Public dialogue and policy making: The UK’s Sciencewise programme

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17 January 2017
What we’ll cover

What is public dialogue and how can it help policy making?

Sciencewise programme

Examples and case studies

Conclusions
What is public dialogue?
Public dialogue

brings together members of the public with policy makers, scientists and other stakeholders
to deliberate on issues relevant to future policy decisions, and in particular on social and ethical issues raised by new science and technology
Key ingredients....

- involvement of specialists and the public!
- time and space to allow participants to discuss and debate the issues
- linked to a specific policy issue

Public dialogue is most valuable when:
- in advance of policy decisions
- issues are highly contentious
- there is potentially strong public interest
- transparency is essential
- Public questions, concerns and aspirations need to be understood and built in to decision making alongside technical expertise and stakeholder views
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public dialogue is...</th>
<th>Public dialogue is not...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent and unbiased</td>
<td>A replacement for Government decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tied to specific policy and decision making</td>
<td>Opinion polling on a generic subject</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusive of diverse perspectives</td>
<td>A means to persuade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broadly representative of the general public through recruitment</td>
<td>A talking shop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structured and deliberative, designed and customised</td>
<td>A replacement for other evidence-based processes or market research</td>
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The UK’s Sciencewise Programme
What is Sciencewise?

“Sciencewise helps policy makers use public dialogue to develop better policy on issues involving science and technology.”

Funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
What kinds of support does it offer?

- Consultancy
- Training and mentoring
- Events
- Advice and guidance publications
- R&D
- Website
- Networking
Examples and Case Studies

- Bioscience
- Data Management and Use
- Energy and Climate Change
- Environment
- Food
- Futures
- Healthcare
- Nanotechnology
- Public Engagement Practice
- Regulation and Governance
- Risk, Resilience and Adaptation
- Wellbeing
- Mitochondria replacement
- National ecosystem assessment
- Synthetic biology
- Flood risk communication
- Shale gas and oil
input into improved site selection process

63 people, 2x1 day workshops, 4 locations

Influenced policy

White Paper:

- Content
- Future engagement
- Style

Disposal of radioactive waste

A public dialogue on the review of the siting process for the Geological Disposal Facility for radioactive waste.

New Reactor Design Assessment

Regulators used Sciencewise to review regulatory engagement and help improve it further.

Online survey and workshops
What regulators learnt....... 

- People are interested in nuclear power station technology and regulatory assessments.
- People who have more context and background (bigger picture) knowledge are more motivated and able to contribute.
- Tone is as important as communications methods.
- Keep the language simple.
- To build trust with people we have to do ‘face to face’, where resources allow.
- Be clearer about what we are asking people to do and what they can and cannot influence.
Responding to the dialogue: adapting regulatory communications & engagement strategy

- It confirmed that we were already doing most things that the Sciencewise project recommended

- 80/20 principle
  - Working with others
  - Delivery through partnerships
  - Keep it simple
  - Clarify how people can get involved and what they can influence
Conclusions
General benefits

- Improves public policy
- Improves the process of policy making
- Helps to manage policy risks
  - Enables progress to be made on strategically significant, sometimes highly contentious topics by supporting policy makers to find ways forward that go with the grain of public views
  - Avoids the conflicts and entrenched positions that can result in the complete rejection of new technologies
- Supports the democratic process by directly engaging members of the public
- Cost-effective
General impact

- Helps create better ‘open policy’
- Improves the quality of communications between Government, scientists and the public
- Drives synergy and integration across Government by bringing together different departments to work on dialogue projects

Impacts on public participants

- Increases public awareness and understanding
- Drives behaviour change
“You can’t expect any drugs policy to have long-term success unless you take people with you. If you cut across the grain of the public instinct, it’s disastrous. Engaging with people should help us devise policies which are acceptable and sustainable.”

(Academy of Medical Sciences)

“The UK has run an exemplary and internationally admired process for considering benefits, risks, ethical issues and public consent, which must properly precede a change in the law.”

(Excerpt from letter by eminent scientists and Nobel Prize winners on mitochondrial donation. Cited in House of Lords by Earl Howe, February 2015)
Further info:

http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/


Thanks!