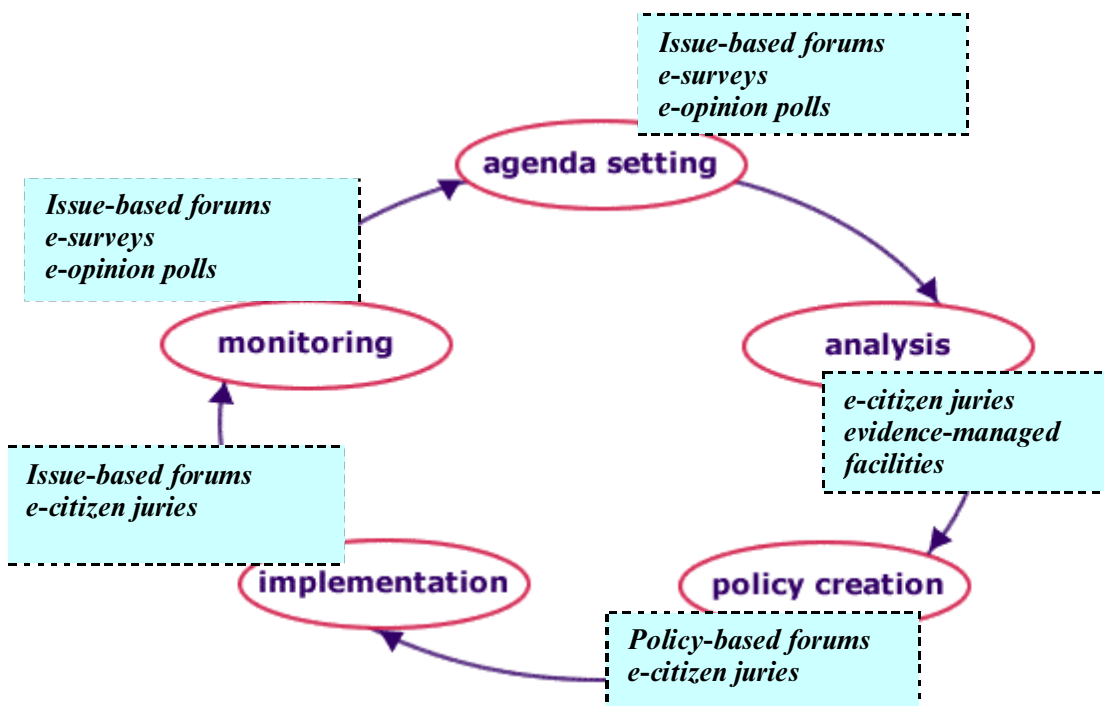
The use of new technology can cause increased citizen expectations, so clarifying the objectives of the e-consultation, including the influence it can have on decision making, is important.

ICT is typically championed as being able to get things done faster and easier, which may lead to the expectation amongst participants in e-consultation exercises that government can make decisions on policy faster. It is essential that citizens understand timeframes and the extent of their influence on the consultation process.

While it is important that participants are clear about their likely contribution to a particular decision, it is equally critical that they are steered away from ‘push button’ reactions to policy. Depending on the objectives of the initiative, e-consultation exercises should encourage citizens to be informed and have sufficient time to both consider and respond to issues.

4.6 Using e-consultation at different stages in decision-making

E-consultation techniques can support policy development at the different stages of the policy-making cycle (see also Section 3.2 – *when will you involve the public?*)



In general, internet based consultative fora have taken one of two forms that correspond with particular stages of policy decision-making.

Stage in the policy-making cycle: agenda setting, analysis and monitoring stages

Issue-based forum

They are typically organised around a policy issue and questions related to the issue. To better inform the target audience, position statements, links to topic-related websites and other background information may be provided on the website hosting the fora. Key stakeholder groups or individuals can also be asked to provide the online witness/position statements.

Two examples of issue-based fora are:

- The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence on-line consultation with survivors of domestic violence (see Appendix 2.16)
- On-line debate commissioned by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology on UK inland flooding (see Appendix 2.17).

Stage in the policy-making cycle: policy creation

Policy-based forum

The policy-based forum could be organised around themes, questions or sections of a consultation document, where feedback from the public is sought. Participants respond quantitatively and qualitatively on-line. Participants might be encouraged to submit alternative ideas and suggestions but the format implies that what is being sought is an indication of how far the participants agree (or not) with the proposals, and why.

- An example of a policy-based forum is the e-consultation for Learning and Teaching Scotland exploring 'Education for Citizenship' at www.e-consultant.org.uk. This demonstrates how to integrate a policy document into a discussion forum.

4.7 The need for specialist input

E-consultation initiatives require individuals with technical expertise. Web designers, for example, will be able to advise on the practical aspects of the e-consultation (such as the layout of material for internet based fora). It is recommended that such individuals are involved in any group established by policy makers to help plan the involvement process. A moderator/ facilitator will also be required to support the running of an internet based discussion forum and should be part of the planning group.

Moderators

The role of the Moderator is to ensure that as part of an e-consultation all participants adhere to the rules, outlined in a 'conditions of use' statement (see 4.8 *rules of engagement*). Where necessary, the moderator will remove comments that breach these rules.¹⁵

There are two main forms of moderation: pre-moderation and post-moderation. With pre-moderation all participant comments are sent to a moderator who decides whether to accept them based on the conditions of use. In the case of post-moderation all comments go straight to the e-consultation. The moderator then monitors comments on a regular basis (typically every 24 hours), removing any that breach the conditions of use. The choice of moderation style is dependent on a number of factors, including the sensitivity of the consultation topic.

¹⁵ The importance of moderation and making rules clear from the start is stressed in Coleman, S. and Grøtze, J. (2001) *Bowling Together: On-line Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation*, p.17.

Facilitators

A facilitator has a more ‘hands on’ role than the moderator, ensuring that comments stay on topic, summarising the comments, and generally supporting the deliberation process when required. Facilitation is important if one of the objectives of the e-consultation is to support deliberative engagement between users. Facilitation helps users reach conclusions, though not necessarily consensus.

These roles can be combined, and for example, the Hansard Society offers training courses for on-line moderators/facilitators (visit www.democracyforum.org.uk).

4.8 Rules of engagement

For on-line consultation there is a need to make clear the rules that will govern the process¹⁶. These should include both a privacy statement and a statement on the conditions of use. This issue also applies to other types of consultation, see for example, the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation.

Privacy statement

It is important to ensure that users understand how the personal information they enter will be used, and who will have access to it. Consultation responses that can be identified with individuals are potentially sensitive information, and data protection guidelines must be followed.

Conditions of use

It is important to have a clear statement of what can, and cannot, be entered as responses to an e-consultation. Any ‘conditions of use’ statement must be clearly understandable to moderators and participants alike, and made clearly visible. It is sensible to seek legal advice when drafting a statement, an example of which is:

“We reserve the right to delete comments that may, in our view, be considered libellous. Users wishing to make comments on the consultation document are requested to refrain from using offensive or abusive language, to refrain from including advertising statements or including text of a disruptive nature. Users should be aware that any such comments may be removed. Inclusion of any statement or comment in this site does not indicate that consultation sponsors endorse it or take any responsibility for it.”¹⁷

4.9 Registering participants for e-consultation

There is a trade-off to be made when designing a registration process for an e-consultation exercise.

¹⁶ The Government’s consultation document, *In the Service of Democracy* gives examples of standards that should govern the conduct of e-participation exercises: including openness/privacy; deliberation/moderation and responsiveness. See www.edemocracy.gov.uk

¹⁷ Taken from the Learning and Teaching Scotland consultation ‘Education for Citizenship’ at www.e-consultant.org.uk

Whilst it is important to make the process as simple as possible so that people are not dissuaded from participating, there are benefits to learning as much as you can about them at this stage. It is important to be aware that e-consultation exercises typically have the objective of reaching a wider audience and, as such, are more concerned with collecting a broad range of experience than delivering a representative sample.

Registration is the obvious point at which to ask users to identify themselves and provide contact details – useful for purposes of feedback and promotion of any follow-up activities. Answers to demographic questions can strengthen analysis and evaluation. Registration, if so configured, can also enable users to use the site as often as they wish, and keep a record of the activities they have completed.

Careful consideration should be given to how long it will take users to complete any questions associated with the registration process relative to the time needed to respond to the involvement itself. This is particularly the case if they have to pay for network connection time, in which case it may be better to ensure that they spend their time in responding to issues rather than registering. At the very minimum, the registration process should capture the user's name, address and e-mail address (if applicable), and any other information considered necessary in order to analyse the contributions effectively.

To summarise, e-consultations over the internet require the following decisions to be taken:

<i>Will the e-consultation be accessible only to a specific audience?</i>
<i>Will it be accessible on a read-only basis to others?</i>
<i>Is a registration and log-in process required?</i>
<i>How complex and rigorous does the registration process need to be?</i>
<i>What level of moderation and facilitation will be required?</i>

Learning and Teaching Scotland: Education for Citizenship case study

Typically, users should be required to log-in each time they enter the consultation. Consideration should also be given to providing users with the means to leave and then return to the consultation, and continue where they left off. The 'Education for Citizenship' consultation is a good example of such a facility, featuring a checklist indicating the questions that had already been answered. This 'checklist' feature could retrieve all previously given responses (whether in the current user session or not), based on user id. To find out more visit: www.e-consultant.org.uk

4.10 Accessibility and usability

The issues of unequal access to technology and the unequal technical capabilities of citizens require systems that are simple to use and, at this point in time, most Internet-based e-consultations have had to be designed to reflect the lowest denominator of requirements. It is important that e-consultations can be used by people using any computer with internet facilities at minimum connection rates and any browsers (including older versions).

To achieve this the majority of current e-consultations are designed to be predominantly text based with a few light graphics. The decision to use any video, audio or animation has to be carefully taken for the above reasons.

Blind and partially sighted users

Accessibility and usability features for partially sighted users and blind users should be used, with all images given tags so that a textual description of their function is available in their place for people accessing the site with a screen reader. This is discussed in detail and recommendations have been made by the World Wide Web Consortium in their Web Accessibility Initiative (www.w3.org/WAI/). The RNIB website (www.rnib.org.uk/digital) provides information on their 'See It Right' Campaign which gives advice on access to technology and how to make a website more accessible to partially sighted users and blind users.

4.11 Using a mix of 'on-line' and 'off-line' consultation tools

Involving the public via ICT can make consultation more attractive and accessible to participants. For some people, it can mean speedy, convenient and simple access to both the consultation process and any information supporting it.

Although the relevant technology is increasingly available, and the question of appropriate skills is being addressed, it remains a fact that some groups, such as older people and those on low incomes, are much less likely to use the Internet than other groups. Lack of skills, lack of trust and concerns over security have been cited as significant barriers to increased internet use¹⁸.

Clearly, not everyone can or wants to use the internet or other ICT tools to participate in democratic processes. It is necessary, therefore, to use and integrate e-consultation tools with other approaches to engage a broader range of people in policy-making. For example, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs used both on-line and off-line mechanisms to consult on its sustainable development strategy (see Appendix 2.18).

4.12 Promoting e-consultation exercises

E-consultations require new methods to promote them. Traditional, off-line promotional routes, such as press releases and news broadcasts, should ensure that the electronic web address is clearly given for the e-consultation. Also, more interactive "on-line" style promotion, such as "tell a friend" postcards and clickable logos advertising the consultation on related websites, might be particularly appropriate. Online consultations may need support and promotion from appropriate community websites and email lists to help reach a cross section of the public.

An example is the Youth Summit 2000 e-consultation conducted on behalf of the Scottish Executive to engage young people www.e-consultant.org.uk. This used clickable banner ads on www.trouble.co.uk and www.neighbours.com which, at the time of the consultation, were the most visited sites by young people.

4.13 Feedback

Appropriate on-line feedback on users' input to e-consultations can contribute to the overall transparency, accountability and openness of policy development. However, as already discussed, e-consultation participants may well expect a faster response than they would expect from other kinds of involvement. Whilst rapid response is not always possible, contributions should be acknowledged when the consultation closes with the timeframe for feedback indicated. It is good practice to inform users of the web address where feedback will be published so that they can 'bookmark' the address for later use.

¹⁸ Office of the e-Envoy (2001) *UK Online Annual Report 2001*, Cabinet Office (www.e-envoy.gov.uk)

4.14 Analysing on-line responses

Methods used to analyse responses to e-consultation overlap with those used to analyse consultation using other approaches (see Section 3.6 - *how will you analyse responses?*).

Where the e-consultation has involved on-line discussion for the 'threads' of conversation are available for analysis. An obvious advantage here is that there is no need to transcribe a face-to-face discussion or comments received in writing. Rather than being paraphrased by a facilitator or reporter, the 'threads' of conversation are visible and contributions are made in users' own words. This makes various kinds of qualitative and quantitative analysis more feasible, for purposes of:-

- summarising the substance of the responses, to identify the users' main concerns, their level of support for any draft proposals, or their suggestions for action they think necessary to address problems raised;
- analysing the quality of deliberation, in terms of how the users make the claims that they make, for example, how they identify themselves, how they use their claimed identity to justify what they say, how they support their arguments by referring to background information, or by responding to other users comments.

There are broadly two types of analysis:

- Thread analysis derived from the results of a discussion 'thread' (i.e. topic or issue heading) can help to assess to what extent particular topics have attracted in-depth discussion. When there are a large number of responses this can assist analysis by drawing attention to potentially significant areas of the debate.
- Content analysis involving both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used to summarise comments made in an online forum.

Case study: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea consultation on E-government

RBKC consulted on its proposals for electronic government. Over 240 people participated. The comments submitted were collated and grouped under a variety of themes. To read the report documenting the responses to the consultation visit: www.rbkc.gov.uk/YourCouncil/Consultation/econsult.asp

4.15 Evaluating e-consultation activities

Recent research¹⁹ indicates a clear lack of an accepted framework on how to evaluate and measure the impact of e-consultations. Empirical research is needed to evaluate e-consultation and make sense of what has, or has not, been achieved. There is a need to understand how to assess the benefits and the impacts of applying technology to the policy process. As governments increasingly support the development of ICTs to enable citizen engagement on policy-related matters, there is correspondingly an increasing need to appreciate whether such electronic consultation meets government's and citizens' objectives. As well as evaluating the process and outcome of an e-consultation (see section 3.8 *how will you evaluate?*), policy makers will also need to evaluate the technical aspect.

The technical perspective will need to address the following question:

- to what extent did the design of the ICT directly affect the e-consultation outcomes?

In designing the e-consultation there is a need to take account of the technical skills and the target audience and the locality of the participants. Here we can take as our starting point established evaluation frameworks from the software engineering and information systems communities and assess issues such as usability and accessibility.

4.16 Creating e-engagement spaces on websites

It is possible to create on government department websites or policy websites a space for citizens to input their views, ideas and give feedback. See Appendix 5 for a list of possible components that could be usefully incorporated into an *e-consultation engagement space*.

¹⁹ Whyte, A. and Macintosh, A (2002) *Analysis and Evaluation of E-consultations' E-Service Bulletin*, Indiana University Press.

5 Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making: A Discussion of Some Key Issues

Introduction

When formulating policy a broad range of views should be considered. The design of public involvement activities should ensure that relevant groups and individuals have genuine opportunities to contribute. Different people have distinct needs, experience different problems and have different perspectives on issues. There are ways of involving and reaching most people in involvement processes, but some of them raise specific issues that demand particular solutions.

Engaging groups that are currently excluded from public policy

The Scottish Executive has developed guidance to ensure diverse groups are not excluded from public consultation. It identifies diverse groups to include:

- Asylum seekers
- Disabled people
- Gypsies/ travellers
- Minority ethnic communities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups
- Older people
- People on low incomes
- People with specific health issues
- People in specific areas (such as rural areas or peripheral estates)
- Refugees
- Religious/faith groups
- Women
- Young people

Scottish Executive (2002) *Good Practice Guidance: Consultation with Equalities Groups*.

Lack of trust is a significant barrier to involving diverse groups in public involvement processes – they may not believe that what they say will be listened to, or lead to change. Some suggestions for dealing with this problem are outlined below – again, *method must match purpose* and any approach you select must reflect the characteristics of your target audience.

Understanding your audience

Policy makers will need to develop an understanding of their target group and any specific needs the group may have. There are many ways of doing this, such as using census information, drawing on previous research or guidance, and talking to the target group directly or organisations that represent or work closely with them.

Based on this knowledge, decision-makers will need to respond sensitively and consider what actions need to be taken to facilitate their involvement. Possible measures include: organising interpreters or signers; running separate meetings for men and women; ensuring venues are fully accessible; making material available in a range of different formats; and asking for people's views about the best ways to involve them.

Involvement at the early stages of the policy-making process

In developing *Viewfinder* we consulted with people from a range of organisations, with direct experience of working with diverse groups in society and individuals who have participated in involvement initiatives²⁰. The need for certain groups or individuals who may have fallen outside of mainstream involvement activities to influence the early stages in the development of a policy was emphasised at these discussions (see Section 3.2 *when will you involve the public?*). Ways of approaching this might be to carry out initial qualitative research or hold discussions with civil society groups in workshops. Specifically, giving people opportunities to identify the problems they face, what needs to change to tackle these, and their role in affecting change, were identified as a means of engaging diverse groups in government decision-making.

Working in partnership

Trust can be fostered by working in partnership with organisations which already have relationships with, and experience of, specific groups. These might include voluntary and community organisations and public bodies. However, some socially excluded groups may have poor links with such organisations, and some kind of outreach activity might be needed.

Our discussions identified a number of different roles that external organisations can play in supporting and contributing to government involvement initiatives:

- taking part formally or informally, drawing on their own knowledge and experience of working with different groups;
- acting as a source of advice and information about the communities or groups they work with;
- helping to identify potential participants, as well as advise on strategies on how to reach them and engage with them effectively;
- helping with the design of exercises;
- delivering training to support initiatives, for example to staff working in government and participants.

²⁰ For further information on our discussions, see appendix 6

Reducing the burden on external organisations

At any one time, CSGs that represent the views of diverse groups are asked to take part in many consultations. This puts serious pressure on their time and resources. It is important that departments recognise this and explore ways of minimising the burden placed on them. It was suggested that departments should draw more on existing findings from previous involvement activities (internally or externally), or work with others to undertake broader exercises.

The Government has introduced a Compact on relations between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England that covers consultation (see for details: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/acu/acu.htm)

There was also concern that some organisations and individuals were being over-consulted. One proposal for tackling this was that departments should broaden the range of organisations they seek to involve in their involvement processes by, for example, maintaining and building lists of organisations on databases.

Listed below are some case studies that illustrate the involvement of diverse groups in policy-making:

- **Appendix 1.1** The Department of Health and University of Central Lancashire: needs assessment project engaging black and ethnic minority communities
- **Appendix 2.14** The Social Exclusion Unit: working in partnership to consult on a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal
- **Appendix 2.15** National Consumers Council: An innovative project to involve low income consumers on food and farming issues
- **Appendix 2.16** All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence: on-line consultation with survivors of domestic violence
- **Section 3.2** Social Exclusion Unit: engaging young people and their parents to inform a project on young runaways

A range of organisations - with direct experience of working with diverse groups in society - has produced guidance or can offer advice on how to effectively involve different groups in decision-making. We reference some examples in Appendix 7.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

This section answers questions often asked by policy makers as they undertake public involvement activities.

1. How do you weigh different responses gained from involving different groups?

Public involvement is not the same as structured survey research and there is no given formula for weighting responses (as there is with survey data). You will need to balance the qualitative responses to your public involvement exercise against other sources of evidence (research and evaluation; legal requirements, etc) in order to advise Ministers. One approach is to draw up a framework for the particular issue. For example, a public involvement exercise on changes in employment policy might involve balancing:

- the views of organisations representing large employers and those representing small and medium enterprises;
- individual large employers themselves;
- Trade Unions or other organisations representing employees;
- professional groups (human resource specialists, lawyers, etc);
- individual members of the public;
- others;

You will be looking at:

- how representative the views of each stakeholder groups are;
- what the level of support is for particular proposals from different groups;
- whether responses from different groups differ significantly.

In practice, you will find that the range of views is generally invaluable in deepening and enriching your understanding of the issue.

2. How valid are public involvement approaches involving only small numbers of people?

The validity of the results of a public involvement exercise can be assessed using a number of measures, such as the sample size, whether a representative sample was reached or the processes the public went through to reach their decision. By way of example, take a citizens' jury and a survey, both used for the purpose of eliciting the public's views on a number of policy options.

A citizens' jury involving sixteen people, recruited to be a best fit of the population, is held over a number of days to consider the policy options in depth. A 1000-person strong survey is commissioned – a statistically representative sample of the population – to produce data on preferred policy choices. So, if both methods were planned and run according to best practice public involvement principles, can the results of one approach be viewed as more valid than another?

The answer is – it depends. If you want to know what percentage of the population agrees that option X is important, or how the views of younger people differ from the retired, then the only 'valid' measure is a representative sample survey. If, however, you want in-depth, informed qualitative information on why people might choose one option against another, then, for example, a citizens' jury might be more appropriate. Seek help from analytical specialists if you are in any doubt.

3. Does public involvement work on controversial issues?

It has been argued that public involvement is not an effective way of dealing with difficult problems or making controversial decisions easier (Steele and Sergeant, 1999). But it can also be seen as a valuable approach for dealing with these kinds of issues. For example, the government initiated a six-month consultation period, instead of the standard three-month, on its public consultation on entitlement cards to provide sufficient time for the subject to be widely debated.

A policy-making process that actively seeks the input of those people interested and affected by a specific policy can generate public trust for the eventual policy. When a decision has been made to involve the public on a particularly sensitive area of policy, it is important to explore ways of building consensus for the process. One approach might be to bring together different stakeholders at the planning stage and involve them in designing the process (see case study on citizens' juries referenced at Appendix 2.2).

Public involvement can help to build consensus. Involving the public in a deliberative process – one which provides participants with opportunities to become more informed about a particular issue and discuss it with others – can often lead to the emergence of consensus.

It should be noted that consensus will not always be possible, stakeholders might not move from entrenched positions. Managing expectations in all consultations, but particularly those on contentious issues, is crucial. Organisations need to be clear about what can change as a result of an involvement process. Ministers will make the final decision. Nevertheless, the process itself has the potential to give decision-makers a better understanding of the different positions and everyone concerned to feel that it has allowed them to express their views.

4. How do departments manage a high volume of responses to public involvement exercises?

Good planning is key to tackling this issue. For example, by anticipating the number of responses departments expect to receive from an involvement exercise, they can begin to design a process that enables key issues to emerge.

If a large number of responses are expected, one approach would be to set out key questions in a questionnaire, with mainly closed questions, to facilitate ease of analysis. Other approaches could then be employed, such as workshops or focus groups, to explore particular issues in greater depth.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.1: Citizen:Government Relations

The following table sets out circumstances where governments might use information, research, consultation and participation in their relations with citizens, illustrated with case studies.

Type	Under which circumstances and suitable methods	Case studies
<p>Information A one-way relationship in which government disseminates information to citizens.</p>	<p>Information might be used when publicising a new policy initiative or change in procedures by publishing information on websites, distributing leaflets, undertaking advertising campaigns and exhibitions. While information alone does not constitute involvement, people will often need information in order to contribute to government policy-making.</p>	<p>The Health and Safety Executive: guidance for contractors and clients</p> <p>The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have published guidance on what employers and contractors need to do to comply with their health and safety responsibilities. www.hse.gov.uk</p>
<p>Research A process by which policy makers capture the opinions or views of specific sectors or groups of the population to inform policy-making.</p>	<p>Individuals participate anonymously as respondents. Research might be used when testing public opinion on different policies under consideration, using quantitative approaches, such as opinion surveys, or qualitative methods like focus groups.</p>	<p>Scottish Executive: plan for action on alcohol misuse</p> <p>To support the written consultation exercise for the Scottish Executive's Substance Misuse Division 'Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse', a research programme was developed to draw in the views of the general public. The project involved focus groups and in-depth interviews with over 70 people, in different locations across Scotland, about their current and past experience of alcohol misuse and alcohol related services. An omnibus survey was also undertaken to capture the views of a representative sample of 1,000 people. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/kd01/red/ataw-00.asp</p>
<p>Consultation A two-way relationship in which government asks for and receives citizens' feedback on policy proposals.</p>	<p>Unlike research and information, consultation is a vital element of encouraging public and civil society groups' "buy-in" to subsequent policy decisions. Consultation might be used to invite the public's views on a specific policy proposal. Suitable methods would include written consultation exercises, workshops, surveys and reconvening groups.</p>	<p>The Social Exclusion Unit: transport and social exclusion project</p> <p>The SEU published a consultation paper on its transport and social exclusion project. They held a series of events around the country targeting those people least likely to come into contact with the document. See www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk</p>

		<p>Visit <i>UK-online</i> for an index of current and closed Government consultations. See www.ukonline.gov.uk</p> <p><i>Consult Wales</i> gives details of current consultations being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly as well as forthcoming consultation events. www.consultation.wales.gov.uk</p>
<p>Participation A relationship between government and citizens based on partnership. Citizens actively participate in defining the process and developing a particular government policy.</p>	<p>Participation is based on a more interactive relationship between government and citizens than consultation. Participation activities might see citizens involved directly to draw up policy proposals and develop solutions to a problem.</p> <p>It might include CSGs working with a government department to help develop new operating frameworks through co-opting CSG representatives on to government bodies. Methods for engaging the public might also include referendums, citizens' juries, citizens' panels and working groups that delegate decision-making authority to citizens²¹.</p>	<p>The Department of Health and University of Central Lancashire: needs assessment project</p> <p>The above organisations developed a national project to engage black and ethnic minority communities in an assessment of needs in relation to drug misuse, treatment, prevention and education. The initiative aimed to develop the skills and capacity of local communities in order for them to engage more effectively with local agencies.</p> <p>The project provided training for around 350 community members from 25 different ethnic groups. These community members accessed over 12,000 people from their communities. A key element of the project was that each ethnic group was allocated between £5,000 - £25,000, over a six month period, with the agreement that the majority of funding should be used to enable the community members themselves to carry out the needs assessment.</p> <p>See also Section 5 – <i>Involving Diverse Groups in Policy-Making</i></p> <p>The above project was shortlisted for the IPPR/Guardian Public involvement Awards 2001. For further information about</p>

²¹ Citizens' juries and panels are methods that can also be used for the purpose of consultation.

		<p>this project , as well as details of the other winning and shortlisted entries, see the Awards report</p> <p>www.ippr.org/research/index.php?current=22&project=25</p>
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Appendix 1.2: Glossary of public involvement methods

There are many potential methods of public involvement, with some of the most commonly used outlined below:

- Written consultation exercises
- Questionnaires
- Open/ Public Meetings
- Focus groups
- Re-convening groups
- Citizens' panels
- Citizens' juries
- Workshops
- Deliberative polls
- Consensus conferences
- Issue Forums
- Working groups
- Visioning exercises
- Planning for real

Electronic methods

- Electronic letterboxes
- Email distribution lists
- Internet based fora
- On-line live chat events
- On-line surveys
- Interactive games and scenario planning

For further information on methods

- Visit the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) website for a good summary of consultation methods together with their strengths and problems ²².
- See the World Bank Participation Sourcebook, which describes a range of participatory methods www.worldbank.org/participation/keydocuments.htm

²² www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/80256C1A00481085/httpPublicPages/7C904EDE6A

Method	Description	Strengths	Sources of information
Written consultation exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public is invited to comment on policies and proposals set out in a document. 	Good for getting views on detailed and potentially complex proposals from interested parties and individuals.	<p>Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2002) <i>Good Practice Guidance on Consultation</i></p> <p>Cabinet Office (1998) <i>How to consult your users?</i> See www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/1998/guidance/users/index.htm</p> <p>Cabinet Office (2000) <i>Code of Practice on Written Consultation.</i> See www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/2000/consult/code/consultationcode.htm</p>
Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May cover a statistically representative sample of the public or a particular group of citizens; The public are asked a set of questions; their responses are collected and analysed; Can be designed to elicit the opinions of the public; Will consist of ‘closed questions’ (public choose between pre-determined options) and/ or open questions (public freely respond). 	Good for finding out what large numbers of people think on particular issues as part of a public consultation exercise.	<p>Cabinet Office (1999) <i>How to consult your users?</i></p> <p>Department for Skills and Education. <i>Tomorrow’s Future. Building a strategy for children and young people.</i> This consultation document included a questionnaire with a mixture of open and closed questions. See www.cypu.gov.uk/corporate/index.cfm</p>
Public Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An open invitation is extended to any member of the public (e.g. through advertising) to find out about a particular issue; The organisers will often present information, and listen and respond to questions or issues raised by the audience. 	Useful as a means of demonstrating a transparent and open approach to policy-making and collecting views.	<p>Cabinet Office (1999) <i>How to consult your users?</i></p> <p>The Food Standards Agency held a number of public meetings to help shape the FSA’s submission to the Commission on Farming and Food in England. See www.talkfood.org.uk/templates/news/meetingList.cfm</p>

Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They bring together 8-10 people, led by a trained facilitator, to discuss a particular issue; • Often recruited to represent a particular group of citizens; • last between 1-2 hours • Information can be provided, but the purpose is to explore opinions in greater depth. 	Good for allowing issues to be explored in some depth	<p>Cabinet Office (2000) <i>How to Consult your users?</i></p> <p>See section 3.2 <i>when will you consult?</i> for Social Exclusion Unit's use of focus groups to inform its project on young runaways.</p>
Re-convening groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to focus groups, except that participants are invited to reconvene as a group on one or more occasion having had time to read information, debate the issues with others outside the group, and reflect and refine their views; • They meet for up to 2 _ hours, allowing for a more in-depth discussion than focus groups; • Meetings can be designed to revisit or build on previous discussions. 	Good for enabling participants to continue their discussion and develop their thinking in between meetings.	<p>Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs used this technique as part of their consultation on a sustainable development strategy. See: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/sdstrategy/summaryconsult.htm</p>
Citizens' panels:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These panels are made up of a statistically representative sample of the population (ranging from 500-5,000 people); • The views of panel members on different issues are sought regularly using a variety of methods, such as surveys, interviews or focus groups; • A proportion of the panel is replaced over a period of time. 	Panels are cost effective once set up, and can be used flexibly. However, attrition can be a problem, as it affects the representativeness of the panel.	<p>Cabinet Office (2000) <i>How to Consult your users?</i></p> <p>Local Government Information Unit (1997) <i>Citizens' Panels: a new approach to community consultation.</i></p>
Citizens' juries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group of 12 to 16 citizens recruited to be a best fit of a population, or a particular section of the public, are brought together to discuss a policy issue; • They last for up to four days and use independent facilitators; • Citizens are informed about the issue and receive evidence from 'expert' 	Good for developing creative and innovative solutions to difficult problems. Allows policy makers to get an in-depth understanding of public perceptions to an issue.	<p>Lenaghan and Coote (1997) <i>Citizens Juries: Theory into Practice.</i> IPPR, London</p> <p>Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2000) <i>Using People's Juries in Social Inclusion Partnerships: Guidance for SIPs.</i></p>

	<p>witnesses;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their conclusions are compiled in a report and presented to the commissioning body for a response. 		<p>Women's and Equality Unit (1998) <i>Citizen's Juries An Appraisal of Their Role Based on the Conduct of Two Women Only Juries</i>, HMSO, London.</p> <p>See Appendix 2.2 for a case study of a citizens' jury.</p>
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These allow policy makers to engage in a dialogue with a group of citizens or stakeholders on a specific issue; • The events can take a variety of formats e.g. government may introduce the issue for discussion and invite participants to debate different aspects of it in a mixture of small group and plenary sessions; • They usually last between half-to-two days. 	Good for providing opportunities to assess an issue in some depth, for example, problems, policy priorities and solutions.	See the National Consumer Council's use of workshops to explore the views of low income consumers towards the future of food and farming (referenced at Appendix 2.15).
Deliberative polls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to measure the opinions of citizens before and after they have had an opportunity to become informed about and discuss a particular issue; • They involve 250-600 people, who are brought together at a conference centre for 1-2 days; • Participants are divided into small groups: they discuss issues, hear evidence and question experts; • Participants are recruited to be representative of the attitudes and demography of the wider population; • Only television companies have employed this approach in the UK. 	Good for providing the informed views of a wide section of the population.	National Centre for Social Research. See www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/report/report_deliberative.htm
Consensus conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A panel of 15-20 people, recruited through random selection techniques, develop an understanding of a specific topic through briefing materials and in dialogue with experts; • At its first meeting, at which discussion is facilitated, the panel is briefed on the subject and 	Good for opening policy-making to direct public scrutiny.	The UK Centre for Economic and Environmental Development facilitated the UK National Consensus Conference on radioactive waste - see www.ukceed.org

	<p>identifies questions that it wants to address. At the second meeting the panel begins to investigate the topic and identifies witnesses to cross-examine;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The panel questions witnesses at a public hearing lasting a number of days; • Following the hearing, the panel prepares a report setting out their views on the subject and presents this in public session at the conference. 		
Issue Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are ongoing bodies with regular meetings, but focussing on a particular issue; • They may have a set membership (illustrated by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's Community Forum) or operate on an open basis (an approach adopted by some local authorities). 	Good for providing opportunities to have an on-going dialogue with the public on particular issues to help formulate policies.	See Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's Community Forum referenced at section 3.2 <i>when will you involve?</i>
Working groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These might involve one or more of the following groups in developing a specific policy: experts, citizens, representatives of civil society groups, Ministers, and government officials; • Such bodies might be a consultative forum or charged with engaging different groups and individuals in policy-making. 	Good for drawing on the expertise of a range of people to help develop policy.	See a case study from the Home Office on Implementing the Human Rights Act referenced at section 3.2 <i>when will you involve?</i>
Visioning exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Future Search conference is one example of a visioning exercise; • It brings together a large group of stakeholders (around 60), selected because they have decision-making authority, an understanding of, or are affected by, the topic under discussion; • Participants take part in a structured meeting, taking up to two and a half days, where they develop a shared vision for the future and commit to action towards the vision. 	Good for helping to create consensus amongst a range of different stakeholders.	<p>For examples of this and other participatory approaches, see the following report: New Economics Foundation <i>Participation works! 21 Techniques of community participation for the 21st century</i> (www.neweconomics.org)</p> <p>For a briefing note on future search, see http://www.neweconomics.org/default.asp?srRequest=areasofwork</p>

<p>Planning for real</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often initiated by local communities on planning matters, a three dimensional model of a particular neighbourhood is created. At a public event displaying this model, the public is invited to attach cards to identify problems, issues of concern and possible solutions. 	<p>These techniques' emphasis on visual materials encourages a range of people to participate in the events.</p>	<p>Planning for real is a registered trademark of The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation. See www.nifonline.org.uk</p>

Examples of Electronic methods²³

Electronic letterboxes

Email addresses on websites or documents give citizens opportunities to feedback to government.

Email distribution lists

Lists used to circulate consultation documents to interested parties.

Citizens can registers for these lists via a website. Their comments can be forwarded to government.

Internet based fora

These can be limited to certain individuals (e.g. a core group of stakeholders) or open to anyone (see www.floodforum.net referenced at Appendix 2.17). These can be designed to allow citizens to: respond to government proposals on-line; read and view the comments of all participants; and engage with other citizens in a dialogue on the proposals.

Generally internet based forum have taken one of two forms: *Issue-based forum*; and *policy-based forum*. These are discussed in Section 4 on *e-consultation*.

On-line live chat events

Participants exchange views, within a fixed period of time (usually 2 hours), with Ministers, MPs etc. These can take place during the time period of an internet discussion forum.

On-line surveys

These are surveys conducted through emails or on specific websites.

Interactive games and scenario planning

These can be used to engage citizens in developing policy options or proposals.

²³ This section is adapted from: *OECD (2001): Citizens as Partners. OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making.* (See www.oecd.org)

Appendix 2: Case Studies

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Appendix 2.1

Departments work to improve involvement internally

Some departments have in place initiatives aimed at improving consultation practice and maintaining high standards in consultation. Some examples are listed below.

Lord Chancellor's Department: consultation guidance on the intranet

The Lord Chancellor's Department has published internal guidance on its Intranet site for staff on compliance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation and other matters relating to consultation. It includes a template for consultation papers to ensure consultation documents comply with the Code and conform to a standard corporate style.

Contact: laurence.fiddler@lcdhq.gsi.gov.uk

Department for Trade and Industry: better consultation with stakeholders

The DTI held a half-day workshop involving stakeholders and officials from across the Department to consider existing consultation practice with stakeholders and to identify priorities for improvement in the future. The Department circulated a note of the outcome of a recent internal discussion on this theme in advance of the meeting as background material. The workshop also used a number of scenarios to enable participants to explore approaches to consultation in different policy situations. Following the workshop, the Department has initiated a better consultation project. A steering group with representatives from key stakeholder organisations will direct the project to ensure that key concerns are addressed.

Contact: Hergen.Haye@sbs.gsi.gov.uk

Appendix 2.2

Building support for public involvement: the example of citizens' juries

An early dialogue with stakeholders on a programme of public involvement can help policy makers to set the parameters and build support for the process. This approach underpins the citizens' jury model, which involves bringing together 12-16 members of the public for up to four days to address an important issue of public policy. A key role of the advisory group for citizens' juries is to advise on the agenda and on the selection of witnesses to ensure participants hear from a range of perspectives.

The Leicestershire Rural Partnership held a Citizens' Jury on the subject of rural services. The Jury considered current and future initiatives concerning the provision of rural services. The Jury was organised, managed and facilitated by the UK Centre for Economic and Environment Development. To find out more visit: www.ukceed.org

Appendix 1.2 on public involvement methodologies includes a fuller description of the citizens' jury method. See also the following *Frequently Asked Question* in Section 6: *Does public involvement work on controversial issues?*

Appendix 2.3

Department for Education and Skills: early planning of public involvement activity

A Government consultation document proposing a strategy for children and young people included details of workshops it was holding as part of the consultation process. Early planning of public involvement activity can help policy makers to integrate the results of different exercises undertaken as part of the development of a specific policy, (such as workshops and written consultation), in order to feed into decision-making at the appropriate point.

To find out more visit: www.cypu.gov.uk/corporate/index.cfm

Appendix 2.4

Share your views – an Internet discussion forum from Finland

The Finnish Government's Internet discussion forum 'share your views with us', found at www.otakanataa.fi, aims to provide citizens with opportunities to input their views on policies at the early stage of development.

Overseen by the Ministry of Finance, 2 to 6 discussions are run at one time on topics chosen by ministries. Ministries are responsible for running their own forums, for example, by providing background material on issues covered and moderating the discussion. They also publish a summary of responses received on the website and the expectation is that they take into account findings from holding forums when developing policies.

The website www.otakanataa.fi also hosts between 1-2 on-line chats between ministers and citizens each month, on subjects selected by ministers.

To find out more visit www.otakanataa.fi or contact Katju Holkeri, Ministry of Finance, Finland on katju.holkeri@vm.vn.fi

Appendix 2.5

Department for Education and Skills: gathering the views of a mix of children and young people

A consultation event was held with children and young people across England to obtain views on the main themes from the *Schools – Achieving Success* White Paper. The event brought together 114 children and young people from a range of primary and secondary schools (including independent, grammar, comprehensive schools and a pupil referral unit), from different socio-economic backgrounds and with special educational needs.

To find out more visit: www.dfes.gov.uk/achievinguccess/download.shtml

See also Section 5 *Involving Diverse Groups In Policy-Making*.

Appendix 2.6

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology: involving a range of people on flooding issues

An on-line discussion was held to examine perspectives on flooding. The consultation targeted the following groups:

- § Members of the public living in high risk flood areas and with personal experience of flooding
- § Organisations or people known to have an interest in managing flooding (e.g. government departments and agencies; the insurance industry; scientists; engineers and planners)
- § Political representatives – covering constituency MPs, members of the House of Lords and local councillors.

To find out more visit: www.floodforum.net

Appendix 2.7

Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Northern Ireland Stratagem: effectively publicising involvement

Organisers of the public consultation on the redevelopment of a former military site in Northern Ireland were successful in widely promoting the initiative. Coverage in the local media, the use of a huge banner around the site with the address of the website hosting the consultation, and writing to 2,500 organisations were approaches employed to alert the initiative to the public and invite their comment. At the end of the consultation period a total of 5,500 hits were recorded on the consultation's website.

To find out more visit: www.fortgeorge.org

Appendix 2.8

Department for Education and Skills: using methods appropriately

As part of a government consultation on its proposals for a new strategy for children and young people, a range of consultation opportunities were provided to enable the public to give their views on the Strategy, tailored to meet the needs of different audiences.

For example, different versions of questionnaires were developed for adults as well as children and young people. The DFES worked with their Young People's Advisory Forum to produce children and young people's response booklets.

In addition, 25 workshop events were held across England for members of the public, voluntary and public sector organisations. A number of these workshops were specially designed for children and young people to participate in. Further events were held with children and young people who are young carers, refugees, in or leaving care or socially excluded.

To find out more visit: www.cypu.gov.uk/corporate/index.cfm

Appendix 2.9

Food Standards Agency: using a range of methods

The Food Standards Agency undertook a wide-ranging consultation to inform its submission to the Policy Commission on Farming and Food for England. This included: written consultation, an opinion poll, an interactive web site called talkfood.org.uk, meeting with consumer organisations, a project to explore the views of low-income consumers, regional seminars and a youth forum.

To find out more visit: www.talkfood.org.uk

Appendix 2.10

City of Edinburgh Council: Consultation Database

The Consultation Database contains a comprehensive store of information about consultation activities carried out by different branches of the City of Edinburgh Council and some of its partner organisations. It includes past, present, ongoing and intended projects.

Information contained in this database includes:

- The aims of the consultation activity
- Information about where the consultation will take place
- Timescales
- Results of the consultation

The database helps to keep staff throughout the Council, partner organisations and members of the public informed about all consultation work being undertaken. The Council believes that it should also encourage joint working and the sharing of resources.

To find out more visit: www.edinburgh.gov.uk

Appendix 2.11

Scottish Executive: evaluating the process of a public involvement exercise

The Institute for Public Policy Research conducted an independent evaluation of four pilot 'People's Juries' in two contrasting Social Inclusion Partnerships in Scotland. The evaluation sought to identify what was more and less successful in each case from the point of view of participants, the Social Inclusion Partnerships and the organisers. The evaluation consisted of observation of each event, analysis of questionnaires from participants and telephone interviews with relevant people involved in the initiative. Key findings from the evaluation of these juries have been used to inform published Scottish Executive Guidance for SIPs on Using People's Juries in Social Inclusion Partnerships.

To find out more see: Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2000) *Using People's Juries in Social Inclusion Partnerships: Guidance for SIPs*.

Appendix: 2.12

Examples from departments on the impact of public involvement on policy

Department for Education and Skills

The DFES consulted on the proposal that schools should no longer have to produce separate school prospectuses and governors' annual reports for parents. The overwhelming majority of the 583 groups and individuals who responded to the consultation said that they were opposed to the idea of the law combining the two documents in the way that was put forward. In the light of the consultation, the Government will not be changing the law so as to combine the two documents.

To find out more visit:

www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/archive/archive1.cfm?CONID=56

Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DEFRA's consultation on new consolidated dairy quota regulations led to two proposals being withdrawn as a result of opposition to them; and a consultation on an appeals mechanism for farmers in England led to changes to the original recommendations on how the appeal mechanism would work.

To find out more visit: www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/milk/index.htm

Appendix 2.13

London Borough of Lewisham: evaluating the outcomes of a programme of public involvement

The Lewisham Listens project was established in 1994 with the aim of achieving “a significant increase in citizen participation in the work of the council.” An evaluation was carried out of the project to assess the level of impact that consultation has had on the Council’s decisions. The evaluation covered a range of consultation activity carried out by the council over a three year period, including the citizens’ panel, annual residents survey, and consultation carried out as part of the council’s strategic reviews. In total, 30 separate consultation exercises were considered.

Evaluation will be built in early into the project. The following evaluation criteria was established:

- Overall levels of participation and representativeness of people participating
- Links with political and administrative structures and action taken
- The extent to which the community took control
- Satisfaction levels of the participants
- Contribution to quality of decision-making

Methodology

- Interviews with 25 officers involved in commissioning consultation using a questionnaire
- A separate questionnaire sent to elected councillors
- A review of written reports and evidence which detail consultation results

Consultation was categorised as having a major, significant, minor or no impact on policy. Impact was judged using the following criteria:

- Extent that decisions were in line with consultation results
- Measures taken when consultation results were not in line with expectation
- The scale of the issue consulted on and implications for any changes for service delivery
- Importance given to consultation results throughout the decision-making process
- Evidence provided to support judgements that were made.

A unit within the Council carried out the evaluation. While the evaluators acknowledged that the judgements made by them on the level of impact that the consultation had on decision-making was inevitably subjective, as much evidence as possible was collected and documented to support the judgements made.

Conclusion

The review indicated that consultation has, in most cases, had some impact on decisions. In 18 out of the 30 cases reviewed the consultation was considered to have had a significant or major impact.

Appendix 2.14

Social Exclusion Unit: working in partnership to consult on a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

In addition to undertaking written consultation on the proposed Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, over 70 events were held throughout England to explain the Strategy and to obtain feedback. The events were largely arranged in partnership with organisations such as the Urban Forum and the Local Government Association (LGA), who were able to draw in a broad range of voluntary, community, public sector and special interest groups.

The Social Exclusion Unit also appointed MORI to gather more in-depth reactions to the Strategy from residents and local public service workers. This research was successful in finding out the views of some traditionally hard-to-reach groups, such as the elderly, and people for whom English is not a first language.

To find out more visit: www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/published.htm

Appendix 2.15

National Consumer Council: an innovative project to involve low-income consumers on food and farming issues

The NCC held two 'Weekend Away for a Bigger Voice' workshops to explore the views of low-income consumers towards the future of food and farming. Each workshop took place over one-and-a-half days. The findings fed into the NCC's submission to the Government's Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food.

The workshop facilitation employed a variety of techniques, including Reflect, citizens' juries, scenario workshops and discussion drama. These were designed to fulfil the twin aims of empowerment and qualitative research. The workshops aimed to explore participants' own experiences and aspirations, rather than define areas for discussion. For more on the findings and methodology employed visit:

www.ncc.org.uk/pubs/feeding_in.htm

The on-line parliamentary inquiry into Domestic violence

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence held an on-line consultation with survivors of domestic violence. The purpose was to allow women who had lived with domestic violence to give direct evidence to a group of MPs who were investigating the subject. This is an example of an initiative that used ICTs effectively to open up the parliamentary process to a group of people whose voices were rarely heard.

Key points

- The discussion ran for one month. The process of locating and registering women to participate started five months before the launch of the consultation and was carried out by workers from women's groups and refuge centres. Participants had to register to receive a user name and a password that allowed them to access the secure discussion forum ("Womenspeak"). MPs were also issued with passwords giving them access to this area.
- The website that hosted the on-line discussion provided an explanation of the consultation, other relevant information about the policy area and links to organisations. The interactive aspect of the website allowed women to post messages directly onto the site or to simply read others' contributions.
- *Access to technology:* Each refuge or women's centre took responsibility for providing the women participating with sufficient computers at their premises or arranging access points at nearby public buildings
- A set of opening questions was posted at the launch of the consultation, developed by key stakeholders and the consultation's advisory group, addressing the main areas within domestic violence.
- An independent moderator monitored discussions and added relevant information to the website.

Further information:

Coleman S and Norman E (2000) *'New Media and Social Inclusion'*, Hansard Society. This report describes in full the consultation process for the on-line parliamentary inquiry into domestic violence. The Hansard society host the Democracy Forum, which debates issues concerning parliamentary democracy in the UK
www.democracyforum.org.uk

Appendix 2.17

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology internet discussion: Floodforum.net

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) commissioned the Hansard Society to run an on-line discussion to examine perspectives on flooding. The purpose was to stimulate debate on the causes, consequences and approaches to alleviating and preventing flooding to inform parliamentary debate on this issue.

Key points

- The discussion ran for one month on a dedicated internet site (www.floodforum.net).
- Methods used to publicise the consultation and recruit participants included issuing invitations, local media coverage (including local radio and newspaper interviews and articles), sending emails, websites and word-of-mouth.
- The organisers alerted participants to public internet access points (eg available at local libraries) and also accepted written submissions from those without ready email access.
- The discussion was moderated by the Hansard Society. Some messages were posted on the website at the start of the discussion to stimulate debate on key issues the consultation sought to address. As the process unfolded, participants were able to introduce new areas for discussion, although it was the moderator's role to ensure that these were relevant to the overall purpose of the process.

Results

532 individuals registered and logged in to the discussion. 157 participants posted a total of 571 messages. It is important to note that it was possible for individuals to log in to the discussion and read other individuals contributions, without posting messages.

The discussion in full is archived at www.floodforum.net and the final report of floodforum is also available at that website.

Appendix 2.18

Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: using 'on-line' and 'off-line' involvement mechanisms to consult on its sustainable development strategy

DEFRA has involved a wide range of people – stakeholders, the public and DEFRA staff – using a range of on-line and off-line consultation techniques in developing its Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy. They ran a series of stakeholder seminars, an online discussion forum involving around 40 organisations; a number of 'reconvening groups' with members of the public, and an on-line discussion forum for staff on DEFRA's internal website.

www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/sdstrategy/summaryconsult.htm

Appendix 3: Issues to consider when working with external contractors

You will first need to decide which part(s) of the involvement process to contract out (eg recruitment, facilitation, planning and/or running events, analysis of results etc). Decisions on these issues must be timely. For example, if the decision is taken to commission an external contractor to analyse the responses to an involvement exercise, additional value can be found by involving them in the preparation and design of the exercise right at the beginning of the process.

While most policy makers will have experience of using contractors, it is worth bearing in mind the following points:

- The necessity of competitive tendering will have implications for when the exercise can actually take place
- There may be expertise in-house that can be drawn on – e.g. from social researchers
- Effective project management skills are a requirement of both internal and commissioned involvement
- The pros and cons of using external consultants should be considered carefully. Whilst they are likely to have the time and skills to complete the work quickly and competently, external consultants are likely to have limited knowledge of the policy area. Cost also needs to be considered.

Appendix 4 : Examples of evaluation frameworks

A validated toolkit for evaluating the effectiveness of public participation exercises from the perspectives of both organisers and participants has been developed. The toolkit is based on nine evaluation criteria, against which exercises are judged. It comprises three measurement instruments; the short participant questionnaire, the long participant questionnaire and an evaluation checklist. Reference: Marsh, R., Rowe, G and Frewer, L. (2001) *Public Participation Methods: Evolving and Operationalising an evaluation framework. Developing and testing a toolkit for evaluating the success of public participation exercises*. Report to the Department of Health and Health and Safety Executive, Institute of Food Research, Norwich
The web address is: www.doh.gov.uk/risk.htm

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) has developed two self-evaluation frameworks for public consultation undertaken by local authorities - one is for the evaluation of individual consultation exercises and the other for corporate evaluation. Both cover the effectiveness of the consultation process and the impact it has had on decision-making. This is available on-line:
www.idea.gov.uk/bestvalue/consult/main.htm

Appendix 5: E-consultation

Creating e-engagement spaces on websites

It is possible to create on government department websites or policy websites, a space for citizens to input their views, ideas and give feedback. The following is a list of possible components that could be usefully incorporated into an *e-consultation engagement space*. The exact list of components will depend on a number of factors, including the objective of the consultation and the target audience.

Overview: A welcoming page outlining the purpose, target audience, timescales of the consultation, who is undertaking the consultation, and why, etc. This should follow good practice principles for off-line consultations as referenced elsewhere in this report (see section 3).

Background information: This is where the policy makers can provide further background information on the consultation issue. It can comprise comprehensive pages on the consultation subject, or link to other electronic sources for further, more detailed information.

Expert Witness Statements: This is where “experts” on the consultation topic could be invited to provide statements.

Methods to gather citizens’ input: The method selected to gather citizens’ comments is dependent on the type of consultation being undertaken.

Other ways to be involved: Details of events and other non-electronic consultation activities associated with the topic are described here. This is one available approach for co-ordinating off-line and on-line consultation exercises.

Feedback: This provides space for a statement from those organising the consultation on the results and effects of the consultation once the consultation is complete and contributions analysed.

Review site: An on-line questionnaire for users to complete to support continuous improvement.

Contributors: A list of the names and organisations (where appropriate) of all those who make a contribution can be displayed here, subject to national data protection legislation.

Log-in/Logoff: This is where user registration occurs, if necessary.

Tell a friend: This allows the promotion of the on-line consultation electronically, for example, the organisers could automatically email people they felt would be interested in participating in the consultation.

In the Service of Democracy

The website e-democracy.gov.uk was created to support the Government’s consultation on e-democracy. The website allows users to: view or download the proposals; respond to the consultation; or link into ongoing discussions; look at background material and make suggestions for more.

Appendix 6: Inclusive Consultation workshop

The Cabinet Office held a half-day workshop on ‘inclusive consultation’. The workshop involved people from a range of organisations, with direct experience of working with diverse groups in society. It also included individuals who have participated in involvement initiatives.

The purpose was to identify challenges and solutions, based on participants’ knowledge and experience, to achieving an inclusive process of public involvement. Here we provide a summary of participants’ views on the Government’s approach to consultation.

1. ‘When Government departments have consulted you what has worked well?’

When a relationship is established between those seeking the information and those giving it

- issues and approach discussed with those who will be consulted before deciding on the method;
- when policy makers have gone out to meet the people before the consultation;
- if the involvement is part of an ongoing process, not just a one-off event;
- groups for two way regular consultation have been created;
- those who have been consulted know what the findings are, see the final report and get regular updates on developments;
- knowledge and power has been equal;
- consumers are provided with the means to gain more knowledge about their community so that the dialogue is more equal.

When the right people have been consulted

- bureaucracy has been avoided, but the talking has been with the community;
- focus groups have been organised through trusted gatekeepers;
- there has been wide ranging inclusion.

When it is genuine

- if you respect and act on what people say;
- if target groups feel they are central to the process, not an output;
- if the government accepts that consumers are capable of considering complex issues given the right facilitation.

Timing

- enough time has been given to consult our users;
- the consultation is at the beginning of the process, not at the end.

When the needs of those being consulted are considered

- paying expenses, such as fares, child care, caring responsibilities etc
- rewards for contributing
- funds to involve low income contributors
- provide transport to meetings

When it is appropriate

- high level engagement
- bottom-up alignment
- different approaches are used

When the approach is flexible rather than rigid

2. Your responses to the question ‘what needs to be improved when Government departments consult you?’

The way in which we are involved

- involve us in the whole process from inception through design to evaluation
- explain why the consultation is needed
- accept some advice about who to include and how to do it
- make clear what is open to change and what is not
- Don’t always stick to your agenda, what about the agenda of those being consulted?

The method

- use inclusive techniques
- don’t rely so much on written consultation
- be more creative and imaginative
- don’t misuse methods, such as focus groups
- allow more room for diverse comments
- form a relationship with a contact

Show you are listening

- acknowledge our expertise
- keep us informed on progress
- take action on our recommendations, or explain why not
- tell us what your findings and recommendations are
- inform us of the outcome of the consultation
- take action
- take a firmer stand on principles

Enable us to help you

- recognise and help to develop ‘intermediary’ organisations
- fund the consultation
- give us enough time to consult properly
- share information

Appendix 7: Guidance on involving diverse groups in decision making processes

A range of organisations - with direct experience of working with diverse groups in society - has produced guidance or can offer advice on how to effectively involve different groups in decision making. We reference some examples here:

Reports

ADT Fourth World (2000) *Participation Works. Involving people in poverty in policy-making.*

Beresford, P. and Croft, S. (1993) *Citizen Involvement. A practical guide for change,* Basingstoke Macmillan.

Cabinet Office. *Consulting ethnic minority communities: an introduction for public services* (www.consultation.gov.uk)

Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power (2000) *Listen Hear The right to be heard. Report of the Commission,* The Policy Press.

Department for Environment, Transport and Rural Affairs (1997) *Involving communities in urban and rural regeneration.*

Duncan, P. and Thomas, S (2000) *Neighbourhood regeneration: Resourcing community involvement,* the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Policy Press.

Edwards, C. (2001) 'Inclusion in Regeneration: A Place for Disabled People?', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 38, No.2, pp. 267-287.

National Consumer Council (2002) *Feeding into food policy. A submission to the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food on the Views of Low income consumers.* www.ncc.org.uk

New Economics Foundation *Participation works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st Century.*

Purdue, D. et al. (2000) *Community leadership in area regeneration,* the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Policy Press.

Royal National Institute for the Blind. (2001) *Access to written information. The views of 1000 people with sight problems.*

Royal National Institute for the Blind (2001) *See it Right Pack.*

Scottish Executive (2002) *Good practice Guidance – consultation with equalities groups.*

Skinner, S. and Wilson, M. (2002) *Assessing community strengths: A practical handbook for planning capacity building,* Community Development Foundation.

Social development reports on participation

Booth, D. and Holland, J. (1998) *Participation and combined methods in African poverty assessment: Renewing the agenda,* Department for International Development (DFID)/ Social Development Department (SDD). www.dfid.gov.uk

Brocklesby, M and Holland, J. (1998) *Participatory poverty assessments and public services: Key messages from the Poor,* DFID/SDD.

Condy, A. (1998) *Improving the quality of teaching and learning through community participation: achievements, limitations and risks*, DFID/SDD.

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Jobes, K (1997) *Participatory monitoring and evaluation guidelines : Experiences in the field – St Vincent and Grenadines*, DFID/SDD.

Norton, A. (2001) *A rough guide to PPA's : Participatory Poverty Assessment – An introduction to theory and practice*, ODI.

World Bank Participation Sourcebook
www.worldbank.org/participation/keydocuments.htm

World Bank, Poverty Reduction Strategy Sourcebook
www.worldbank.org/participation/keydocuments.htm

Organisations

Children and Young People's Unit, Department for Education and Skills
CYPUs *Learning to Listen* document contains core principles for the involvement of children and young people, includes case studies and an annex of external organisations who have experience of working with children and young people and developing consultation and participation with this group. For this document and different Action Plans developed by the department about children and young people's participation, visit their website (www.cypu.gov.uk)

Commission for Racial Equality
CRE is a non-governmental body set up to tackle racial discrimination and promote racial equality. Its website includes links to various organisations working in this field.
www.cre.gov.uk/navigate/links.html

Disability Rights Commission
The Disability Rights Commission has a specific function to provide a central source of information and advice, particularly to disabled people, and businesses. Visit their website: www.disability.gov.uk/info/index.html

National Centre for Voluntary Organisations
NCVO's website includes links to the voluntary sector on-line - www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/main/gateway/links2.html

Royal National Institute of the Deaf
RNID is the largest charity representing the 8.7 million deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. www.rnid.org.uk.

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(www.homeoffice.gov.uk/acu/acu.htm)

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Institute for Public Policy Research (2001) IPPR/Guardian Public Involvement Awards 2001. (www.ippr.org.uk)

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