

The background of the cover is a vibrant orange with a large, stylized graphic of a DNA double helix in shades of yellow, green, and blue. Overlaid on this are several photographs: a group of people in a meeting at the top left, a hand-drawn mind map in the center, a woman speaking into a microphone in the middle, and a woman kneeling in conversation with a man at the bottom. The title text is positioned on the right side of the cover.

A Citizens' Inquiry into the Forensic Use of DNA and the National DNA Database

Evaluation Report
July 2008

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. THE COMMISSIONING GROUP'S AIMS FOR THE CITIZENS' INQUIRY	4
3. EVALUATION	6
Achievement of the working group's aims	6
Planning and documentation	16
Facilitation	17
The panellists	17
4. CONCLUSION	18
APPENDICES	19
1: Inquiry Sessions	19
2: Methods	20
3: Questionnaire and Results	21



Executive Summary

This report provides an evaluation of the Citizens' Inquiry into the issues of concern raised by the forensic use of DNA and the National DNA Database.

The Citizens' Inquiry was conducted by an independent company called Vis-à-Vis Research Consultancy Ltd on behalf of a working group co-ordinated by the Human Genetics Commission.

Evaluating the Citizens' Inquiry against each of the aims established by the working group, this report finds as follows:

- (a) *Broaden the range of informed views and concerns that can feed into policy-makers' strategic decision-making.* Effectively met.
- (b) *Provide a good foundation on which to build an ongoing plan of dialogue and communications activities in this area of policy.* Likely that the two reports produced by Vis-à-Vis will provide a good foundation for further activities.
- (c) *Increase awareness among all stakeholder groups, and diverse publics, of the challenges, opportunities and uncertainties of the use of DNA for forensic purposes, particularly social and ethical issues.* Likely that these reports will achieve this aim. The Inquiry process itself certainly increased awareness among the diverse population assembled for the Inquiry.
- (d) *Encourage a two-way dialogue and mutual learning process between researchers, policy-makers, other stakeholders and diverse publics.* The Inquiry process highly effectively created such a dialogue.
- (e) *Make demonstrable to people, especially those from parts of the population who may be particularly affected, that the public's informed views and concerns have been heard by policy-makers, even on issues not directly connected to the use of DNA for forensic purposes.*
How effectively this aim was achieved can only be judged after further public debate. The process and the reports provide a good foundation for this aim to be achieved.
- (f) *Contribute towards a long-term increase in the involvement of the relevant actors in the use of DNA for forensic purposes in public engagement and dialogue.* The enthusiasm of the Inquiry panel for further involvement in this discussion indicates that this aim will also be achieved over time.

This evaluation concludes by commending Vis-à-Vis, the commissioning working group and the Inquiry's advisory panel for setting up an exemplary process for public investigation and debate on this most important issue. It praises the panellists themselves for their committed hard work, their intelligence and their goodwill.



1. Introduction

The Citizens' Inquiry into issues of concern raised by the forensic use of DNA and the National DNA Database was set up by a working group co-ordinated by the Human Genetics Commission. A competitive tendering process to organise and facilitate the Inquiry was won in December 2007 by an independent organisation called Vis-à-Vis Research Consultancy Ltd. In February and March 2008, two panels initially comprising 30 people were assembled by Vis-à-Vis in Birmingham and Glasgow to question experts who offered their views on the forensic use of DNA and the National DNA Database. Appendix 1 lists the dates of the Inquiry sessions. After that, on 15–16 March in Birmingham and on 5–6 April in Glasgow, the panellists met to assemble their recommendations, and in May 2008 Vis-à-Vis submitted a draft report, setting out the panellists' views. In June, Vis-à-Vis submitted the *Contractor's Report*, which provides a very detailed description and analysis of the process they created.

This report outlines my evaluation of the whole process. The qualitative and quantitative methods I employed are described in Appendix 2 and the quantitative findings are included to be added in Appendix 3. Simply put, my method was to ask the main stakeholders in the process (the commissioning working group) to give their views on the question 'To what extent have your aims been met?' and to ask the panellists, 'How well has this process worked for you, given the aims of the Inquiry?' This report records their answers, includes my own observations on their meetings and the documentation provided by Vis-à-Vis, and sets out my views on the effectiveness of the whole process. Overall, my finding is that this has been an extremely valuable process and that the commissioning working group's aims have been well met.



2. The Commissioning Group Aims for the Citizens' Inquiry

In its commissioning document, the Human Genetics Commission (HGC) Working Group set out its aims as follows:

‘The HGC feels strongly that the forensic use of DNA and genetic information has not yet been subject to significant public debate. The overall aims of the project are listed here:

- (a) Broaden the range of informed views and concerns that can feed into policy-makers' strategic decision-making.
- (b) Provide a good foundation on which to build an ongoing plan of dialogue and communications activities in this area of policy.
- (c) Increase awareness among all stakeholder groups, and diverse publics, of the challenges, opportunities and uncertainties of the use of DNA for forensic purposes, particularly social and ethical issues.
- (d) Encourage a two-way dialogue and mutual learning process between researchers, policy-makers, other stakeholders and diverse publics.
- (e) Make demonstrable to people, especially those from parts of the population who may be particularly affected, that the public's informed views and concerns have been heard by policy-makers, even on issues not directly connected to the use of DNA for forensic purposes.
- (f) Contribute towards a long-term increase in the involvement of the relevant actors in the use of DNA for forensic purposes in public engagement and dialogue.’

The ‘diverse publics’ and ‘dialogue’ points in these aims were emphasised throughout the commissioning document:

‘Our aim is to provide a space in which an *inclusive* group of UK citizens – having considered key social and ethical issues involved – can effectively communicate their informed views on the current and future use of DNA for forensic purposes to policy-makers...

‘Although participants in the Inquiry will be asked to focus on the National DNA Database, we would also wish for discussions to be facilitated in such a way that they are able to frame the breadth and depth of the issues under discussion for themselves. As in similar methods of public engagement, such as citizens' juries and consensus conferences, the scope of their final report will be shaped through



negotiation, in this case with the HGC's working group. Participants will thus be *free to express views on whatever they wish* without diluting the ability of the Inquiry to achieve its aims...

'The Citizens' Inquiry's report, together with analysis by the contractor and the HGC's working group, will draw on the informed views of a *diverse* group of individual.' [author's emphasis]



3. Evaluation

Achievement of the working group's aims

This section of the report is organised by reference to the commissioning working group's formal aims (a) to (f) and its stress on diversity and dialogue. Since this report also evaluates the experiences of the panel, it discusses each aim with reference to the panellists' views about their own learning process.

(a) Broaden the range of informed views and concerns that can feed into policy-makers' strategic decision-making

In aiming to broaden the range of informed views on this issue, the working group was very clear that it wanted to hear from diverse populations in the UK. What was meant by 'inclusive', and exactly how 'inclusive' the Inquiry panel was to be, was the subject of intense debate at the start of the process. At the first advisory panel meeting on 22 January 2008 in London, Vis-à-Vis was subjected to forceful scrutiny when it presented its initial list of panellists. One member in particular objected to the heavy weighting in the list towards young people and people from minority ethnic communities. This objection was based simply on the question of how credible would be the Inquiry's findings if the panel was not representative of the UK's population as a whole. Vis-à-Vis agreed to find some more older white men for the panels, but argued that its brief had been to produce panels that would ensure that the views both of people most likely to be directly affected by the extension of the DNA database, and of people who are usually not well represented in public debate, would be fully included. At the subsequent meeting of the working group on the same day, this matter was fully discussed once more. One member of the working group said, 'We decided we wanted to get a group of people not normally heard. We made robust decisions. The over-representation of black men on the panels is desirable', and this appeared to be the common view. Vis-à-Vis's selection criteria and panel composition were endorsed.

In my survey of the panellists' views on the Inquiry process (see Appendix 3 of this report) people described the ethnic groups they belonged to as follows:

African Black	1	Scottish/English	1
Asian	2	Sikh	1
Black Caribbean	1	White	1
British	2	White British	4
British Asian	1	White European	1
British/Jamaican/Africa	1	White Scottish	2
Mixed	1	No response	2
Pakistani	2		

Thus, of the 23 people surveyed, nine people declared themselves to be white, and 10 declared themselves to be non-white (assuming 'Asian', 'Sikh' and 'Pakistani' signify non-white). Interestingly, two gave no response and two said 'British' – these might be people who are not interested in expressing their identity in terms which include

skin colour. Nevertheless, compared with the UK population, non-white people were over-represented on the panel.

In terms of gender, 11 were male and 12 were female, which is representative of the population as a whole.

The age range in my survey was as follows: age 15–20: 8, age 21–30: 5, age 31–40: 2, age 41–50: 5, age 51–60: 1, age 61–70: 2. Young people are over-represented, but older people are included here.

The following occupations were declared in my survey: service user, unemployed, financial consultant, volunteer, youth worker, mentor (2 people), student (8 people), employment development officer, crèche assistant, community development officer, disabilities worker, youth justice development officer, local government officer (2 people) and consultant engineer. Students and public sector workers are heavily over-represented in occupational terms.

The *Contractor's Report* provides more information on the composition of the Inquiry panel.

To get a flavour of the types of people on the panel, I asked what their favourite TV programmes and newspapers were, and the results were as follows.

Favourite TV programme: none (2); soaps; cricket; *The Bill* (2); *Friends*; *BBC News at 10*; *QI*; *Lost*; *EastEnders* (4); *Smallville*; BBC News 24; *Golden Balls*; *Newsnight*; *Heroes*; *news*; *Spooks*; *The One*; *Doctor Who*.

Favourite newspaper: none (5); *Daily Mail*; *Metro* (4); *Sun* (3); *The Times* (3); *Guardian* (2); *Mirror* (1); *Daily Record* (Glasgow) (1); *Evening Times* (Glasgow) (1); *Independent* (1); *Daily Telegraph* (1).

Readers of quality newspapers and viewers of TV news programmes might be slightly over-represented here, but these are probably broadly representative of the social interests of the population as a whole.

One member of the working group (A) commented on this aim as follows:

‘The inquiry appears to have successfully engaged citizens from diverse range of backgrounds, many of whom may not otherwise have found or taken an opportunity to represent their views to policy-makers. The range of views and concerns expressed, whilst not being significantly novel, confirms that concerns are held by a diverse range of people and persist after more detailed consideration in the context of richer information and deliberation.’

Another (B) said:

‘I think that we have broadly achieved this – we have taken a diverse group of citizens, the likes of whom have not previously fed into policy-makers’ decision-making processes (on this issue). The policy-maker end of it is ongoing – they have communicated with us, and with a few policy-makers in the process, but there is more to be done here, in my view. Hopefully the report will enable us to do that to some extent.’



A third member of the Working Group (C) said:

‘I think this aim has been met – a diverse group of citizens were involved and a range of views developed on the NDNAD and the forensic use of DNA. The HGC now has to work to feed this into the policy process. Because the report came with contradictory recommendations and without numbers attached to the minority and majority statements, our task is to use this ambivalence appropriately and educate policy makers on how public views are expressed and can be utilised even if not resolute. Those areas where there was unanimity makes that easier.’

In discussion on the ‘representativeness’ question at the final meeting with the panellists, several points were made, including the lack of people from rural areas, the lack of residents from east Scotland and eastern England, and the lack of representation across all classes. But participants said they liked the mix of people overall, one stressing that although the mix felt strange at first, as time went on she felt it was ‘entirely normal and rather nice’. Another said that the Inquiry was ‘not about black or white but about participating in the discussion’.

A member of the Advisory Committee noted how that the range of ‘informed views’ might have been widened by their advice:

‘The Inquiry Panel’s (IP) views were certainly informed by engagement with a range of experts, and concerns were raised. I’m not sure whether these actually ‘widened’ the range, but they may have highlighted particular (or individual) areas of concern that might otherwise be overlooked.’

So the first part of this aim – ‘broaden[ing] the range of informed opinion’ – can be judged to have been effectively met.

The achievement of the second part of this aim – ‘feed[ing these views] into policy-makers’ strategic decision-making – depends on processes that will take place in the months and years after the *Citizens’ Report* is made public, as the working group member quoted above has observed.

An Advisory Committee member made this point:

‘It remains unclear whether any of the views or recommendations will actually influence policy or strategy, and elements of the conflicting recommendations in particular could be used to claim “public support” for politically-motivated (not evidence-based) decisions.’

Having read the report and observed the process through which it was constructed, it seems very likely that it will make a constructive contribution to policy-making, if the legitimacy of the working group’s initial decision on the composition of the panel is accepted. Clearly, the issue of how representative of the whole population is an Inquiry panel is an important one that deserves wider debate. The fact is that the working group specifically requested an Inquiry which reflected the views of a diverse and inclusive set of people, and this has been achieved. The legitimacy of the majority finding of the Inquiry – that there should not be a universal DNA database – will be questioned by those who say that the types of people included in the panel are most likely to oppose a

universal database, irrespective of the evidence. On the other hand, there was a strongly expressed minority opinion in favour of a universal database, indicating that genuine inquiry and debate had taken place. The reasoning provided in the report for each of the recommendations also indicates careful and rational thought throughout the Inquiry, which must add credibility to the process. And there is a clear ethical and democratic injunction for national debate to include the views of people – such as young people and people from minority ethnic groups – whose opinions on important national issues are rarely solicited by the media and other opinion-formers. In my view, this Inquiry will provide important material to inform strategic decision-making.

(b) Provide a good foundation on which to build an ongoing plan of dialogue and communications activities in this area of policy

Evaluation of this aim begins in the comments above. A third advisory panel member (C) stated that the key issue is how to develop the planned dialogue and communication on the basis of the *Citizens' Report*, something that is currently being considered. Working Group member A said:

‘The reported enthusiasm of the participants to continue to be involved in the process and the level of engagement with the policy process appears to have been successful. The outcomes provide a basis on which to seek further, broader public comment.’

Member B said:

‘We have established a basis for continuing dialogue and communications – HGC is taking the dialogue forward through the National DNA Database working group [different from the Citizens' Inquiry working group in constitution]. “Good foundation” is trickier – foundations to me are solid and a dialogue process such as the one we undertook is (in my view) necessarily just one part of a foundation.’

Member C said:

‘The Citizens' Inquiry provides a good foundation both in terms of process and outcome. The initial reports had some weaknesses, but the lessons to learn from that are perhaps to foreground the relationship between the inquiry and the policy process, so that citizens become more aware of the latter, in addition to the substantive area of their inquiry.’

It appears therefore that working group members are uncertain how ‘good’ this foundation is, which is to be expected, since only with the passage of time – and the results of future public consultation and debate – can a firm judgement be made on this aim for the Citizens' Inquiry report.



An Advisory Committee member had further suggestions and comments:

‘The Appendix 4 action plan in the Recommendations report would be a start, but a proper ongoing programme of engagement would require significantly greater funding than the Inquiry itself received. More systematic engagement with representative groups would be desirable, as would baseline and follow-up opinion polling on key questions/concepts. Intensive ‘focus groups’ were clearly the only practicable approach given the time and budgetary constraints – to trigger a balanced, national debate will require a great deal more thought.’

Having read both the Citizens’ Inquiry recommendations and the Vis-à-Vis analysis of the Inquiry process (the *Contractor’s Report*), my view is that both reports will provide useful stimulus for public debate. The Inquiry recommendations, and the reasoning behind them, appear to reflect the breadth of opinion I would expect to find in any public discussion of this depth and type. The *Contractor’s Report* both fills out the recommendations, by explaining the context in which they were produced, and provides excellent stimulus for those engaged in policy formation who see the need to go beyond the routine forms of public consultation (surveys, focus groups and the like). Finally, the action plan presented at the end of the *Citizens’ Report* includes proposals for furthering the ‘dialogue and communications in this area of policy’ which appear eminently practical and reasonable.

(c) Increase awareness among all stakeholder groups, and diverse publics, of the challenges, opportunities and uncertainties of the use of DNA for forensic purposes, particularly social and ethical issues

Exactly who are all the stakeholder groups in the National DNA Database debate is something of an open question, and, again, whether their awareness is raised by this process can only be judged in the future. But the Inquiry panel contained, as we have seen, a ‘diverse public’, so this aspect of this aim can be said to have been achieved, at least in part. From listening to both the experts’ views and the discussion they provoked, and from the quality of the thinking contained in the Inquiry recommendations, it is evident that the Inquiry process was exceedingly thorough in bringing out, to this section of the public at least, ‘the challenges, opportunities and uncertainties of the use of DNA for forensic purposes’. The panellists provided positive feedback to me (via a questionnaire) on the issue of how their awareness had been raised. To my question ‘How informative was the Inquiry?’, six scored it at 4, and 17 at 5, where 5 is the most positive score, so the whole group clearly found it highly informative. How their views, as a small but significant section of the public, are then used to further wider public debate is clearly a matter for the working group to decide. On the face of it, it would seem that panel members could be involved in media briefings, quoted in press releases and such like. Some of them were impressively articulate and telegenic.

My findings are confirmed by working group members. Member A said: ‘This has occurred in relation to the participants in the Inquiry, although broader awareness-raising will depend on communication of outcomes and ongoing activities.’ Member B said: ‘I think we roaringly successfully managed the “diverse publics”, but

obviously there is always the need to spread the message further as a panel of 30 and an audience of perhaps 50 isn't many of said "diverse publics".'

Member C said:

'I think the HGC will be able to do that with the outcomes from the Inquiry. The Inquiry itself will probably achieve that modestly. The citizens themselves will obviously be more informed and there will be some knock on effect of that amongst their peers etc. Also experts attending the Inquiry will probably have become more informed about the dialogic and deliberative nature of the process. Some press coverage already, and hopefully in the future, will ensure wider dialogue and awareness.'

The panellists themselves see the importance of continuing the public discussion. One said this Inquiry should be seen as a pilot, while another said that resources need to be invested in holding these Inquiry sessions all over the UK.

On the other hand, these comments by an Advisory Committee member show how much further public awareness needs to be developed:

'The Citizens' Recommendations Report provides opinions/recommendations. It does not go into enough detail about DNA/NDNAD and its uses to increase the awareness of any "stakeholders" other than the IP participants. It is possible that the transcripts of the experts' evidence may do this, but (to my knowledge) this information has not yet been made publicly available.

'A clear definition of the precise operation of NDNAD, drawing out the distinctions between the Scottish and English/Welsh systems (and their interactions), as well as a comprehensive explanation of DNA sampling, profiling, matching and detection (the two are NOT the same!) would be very helpful.

'"Challenges, opportunities and uncertainties" have to be grounded in fact, not supposition. If anything, this Inquiry has shown how patchy public understanding truly is.'

(d) Encourage a two-way dialogue and mutual learning process between researchers, policy-makers, other stakeholders and diverse publics

There is ample evidence that a 'mutual learning process' was fully achieved in terms of the dialogue between experts (including researchers) and diverse publics. On the issue of the effectiveness of listening to the experts, five of the panellists scored 5 (5 equals 'excellent'), 14 scored 4, and only five scored 3. On the effectiveness of the questioning of the experts, five scored this at 5, 15 at 4, two at 3 and two at 2. This indicates some reservations on the questioning process, but overall a high level of satisfaction at the process of interacting with the experts. In discussion, the panellists had several points to make, including:

'The experts were in a bit of a rush; they could have prepared themselves a bit better.'



‘Some issues (e.g. samples, profiles, distribution) took a long time to clarify).’

‘They should have had diagrams and pictures.’

‘I’d fall asleep after five minutes of their talks. The question and answer period was much more stimulating.’

‘We needed more time for questions.’

‘It would have helped to have had the handouts earlier.’

‘As the support worker... my job would have been made easier if I’d had the handouts earlier.’

‘Some really good questions came up after we got the handouts – that was too late.’

‘The big lumps of transcripts [of expert contributions] came too late, when the momentum was lost.’

‘The experts often repeated each other, and I found it hard to ask questions.’

‘Very formal talk is quite hard to understand, with their big words and the names of lots of organisations ... they could have made it simpler.’

‘The red card system was good – it made the experts explain themselves more clearly.’

These comments illustrate how difficult it is to organise the learning process effectively on such complex issues, with a wide range of experts and a group of learners with a big range of educational attainment, over a short period of time. They should be taken in conjunction with the questionnaire data above: when asked to score the process, 83% of the group scored 5 (excellent) or 4.

The experts themselves gave feedback to Vis-à-Vis which is set out in the *Contractor’s Report*. There were some reservations about the effectiveness of the video-link between Birmingham and Glasgow, and one expert said:

‘The style of the Q&A session – requiring very brief answers to often complex questions – did not make for good understanding. This concern was compounded by the limited time available for the introduction by the speaker.’ Overall, however, the experts were enthusiastic about the learning that took place, as the following quotes from the *Contractor’s Report* indicate:

‘I thought it was a worthwhile project, I enjoyed interacting with members of the public which is something my position does not normally allow.’

‘Participants were allowed a full and frank exchange of opinions.’

‘I do a lot of public engagement with young people, and scientific experts often try to undermine the points they make by focusing on a technical issue instead of listening to the point being made.’

‘[I enjoyed] The interaction with a very diverse group who had equally diverse views on the use of DNA. I enjoyed the debate with a friendly group of people who not only wanted to voice their opinion, but were very interested to hear other people’s views.’

Working group member A commented as follows on this aim:

‘Difficult to comment on substantive learning, although some participants are reported by the facilitators to have developed a level of knowledge, which has allowed them to participate in debates at a high level (for example, challenging MSPs in relation to the forensic database on a visit to the Scottish Parliament). However, participants who presented their findings to the HGC plenary meeting appeared to have drawn unevenly on information from the Inquiry process and their wider experience, which meant that the discussion did not flow as freely as we had hoped. There has certainly been learning from the point of view of process and management of public engagement for myself and, I would suspect, other members of the commissioning group, although much of this has been in relation to difficulties that have had to be overcome.’

Working group member B said: ‘I think [many of] our panellists would feel empowered to engage in the debate now, so that’s an achievement’.

Member C was less comfortable on this aim:

‘This has begun to happen but we don’t yet have a mechanism in place to close this loop. I think as Commissioners we have learnt a lot about the process of deliberative dialogue, but I am less confident that Vis-à-Vis have learnt about the needs of the HGC or policy makers or how they could maximise their work by taking the issues we raised throughout seriously and acting on them.’

On the aim to enhance debate with policy-makers and other stakeholders, it is clear from A’s views above that there is some concern about how effectively the Inquiry will translate into this field, but member B suggested that ‘the policy-maker bit is ongoing’, indicating that, again, only time (and, it has been suggested by others, the investment of additional resources) will tell how effectively this aspect of the aim has been met.

Once again, the Advisory Committee member was more dubious:

‘Including citizens on a Commission or the ethics committee (as per recommendation 3) might be evidence of some sort of dialogue, or effort to move towards one. Only time will tell. Meanwhile, secrecy and propaganda seem to prevail in Parliament and the media. The Advisory Committee certainly demonstrated that campaigners and Chief Constables could have a dialogue and learn something “about” each other - learning from each other is more complex.’



(e) Make demonstrable to people, especially those from parts of the population who may be particularly affected, that the public's informed views and concerns have been heard by policy-makers, even on issues not directly connected to the use of DNA for forensic purposes

Whether or not this aim has been achieved depends, first, on how the composition of the panel is interpreted and, second, on how the results of the Inquiry process are communicated to the public at large. On the first point, it has been argued above that the panel was deliberately diverse in composition and heavily weighted towards people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Aim (e) indicates that the working group is well aware of the strong over-representation of people (particularly men) from minority ethnic groups in the UK's criminal justice system and that minority groups might well be particularly sensitive to the proposal to extend DNA testing from those caught up in the criminal justice system to the whole population.

The *Contractor's Report* sets out in several places a nuanced account of the discussion that took place in panel meetings about the concern that racial discrimination operates already within the criminal justice system, and that its impact would be enhanced if the database were universal. These sections of the report require careful attention. At the various events I attended, I was struck by how rarely this issue was raised, and by the even-handedness of the discussion that took place. The white panellists were as concerned about the possibility of discrimination as were the non-white members, and the police officers who attended when I was there were as concerned to overcome institutional racism as were the panellists. All this bodes well for wider public discussion and the panellists might well play an extremely useful role in the months to come when these discussions take place at a national level.

The second issue, therefore, is how that further discussion is structured, and this is a matter for the working group to decide. Clearly, a very difficult issue is posed if government decides in favour of a universal DNA database, given that the majority view of the Inquiry is opposed to that policy. Should that become government position, it will have to argue that the Inquiry's view has been 'heard', but rejected.

But such issues are 'much further down the line', working group member A said:

'The presentation to the HGC plenary was an instance of this [aim (e)] – I hope the participants felt that the HGC had listened to their views, and a number of commissioners commented afterwards that they had found both the draft *Citizens' Report* and presentation interesting. The fulfilment of this aim will depend on engagement further down the line, however.'

Similarly, member B said:

'I would have thought this had been partially achieved – the panel and those they come into contact with in their daily lives will have gathered that we are serious about listening, which is good, but unless we pursue this and they see further progress they will lose faith I suspect. So a lot will hang on what we [the HGC and its partners] do next – e.g. the final report from HGC – how much emphasis it puts on the Citizens' Inquiry's findings and so on.'

Member C was fairly sure on this aim:

‘It is hard to assess this yet but I am confident that HGC’s transparent way of working will ensure this. We have set up a new working group to take things forward.’

The Advisory Committee member was rather more astringent on this point:

‘I remain deeply sceptical that the IP’s views and concerns will have any influence at a policy level, unless robustly promoted by HGC. Ministers, officials and senior police are unlikely to be swayed by a report of this nature without serious political backing and further evidence.’

‘I would not think it appropriate to fob off other members of the public who have concerns or are affected by saying that this report is adequate representation of their views, or even the general public’s. The exercise was simply not broad or detailed enough to be so.’

‘N.B this is not to be taken as a criticism of either Vis-a-vis or HGC. In my opinion, the Inquiry was drastically underfunded from the outset. If the authorities want a serious national debate, they should provide adequate resources for one.’

The panellists themselves told me in the discussion at the final meeting that they felt they had been through a valuable process. Their comments included the following:

‘They are right to ask the public’s view on this, even though we are only a small part of the public.’

‘The government clearly wants to know what we think.’

‘We need more inquiries like this one.’

‘We need more panels on DNA for other people – and I need to know more.’

‘If our report is influential, then it’s worthwhile.’

‘More TV and newspaper coverage is needed on this issue.’

‘This has been a good process because there is such diversity of people and backgrounds here.’

‘The inquiries do get everyday people’s opinions. Government ministers do not live in the real world. Our trip to Hackney showed how out of touch they are.’

‘This is the real world here, with real people.’

‘But academics have some extra information, so we need them too.’

Clearly, along with the scepticism (relatively muted on this occasion), there is much goodwill among the panellists related to their experience of being engaged in discussion of an extremely important public issue and a sincere hope that their views will be influential. Significantly, at this point in our discussion, no one raised the particular sensitivity contained in this aim – it seemed that the discussion had transcended ‘race’.



(f) Contribute towards a long-term increase in the involvement of the relevant actors in the use of DNA for forensic purposes in public engagement and dialogue

This aim appears to summarise aspects of previous aims. Again, I would suggest that time, and further processes, will tell. My views on this point are well stated by working group members A and B:

‘This is a long-term aim but the project has provided a node through which a variety of relevant actors have been linked (e.g. individual citizens, professionals working in various related disciplines, HGC, government officials, public dialogue specialists, research bodies and academics).’

‘The phrase “long-term increase” suggests that we can’t tell if we’ve achieved this yet. I do think that we have laid (some!) foundations for such an increase – we have demonstrated what is possible in terms of helping a diverse group of people engage with the issues.’

Member C said:

‘HGC will be taking this forward through a new working group and additional consultation. I cannot say if there will be any other increase in involvement through processes we are not involved with ourselves.’

And the Advisory Committee member’s comments should be set alongside these remarks:

‘Relevant actors: The police? FSS? The courts? Politicians? Scientists? This may have been a first step, but it’s going to need a robust, ongoing process to achieve anything long term. The action plan sketches out some possible ways forward. It will be telling to see who engages with this, and at what level.’

This concludes my evaluation of the Citizens’ Inquiry process against the criteria set out in the original HGC commissioning document. But some additional comments arising from my consideration of the process as a whole might be of use.

Planning and documentation

I would commend Vis-à-Vis for its planning and for the documentation it produced. At each stage of the Inquiry, I received detailed paperwork which indicated thorough planning of the Inquiry panel sessions and detailed discussions with the advisory panel. Vis-à-Vis has produced a report of the process it went through from start to finish (the *Contractor’s Report*), and this should be consulted by anyone who needs a detailed account. It includes the Vis-à-Vis facilitators’ own analysis of the issues, and the context in which the panellists arrived at their judgements and recommendations. Their description of the process is confirmed by my own observations.

Facilitation

I have spent the last 35 years working professionally and as an active citizen in formal and informal settings in which educational processes (broadly defined) are taking place. Many, perhaps most, of the settings have been multicultural in composition. In all those years, I have never experienced such a harmonious and engaging learning environment as that created by the Vis-à-Vis facilitators. Anyone involved in education knows how hard it is to create a lively, interactive, respectful, humorous learning situation, even when they have a relatively homogenous group. Anyone involved in multicultural education knows how fraught issues of racism and difference can be during the learning process; for all the progress made in the past 40 years, the injustices arising from perceived difference can still wound a group and strangle learning. The opposite of this seemed to be taking place during the panel sessions I witnessed. The pleasure in lively debate, the respect for diverse opinions, the intelligence and confidence that were displayed by all the participants really was a joy to behold. Vis-à-Vis's gifted facilitators deserve much praise for creating such a productive environment.

The panellists

Since the heart of this Citizens' Inquiry was the citizens themselves, the last word should be with them. When I asked what was 'not so good' about the process they had been through, this was the worst they could say:

'Travelling in that minibus.'

'The demographics: only one of us came from the countryside.'

'Among the Scots, only one of us was not from Glasgow.'

'It was too focused on urban groups.'

'I would have liked the experts' handouts immediately on the day.'

Asked what was the best thing about the process, they said this:

'We were inspired by the facilitators – their delivery was superb.'

'The facilitators were good – they were impartial.'

'The stress on the fact that it was our Inquiry and our report. The facilitators did not influence us.'

'We shaped the sessions, deciding on which experts we wanted.'

'At the Birmingham residential we met the other panellists and we became friends.'

'The video-conferencing was good – we could see the other participants.'

'The mix of faiths, ages and backgrounds was well organised – this was the best thing.'

'The experts were good, some in particular. It was interesting finding out where their bias lay. The police were all in favour, but the scientists were more critical.'

'The hard work preparing the sessions, the taxis, and the muffins.'

Thanks to the selection process for this Inquiry, the facilitators had a remarkable group of people to work with.



4. Conclusion

This evaluation has assembled evidence from the following sources: observation of three panel meetings of the Citizens' Inquiry, two committee meetings, a questionnaire filled out by 23 of the 25 participants, a private discussion session with most of the panellists, email and telephone interviews with members of the working group (the commissioning body) and the advisory panel.

Overall, it finds that all of the working group's aims have been met very effectively, or are likely to be met as public debate on this issue continues to develop. My optimism that the reports that arise from this Inquiry will be helpful in the ongoing debate arises from my view that the consultants, Vis-à-Vis, assembled an excellent group of diverse citizens for the Inquiry, facilitated their discussions to a very high standard indeed, and produced a set of recommendations which are credible and reliable, along with an analysis of the context in which these recommendations were made, which contains a great deal of information that will be useful in further discussion among both the public at large and the experts and policy-makers in this field.

I commend all parties involved in this complex and challenging process and look forward to the ongoing public debate on this difficult issue.

Dr Max Farrar
Leeds Metropolitan University

13 July 2008

Appendix 1: Inquiry Sessions

Inquiry sessions were held as follows:

Monday 4 February 2008, 6–9pm

Monday 11 February 6–9pm

Monday 18 February 6–9pm

Monday 25 February 6–9pm

Monday 3 March 6–9pm.

The sessions were held at: Orange Studio, Cannon Street, Birmingham; and Glasgow Audi, Braehead, Glasgow.

Appendix 3 of the *Citizens' Report* sets out the full timeline for the Inquiry process.



Appendix 2: Methods

My approach to this evaluation followed the familiar procedure of assembling data from a variety of sources with the aim of answering the question: did this process fulfil the aims set out by the commissioning agents? (These aims are set out in Section 2 of this report.) I gathered mainly qualitative data by attending and closely observing the following events:

- advisory panel meeting on 22 January 2008 in London
- working group meeting on 22 January 2008 in London
- Inquiry session with expert witnesses on 3 March 2008 in Birmingham
- joint residential weekend to deliberate on findings and generate recommendations on 16 March 2008 in Birmingham
- joint residential weekend to finalise recommendations on 5 April 2008 in Glasgow.

At the penultimate meeting of the Inquiry panel, on 16 March, where they were working out what their recommendations were going to be, I circulated a short questionnaire that almost everyone filled out for me. (I obtained the results from the others at the final meeting.) The questionnaire is included in Appendix 3. At the final meeting I conducted an open discussion on similar lines to the questions asked already, in order to obtain some more personal reflections on the process. This material and data from the questionnaire incorporated into the narrative of this report.

I emailed each member of the commissioning working group, asking their views on the extent to which the process had met the aims they set out when publishing the tender for this piece of work. Three replies were received and their replies are selectively incorporated into this report. Finally, I had a telephone conversation with Dr Bano Murtuja, the lead consultant at Vis-à-Vis, during which I put to her the views I had assembled while conducting this evaluation.



Appendix 3: Questionnaire and Results

This is the questionnaire that was circulated to all members of the Inquiry panel.

Citizens' Inquiry into the Forensic Use of DNA and the National DNA Database: evaluation questionnaire

A) Personal information

1. Your age: _____
2. Your sex: _____
3. Your occupation: _____
4. Your favourite newspaper: _____
5. Your favourite TV programme: _____

B) Getting involved with this Inquiry

6. How did you get recruited into the Inquiry? _____
7. Why did you agree to get involved? _____
8. Have you been involved with anything like this before? _____
9. Are you actively involved in public affairs (e.g. politics, other citizens' groups)?

10. If Yes, are you involved with (tick any/all): _____
A political party? _____
A community organisation? _____
A pressure group? _____
Something else (please say!) _____

**C) The process with this DNA Enquiry**

Scale: 1 = Bad; 3 = OK; 5 = Excellent

11. Arrangements in preparation for each session – what were they like? (Circle the one that applies to you)

1 2 3 4 5

12. Getting information from the Vis-à-Vis team – how easy was it?

1 2 3 4 5

13. Listening to the experts – how good, or bad, was that?

1 2 3 4 5

14. Asking questions and getting responses from the experts – how good, or bad, was that?

1 2 3 4 5

15. Discussing the issues in your small groups – how good, or bad, was that?

1 2 3 4 5

16. Having the final discussion and making up your minds – how good, or bad, was that?

D) Thinking about this process overall

Scale: 1 = Not at all; 3 = OK/a bit/perhaps; 5 = Extremely/a great deal/very likely

17. How informative did you find this Inquiry?

1 2 3 4 5

18. How enjoyable did you find this process?

1 2 3 4 5

19. Would you recommend an Inquiry process like this to your friends?

1 2 3 4 5

20. Would you like to get involved with another Citizens' Inquiry on another topic?

1 2 3 4 5

21. How likely are you to get involved with other 'public affairs' activities?

1 2 3 4 5



22. A final personal question (no pressure!). Your ethnicity: _____

Thanks for your help!



Citizen's Inquiry into the Forensic Use of DNA and the National DNA Database: summary of questionnaire results from citizens

	Question	Range of responses
1	Age	15-20 (8) 21-30 (5) 31-40 (2) 41-50 (5) 51-60 (1) 61:-70 (2)
2	Sex	11 male; 12 female
3	Occupation	Bridging the Gap; consultant engineer crèches assistant; community development officer; employment development officer; local government officer (2); mentor (2) financial consultant; student (8); unemployed; service user; volunteer; youth worker; youth justice development officer
4	Ethnicity	Asian (2); Black African (1); Black Caribbean (1); British (2); British Asian (1); British/Jamaican/African (1); Mixed (1); White (1); White British (4); White Scottish (2); Pakistani (2); Scottish/English (1); Sikh (1); White European (1); No response (2)



	Question	Range of responses
5	Favourite newspaper	None (5) Metro (4) Times (3) Sun (3) Guardian (2) Daily Mail (1) Daily Record (1) Daily Telegraph (1) Evening Times (1) Independent (1) Mirror (1)
6	Favourite TV programme	EastEnders (4) None (2) The Bill (2) Cricket (1) BBC News 24 (1) BBC News at 10 (1) Doctor Who (1) Friends (1) Golden Balls (1) Heroes (1) QI (1) Lost (1) News (1) Newsnight (1) Smallville (1) Soaps (1) The One Show (1) Spooks (1)
7	How recruited?	Via a project/work (7) Through a friend/relative/ Colleague (4) School/youth leaders course (3) Via radio programme (2) Was asked (2) Filled out a form (1) Through UK youth parliament (1) Youth Parliament (1) Saw an advert (1) Was helping Vis-à-Vis (1)



	Question	Range of responses
8	Why get involved?	Enjoy learning/general interest (16); Had experience of the DNA register (2); Want to make a difference (2); Ensure BME voice is represented (1); Everyone should have a say in policy-making (1); To support my sister (1); Mentions payment (1)
9	Involved in anything like this before?	No (21); Yes (2)
10	Active in public affairs already?	No (11); Yes (12)
11	What type of public activity?	Community organisation (12); Political party (6); Pressure group (4); Some other activity (5)
12	How effective were arrangements for each session?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (0) 4 (18) 5 (5)
13	How easy to get info from the Vis-à-vis team?	1 (0) 2 (1) 3 (3) 4 (11) 5 (8)
14	How effective was it listening to the experts	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (5) 4 (14) 5 (4)
15	How effective was it asking questions of the experts?	1 (0) 2 (2) 3 (2) 4 (15) 5 (4)



	Question	Range of responses
16	How effective was the small group discussion?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (2) 4 (10) 5 (6) No reply (5)
17	How effective was the final discussion, making up your own minds?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (2) 4 (10) 5 (4) No reply (7)
18	How informative was the Enquiry?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (0) 4 (6) 5 (17)
19	How enjoyable?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (1) 4 (4) 5 (18)
20	Would you recommend an Enquiry process like this to your friends?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (0) 4 (4) 5 (19)
21	Would you like to get involved with another one?	1 (0) 2 (0) 3 (0) 3 (1) 4 (3) 5 (19)
22	How likely are you to get involved with other 'public affairs' activities?	1 (0) 2 (2) 3 (1) 4 (9) 5 (11)



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