

Evaluating the public dialogue process on shale gas and oil developments

Report for Sciencewise

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Contents

Executive summary.....	3
Background.....	3
Evaluation objectives and methodology.....	3
Key findings and lessons	4
1. Introduction	7
Background.....	7
Dialogue objectives.....	7
Dialogue project activities	8
Evaluation objectives	11
Evaluation methodology.....	11
Structure of this report	12
2. Design.....	13
1. Context and scope.....	13
2. Recruitment	15
3. Structure of the workshops	15
4. The hand outs.....	17
5. Presentations and technical input.....	19
6. Time for Q&A and engagement with representatives	20
7. Neutrality and bias.....	22
3. Delivery	24
1. Organisation and venue.....	24
2. Facilitation	24
3. Presentations.....	25
4. Impacts	26
1. Impact on policy decisions.....	26
2. Impact from the perspective of participants	26
5. Governance	29
6. Overview and conclusions	30
Appendices	32

Executive summary

This summary highlights Icaro's key findings from the evaluation of a public engagement on unconventional gas and oil developments.

Background

The Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil (OUGO) is a new office within DECC which aims to promote the safe, responsible, and environmentally sound recovery of the UK's unconventional reserves of gas and oil. Shale gas and oil and coal bed methane are known as 'unconventional', because of the techniques required to extract them. In view of the Government's forecasts for gas use within the UK's energy mix and our increasing reliance on imports¹, Government is encouraging the exploration of shale to determine its potential for the UK and to develop the industry.

A dialogue process was developed by DECC, and co-funded by Sciencewise², to learn how to better inform the public as a whole, how people would want to be engaged if exploration were proposed in their area, at what stage they would want to be engaged, and by whom. The primary focus of the project was not to explore public attitudes towards DECC's policy on unconventional gas and oil; but rather the engagement process around shale gas and oil.

This dialogue consisted of a two-wave qualitative and deliberative methodology, used to help participants build knowledge around quite technical information on shale gas and oil and the regulatory arrangements in place, before focusing on public engagement. The dialogues were undertaken in three areas – Northampton, Liverpool and Winchester – engaging a total of 71 people. Further detail about the dialogue is provided in the Introduction section of this report.

Evaluation objectives and methodology

In order to fulfil Sciencewise requirements DECC commissioned Icaro to conduct an independent evaluation of the dialogue. The evaluation had two aims:

1. To provide an independent assessment of the quality and impacts of the dialogue project to demonstrate the extent of the project's credibility, effectiveness, and success against its objectives, covering both the dialogue processes and their outcomes (including an assessment of impacts on policy and those involved);
2. To contribute to increasing the wider effectiveness and use of public dialogue.

The evaluation comprised three key elements:

- Observing the dialogue events.
- Post-event feedback - a two-stage approach: (i) a short paper-based questionnaire (asked of all 71 participants); and (ii) an online discussion board (with 13 of the participants)

¹ DECC www.gov.uk/oil-and-gas-uk-field-data

² Sciencewise is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues. See www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk

- Eight interviews with key stakeholders – from DECC, Sciencewise, and the project Oversight Group.

Key findings and lessons

i) Design

Policy need: The dialogue delivered effectively against its objectives. It addressed a gap in the evidence base and met a specific policy need. It is highly encouraging that, even at this early stage, the outcomes are being used by DECC - alongside other sources of evidence - to inform both policy and practice. The work has delivered credible findings that have added value beyond what can be achieved solely through traditional social research methods (such as surveys and focus groups). This is because – for an emerging subject like shale gas and oil - a dialogue-based approach allows the time to provide detailed information to participants over a period of time to help them come to an informed view. It also provides a much richer source of additional information to advise policy.

Effectiveness of the approach: The premise of a deliberative, in-depth process was successful and appropriate in the context of shale gas and oil, around which levels of knowledge are generally low. The two stage design was important since participants needed time to process new information before giving an informed view. In particular, the interim between the two workshops gave participants the space to consider the information from the first workshop.

The focus on community engagement (not shale gas itself): The project faced the challenge of demarcating the issue itself from the principles and process of community engagement. There were some practical difficulties in communicating the distinction, and the moderator's explanations used on the day that the events 'were not about their views on shale gas' did not sit easily with the fact that – in the first workshop – a large proportion of the day was about their views on shale gas and oil (in terms of giving participants information on the risks and benefits).

Recruitment: This was strong, with a good spread of participants in terms of socio-demographics. There was also a good mix of levels of knowledge about shale gas and oil.

Structure of the events: The two day structure worked effectively overall, although some participants felt that the six hour sessions were slightly too long. One of the elements that worked very well was the co-creation event in the second workshop where participants – in their small break out groups - fed back their engagement plan in plenary. This was an important way of giving participants confidence that their views were being listened to and taken on board. The report identifies some elements that could have been improved further, most notably the potential for more two way interaction between participants and DECC at this point.

Stimulus materials: The project involved a large number of hand-outs (particularly in the first workshop during the more educative parts of the process). These were well received and, in particular, participants were positive about the inclusion of comments and perspectives from different organisations. However, some participants struggled to refer back to information and it would have been better to present the information in a book or folder.

Presentations were delivered by DECC representatives, and these were supplemented by a 'talking heads' video and audio recordings. Feedback from participants shows that they were positive towards the video but considered the audio clips less effective.

Furthermore, many participants would have liked more expert presence in the room, as well as more Q&A and interaction with DECC representatives. By contrast, DECC representatives thought that they were not supposed to engage with participants so that all questions and comments raised could be captured centrally. This limited the amount of interaction between representatives and participants during the events.

Neutrality and bias: There was a perception among some participants that the process had a 'pro-fracking' stance. This view stemmed from several factors, most notably the sequencing of the first workshop when the benefits were presented before the risks. Even when the risks were subsequently introduced (in a similar fashion and for an equivalent amount of time) some still felt that the benefits had been given more prominence and the risks played down. Others did not feel the same, and felt the inclusion of comments from different organisations in the handouts demonstrated the commitment to impartiality.

ii) Delivery

The event organisation and facilitation were both strong (reflected in the high scores in the post-event questionnaire). There were some initial imbalances in the contribution of individuals within some of the groups (particularly in those with some louder – and typically male – voices). These were addressed by the facilitators, and an exercise early on in the first workshop – which broke the table into small group/pair work – was also a useful mechanism in this respect.

The presentations were delivered effectively by DECC representatives although there was some use of acronyms (e.g. 'The HSE') that participants struggled to understand. However, the key issue was the quality of the video and audio. For example, the 'talking heads' video failed to play in Winchester, while volume/poor sound impacted on the stakeholder audio clips in all locations.

iii) Impacts

On policy: The project is very likely to make a positive contribution to policy decisions moving forward. While it is not possible – at the time of writing - to assess the eventual influence on DECC and its partners, the emerging findings are already being used by DECC to develop thinking around public engagement on shale gas and oil. Furthermore, it is already informing the design of local events around shale gas and oil.

In terms of the impact on DECC itself, the team feel that they have learnt much from the process, especially the direct feedback from having attended the sessions in person. They also report they will hold some internal lunchtime seminars to feed back to colleagues in the Department about the use of dialogue approaches.

On participants: The post-event questionnaire highlights that as many as 95% agreed that '*I learned something new as a result of taking part*'; 93% would recommend taking part in events like these to others and 92% enjoyed the events. Furthermore, 86% agreed the events had influenced their views on shale gas and oil, and just over three quarters (77%) agreed that '*I am more convinced of the value of public participation in these sorts of topics*'. Turning to participants' views on the impact on DECC, the lowest level of agreement – at 49% - was for the statement '*I think this will make a real difference to the ongoing debate about shale gas and oil*'.

iv) Governance

The composition of the Oversight Group was well designed and included a useful plurality of perspectives. DECC interviewees felt that having a range of views was very useful. The ability of Oversight Group members to contribute was limited by the timetable constraints, which had three main impacts:

- Meetings often could not involve the full group all together and/or that DECC had to engage in separate one-to-one discussions.
- It precluded the possibility of running a pilot, which several Oversight Group members felt would have been beneficial.

- It meant that their feedback on the materials – particularly for the second stage of workshops – was limited.

1. Introduction

This report sets out key findings from the evaluation of a public engagement on unconventional gas and oil developments. The findings from the dialogue project are published under separate cover³.

Background

The Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil (OUGO) is a new office within DECC which aims to promote the safe, responsible, and environmentally sound recovery of the UK's unconventional reserves of gas and oil. OUGO has recently set out its five key objectives, some of which relate specifically to the public:

- **Supporting public engagement:** (i) helping people understand the facts about unconventional gas and oil production and what it could mean if it takes place in their area; (ii) support local authorities to engage with their communities on issues specific to their area in relation to exploration and production, helping to resolve issues and ensure projects are able to move forward, where appropriate, with the engagement of the local community.
- **Making sure local communities benefit from development in their area:** ensure the delivery of a coherent framework for the delivery of local communities benefit directly from any development in their area.
- **Build the knowledge base:** support the provision of comprehensive, timely and accurate information on unconventional gas and oil recovery development, commissioning research as needed to fill knowledge gaps and base policy on the best available evidence.

A dialogue process was developed to learn how people would want to be engaged if an unconventional gas and oil development were proposed in their area, at what stage they would want to be engaged, and by whom.

The primary focus of the project was not to explore public attitudes towards DECC's policy on unconventional gas and oil. Instead, the aim was to help OUGO set its public engagement policy on unconventional gas and oil and to inform industry's development of the community benefit package. It was also anticipated that there would be wider value to stakeholders (from both government and industry) in helping them to develop appropriate plans and materials for engaging the public.

Dialogue objectives

The dialogue had a number of key objectives and research questions, as follows:

- To understand how to engage the public most effectively in unconventional gas and oil developments in their area including:

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-engagement-with-shale-gas-and-oil>

- what would a successful process of public engagement look like, and what should it avoid?;
 - how it should work over time: at what stage/s in the process they would want to be engaged/communicated with, why and how?; and
 - who are the most and least trusted sources of information, and why? Exploring the role of national and local information sources.
- To understand how the public engage with issues around unconventional gas and oil, practically and cognitively:
 - using what channels (e.g. online information, face-to-face meetings);
 - at what level of detail/complexity, including explanation of the science;
 - with what perception of risks and the conditions/regulations needed to manage them now and during production in the future; and
 - what differences there are between different groups/publics e.g. in different parts of the country in these factors⁴.
 - This includes reflecting the sources of information the public have used to date as well as exploring their preferences⁵.
 - To identify any gaps where:
 - further policy or materials are needed to help the public understand unconventional gas and oil; or
 - the regulatory arrangements are less able to inspire public confidence, even where objectively robust, as this will be an important element of DECC's consideration of the necessary regulatory regime, and how it is communicated, going forward into a potential production phase.
 - To explore public understanding and acceptability of the recently published industry community benefit package proposals.

TNS BMRB was commissioned to design and deliver the project. The budget was £90,000 for the dialogue and £10,000 for the evaluation, with Sciencewise⁶ contributing £50,000 of funding.

Dialogue project activities

This section provides an overview of the dialogue process and, in doing so, sets the context for the evaluation findings that follow.

Management and oversight arrangements

Project roles and responsibilities were as follows:

- *DECC*: responsible for project managing the research, coordinating and chairing the oversight group and steering group, and signing off materials throughout to ensure a robust quality assurance process.
- *Sciencewise*: joint funders for project; helping policy makers commission and use public dialogue to inform policy decisions involving science and technology issues.

⁴ This objective was not part of the original ITT but was added following the first Oversight Group meeting.

⁵ This objective was not part of the original ITT but was added following the first Oversight Group meeting.

⁶ Sciencewise is funded by the Science and Society team of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Sciencewise is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues. See www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk

- *Oversight Group*: peer reviewing responsibility, including: providing input on where to find the best science and scientists; ensuring that the dialogue process is balanced and impartial; and acting as a sounding board for potential activities or decisions about the process or content. The Oversight Group members met four times over the lifetime of the project, and were from the following organisations:
 - Local Government Association (LGA)
 - United Kingdom Onshore Oil and Gas (UKOOG)
 - DECC – Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil
 - Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)
 - University of Exeter
 - Health and Safety Executive
 - Planning Officers Society
 - DECC – Customer Insight
 - Sciencewise
 - TNS BMRB (appointed contractor)
 - Icaro (appointed evaluator)

Participants and recruitment

The dialogues were undertaken in three areas of the UK – Northampton, Liverpool and Winchester – engaging a total of 71 people who attended both waves. The locations were chosen to provide a range of demographic, geological and licencing factors, covering areas that were both prospective⁷ and not currently thought to be prospective for shale gas and oil:

- Northampton: where shale development is not likely as the area is not considered prospective (given results of the British Geological Survey);
- Winchester: where shale development may occur, pending a licence being granted and all necessary permissions⁸;
- Liverpool: where shale development may occur, pending all necessary permissions being granted, where an operator had already obtained a licence.

The sample was purposively selected to reflect the make-up of the local areas using quotas based on age, gender, socio-economic status and home ownership. The achieved sample characteristics are given below⁹:

⁷ Considered areas where there may be shale gas and oil in the rock, but until there is exploratory drilling and testing we cannot confirm where oil or gas can be commercially recovered.

⁸ Understanding of the prospectivity of UK shale is developing and has since been updated with the publication of the British Geological Survey's report on the Weald Basin in April 2014, after the dialogue was carried out.

⁹ Due to flooding and other factors influencing attendance, an even number of 24 participants per location was not achieved – although across the research as a whole the intended number of participants was achieved

Area	SEG	Urban/ rural	Home ownership	Age groups	Gender
Northampton: 25 people	AB: 7	Urban: 17	Privately owned: 16	18-34: 10	M: 13
	C1C2: 12	Rural: 8	Social housing: 4	35-54: 9	F: 12
	DE: 6		Private renters/Other: 5	55+: 6	
Liverpool: 24 people	AB: 4	Urban: 24	Privately owned: 11	18-34: 9	M: 11
	C1C2: 11		Social housing: 7	35-54: 9	F: 13
	DE: 9		Private renters/Other: 6	55+: 6	
Winchester: 22 people	AB: 8	Urban: 12	Privately owned: 12	18-34: 8	M: 10
	C1C2: 9	Rural: 10	Social housing: 4	35-54: 8	F: 12
	DE: 5		Private renters/Other: 6	55+: 5	

Dialogue methods

This dialogue consisted of a two-wave qualitative and deliberative methodology, used to help participants build knowledge around quite technical information on shale gas and oil and the regulatory arrangements in place, before focusing on public engagement. The approach included the following stages, described in more depth below.

Timings

Wave 1 workshops took place on 8th (Northampton) and 15th (Winchester, Liverpool) February 2014, and Wave 2 workshops took place on 1st (Northampton) and 8th (Winchester, Liverpool) March 2014. All workshops lasted six hours. Three facilitators attended each event, hosting three groups per workshop. Venues provided a plenary space for all participants, and discussions moved between the plenary and breaking into group discussions of eight participants per facilitator. Northampton was not a pilot per se, but feedback from this session did allow for tweaks to be made to the approach and materials ahead of the events in Winchester and Liverpool.

Information provision

The Oversight Group reviewed stimulus materials for both waves of the dialogue. To further ensure the information materials provided reflected a balance of views, TNS-BMRB consulted wider stakeholders to comment on the Wave 1 materials¹⁰, and their comments were incorporated into the materials. TNS-BMRB also consulted Dr Jason Chilvers¹¹, Senior Lecturer at the University of East Anglia (School of Environmental Science) at several stages in the project, both in developing the stimulus materials and the analytical framework and findings.

The stimulus material took the form of printed hand outs to accompany the presentations and discussions, posters, flip charts, card sorts and team activities/tasks. It also included a 'talking heads' video with explanations about shale gas and oil given by scientists and geologists, and a series of audio clips from different stakeholders. OUGO sought to provide a balanced overview of information on shale gas and oil, and included a range of perspectives in the hand out materials (e.g. quotes from organisations ranging from Greenpeace to industry groups and trade bodies).

Presentations

The events were moderated by TNS BMRB whereas presentations were delivered by DECC representatives. In addition, at Wave 1 there was a 'talking heads' video that involved a discussion about shale gas amongst geologists and other scientists; and at Wave 2 there were a series of audio clips to present the responses of different stakeholders / organisations to some pre-formulated 'interview' questions.

¹⁰ Greenpeace, National Farmers' Union, The Wildlife Trusts, iGAS, a planning officer from Hampshire and 2 academic scientists from the Universities of Oxford and Exeter.

¹¹ <http://www.uea.ac.uk/environmental-sciences/people/profile/jason-chilvers>

Representation at the events

A number of DECC staff attended the events as observers. There was no representation from non-DECC members of the Oversight Group.

Analysis

All workshops were digitally recorded and transcribed. Notes were taken during workshops by moderators and observers, and any workshop materials produced or annotated by participants were kept and analysed. Analysis entailed a series of researcher brainstorms using notes and stimulus materials, followed by 'matrix mapping', an approach entailing entry of all summarised data into an analytical framework to allow systematic coding, sorting and thematic analysis.

Evaluation objectives

This evaluation had two aims:

1. To provide an independent assessment of the quality and impacts of the dialogue project to demonstrate the extent of the project's credibility, effectiveness, and success against its objectives, covering both the dialogue processes and their outcomes (including an assessment of impacts on policy and those involved);
2. To contribute to increasing the wider effectiveness and use of public dialogue.

While there are some audit elements to the evaluation, the primary focus is on the impact of the dialogue and the key learning it generates. The evaluation was also formative, i.e. instigated from the outset so that it could feed back in real time to the project team and – by doing so – improve the project or processes that were being evaluated.

It was conducted in accordance with the Sciencewise requirements for evaluation¹².

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation comprised four key elements that generated a mix of quantitative and qualitative data:

- *Observing the dialogue events* – Icaro attended both workshops in all three locations, providing full coverage.
- *Post-event questionnaire* - a short paper-based questionnaire asked of all 71 participants, which achieved a 100% response rate;
- *Online discussion forum* – 13 participants were selected from a pool of those who indicated their willingness to participate in the post-event questionnaire. Purposive sampling was used to ensure coverage of all three locations as well as a broad mix according to age and gender. The forum was held over the course of the week immediately after the second wave of dialogue events. This latter approach allowed for in-depth responses and provided a detailed understanding of participants' perspectives.
- *Interviews with key stakeholders* – eight interviews with key stakeholders, representing DECC, Sciencewise, University of Exeter, United Kingdom Onshore Oil and Gas, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and TNS-BMRB. Depending on the level and nature of their engagement with the project, interviewees were asked for their views about: the

¹² <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Publications/SWP07-Evaluating-projects-27March14-FINAL.pdf>

premise for the project, the appropriateness of a dialogue approach, the Oversight Group, the design and delivery of the dialogue, and likely impacts of the project moving forward.

The questionnaire, topline results and online discussion prompts are all outlined in Appendices 1-3. The stakeholder interview guide is included in Appendix 4.

The framework for the evaluation questions was developed in light of the need to evaluate against the Sciencewise guiding principles of good practice.

Structure of this report

This report is structured to provide evaluation findings and lessons on the following:

- i) Design
- ii) Delivery
- iii) Impact
- iv) Governance

The final section outlines the conclusions and overall lessons for future dialogue activities.

2. Design

This section outlines key evaluation findings in respect of the design of the dialogue.

1. Context and scope

Policy need

One of the key strengths of the project overall was the clarity of the policy need and how the work could contribute to OUGO's thinking and policies around community engagement on shale gas development. Companies are already undertaking engagement activities and need clear guidance to ensure the process is effective. Timings for the project were tight and, as the report goes on to discuss, did have an impact on various aspects of the project's delivery. However, the project – and the information and learning it has generated – was needed quickly in order to inform emerging policy and practice.

Background to the dialogue

The dialogue was designed and commissioned against the backdrop of a subject that often operates in an emotive space. The media coverage of shale gas and oil development and, in particular, the representation of risk has been considered quite polarised, with the potential to influence public perceptions accordingly.

Much of the research undertaken to date on public attitudes towards the issue has involved high level surveys that test general awareness and broad levels of support and opposition to 'fracking'. OUGO's recognition of the need for more in-depth and exploratory work to understand public attitudes led to the selection of a dialogue-based approach.

Effectiveness of the overall approach

The evaluation provides strong evidence that the premise of a deliberative, in-depth process was successful and delivered benefits over and above more traditional forms of social research (such as focus groups). For example:

- The DECC team recognised the benefit of being able to understand how participants in the events reacted to information and how these views changed (or not) across time;
- One of the Oversight Group interviewees noted the limitations of survey-based approaches for issues where a technology or process is relatively novel and public awareness is low, and therefore the need for alternative approaches (e.g. deliberative events, public dialogue);
- Feedback in the post-event questionnaire emphasised the importance of the educative elements of the process. For example, words that were frequently offered to describe the process included 'informative', 'educational', 'knowledgeable' and 'learning'.

The two stage design was an important feature of the project. Participants were, in most cases, starting from a low knowledge base about unconventional gas and oil, and therefore needed the time and space to process new information before giving an informed view. In this context, the first event adopted a largely educative role (with relatively little dialogue), whereas the second event was more interactive and participatory. In particular, the interim between the two workshops served a useful role in giving participants the space to consider the information from the first workshop.

The first event when we were learning about Shale Gas and Fracking was important. I had never even heard of Shale Gas, therefore I felt I needed that time to make sure I fully understand the process.

Participant, online discussion board

I think that this [the gap between sessions] was a very good idea as it gave us enough time to process the information from the first session and generate new ideas for the next one. We were given a lot of written information as well as heard information so it was nice to have enough time to be able to read through this in between the sessions.

Participant, online discussion board

Having two events was absolutely essential for a subject as complex and polarising as this. I certainly made use of the gap in between to fully research the subject and this reinforced my view on some subjects but changed my opinion on others. This would not have been possible without the gap between the sessions so I fully endorse this approach.

Participant, online discussion board

Focusing on the engagement process around shale gas (rather than shale gas itself)

Unlike many dialogue projects where the focus is centred on the subject itself, this project faced the challenge of demarcating the issue itself (which people naturally want to discuss) from the principal focus of the project on the principles and process of community engagement around shale gas.

The post-event questionnaire suggests that participants were comfortable with how the objectives for the project were set out (93% gave a score of 7 or more out of 10). However, the qualitative feedback at the workshops and in the online discussion boards suggests that this overall score masks some practical difficulties in communicating the distinction, at least in the first workshop.

For example, the moderator explanations used on the day that the events ‘were not about their views on shale gas itself’ did not sit easily with the fact that – in the first workshop – a large proportion of the day was about their views on shale gas (in terms of necessarily giving participants information on the risks and benefits). It might have been better to acknowledge this as an interim step towards the engagement plan, rather than saying that the process as a whole was not about their views on shale gas.

Furthermore, there was a degree of confusion in terms of what decisions have been taken and which have not. The original intention, and the briefing instruction to the moderators, was to make clear that the only decision to date has been a decision to promote exploration to establish the potential for shale gas in the UK. However, under pressure to move the discussion on and retain the focus on community engagement (rather than shale gas itself) there were occasions where this was understood by participants as meaning that Government had ‘decided’ to have shale gas (i.e. some moderators used the shorthand of ‘we’re not here to talk about whether shale gas is a good thing or not; that decision has already been taken’).

This presentational issue in some of the groups did have an impact on some of the participants (although not on others). These participants ended up understanding (or thinking they understood) that the Government had already decided in favour of shale gas and these events were of secondary importance – even when they were positive about the events in other respects.

I found the workshops very informative as I had a very sketchy idea of what fracking was about. I came away understanding the process and also some definite views. The group discussions were interesting as they threw up different ideas and opinions and we were able to discuss these in a balanced way. But my overall opinion was that these workshops were probably held because it was deemed necessary to do so and that fracking was going to take place no matter what. I have to be honest and say that was frustrating!

Participant, online discussion board

One member of the Oversight Group raised a question as to whether some of the confusion could have been mitigated by a clearer distinction between a national conversation about shale gas and related conversations – at a local level – that are specifically about public engagement. Their view was that DECC might have ‘jumped a stage’ straight into a local discussion about engagement without a prior national conversation.

Dialogue or research?

One of the features of the project is the fact that it has been described (both in the initial documentation and subsequent discussions), as ‘dialogue’, ‘research’, ‘deliberative research’ and ‘public engagement’. While these approaches are related and by no means mutually exclusive (existing on a continuum that ranges from social research methods on one side to pure dialogue on the other), there are important distinctions that go beyond semantics and which shape the nature of the exercise and its outcomes. In particular, it dictates the degree of control in the process and the extent to which it uses ‘top down’ vs. ‘bottom up’ approaches.

In this instance the events were subject to a relatively high level of control. For example, participants sometimes felt restricted in the extent to which they could question the presenters, and the DECC representatives were briefed to generally avoid engagement with participants as part of the objective was to capture what additional questions participants ask through the dialogues (see Section 2.7).

Therefore, when judged as a research-led dialogue process that was seeking to deliver against a series of key questions, the approach was effective (and, as Section 4.1 goes on to discuss, has clearly met a specific policy need). However, there was less focus on empowering participants and giving them the time and space to discuss the issues that they felt were most relevant to them, and so the approach will appear weaker if judged through the lens of purer forms of dialogue.

2. Recruitment

This element of the project was strong, with a good spread of participants across the three locations in terms of demographics (e.g. age, gender). There was also a good spread in terms of level of knowledge about shale gas and oil.

3. Structure of the workshops

Length of the sessions

While the two day structure worked effectively (as discussed in 2.1) some participants felt that the six hour sessions were slightly too long and could have been tweaked to be an hour or so shorter. Furthermore, others noted a degree of repetition in the sessions where they felt they were being asked the same questions in a slightly different way (particularly in relation to the question of who should communicate about unconventional gas and oil to communities).

I would say that the days were quite long... By 3pm people were getting tired, which was evident as conversation dwindled. However, there was a great deal to cover so it may have been hard to finish earlier.

Participant, online discussion board

The first event in which we were learning about Shale Gas and Fracking needed to be as long as it was to enable me to learn about the whole process. But the second session could have been a bit shorter – the morning sessions repeated a lot from the first day.

Participant, online discussion board

The lady leading our small group break out session was lovely, although sometimes she stuck rigidly to her 'script' occasionally asking questions that had already been answered, but I guess this may have been to clarify our thinking.

Participant, online discussion board

Using small groups

The use of small groups as a mechanism to discuss issues and raise questions in between the presentations and plenary sessions was effective. The post-event questionnaire shows that over half (59%) rated this aspect 9 or 10 out of 10, and almost all (96%) rated it 7+ out of 10.

Some participants did, however, question whether there was enough work in plenary, while others discussed the idea of mixing the groups up between the two events. There are a number of ways that groups could have been split - for example, by age, environmental outlook or existing knowledge about shale gas. In some respects this would make analysis by sub-groups of participants easier (e.g. how do views vary between younger and older age cohorts?); whereas in others this would lose the fact that all sub-groups were mixed groups that reflected a 'real world' debate.

The process itself was quite good, a nice mixture of large group and small group discussions. The individual group leaders made us feel quite comfortable and led the conversations well.

Participant, online discussion board

The group I was in was very good at hearing and discussing individual opinions, which made for a very stimulating and thought provoking group exercise. My only criticism would be that more time could have been spent on hearing other group opinions and their general consensus on a topic (although I do realise that some time was allocated for this).

Participant, online discussion board

After day two I was considering whether it might have been an idea to mix the groups on the second day rather than keep the same ones. I am in two minds about this. The fact that the group stayed the same meant that we all felt comfortable with each other and relaxed a little, however mixing the groups would have exposed us to other participants' opinions, so may have stimulated further discussion or debate?

Participant, online discussion board

The final feedback session

One of the elements that worked very well was the co-creation exercise in the second workshop where participants – in their small break out groups - fed back their engagement plan in plenary. While the task itself was quite challenging, participants embraced it and delivered some effective plans that they were then able to feed back to the wider group. They were very positive about the opportunity to feed back, and it was an important way of giving them confidence that their views were being listened to and taken on board.

This approach was ideal - the three groups working separately came up with ideas that probably wouldn't have all been discussed in the wider group. All three presentations from these sessions had a common stream but brought different ideas and approaches.

Participant, online discussion board

That was very good actually, we went off into our small groups and then a spokesperson from each relayed the ideas. Hearing different ideas was certainly beneficial to me. I also think it was good for DECC to hear the differing views as well. My personal favourite part!

Participant, online discussion board

This element could have been improved further with some small tweaks. For example:

- It worked well when participants fed back directly, rather than via their facilitator. Where the latter happened, it was picked up on and questioned by participants.
- The session would have worked even better as the final session and culmination of the process, rather than being followed by another session in the break out groups.
- Taking photos of all of the individual plans would have led to a powerful visual output.
- The session could have involved more two way interaction between participants and DECC. For example, the representatives could have moved to the front of the room to listen – and then respond – to the participants' suggestions (an approach that has worked well in other Sciencewise projects¹³). Participants were very quick to pick up on any cues that representatives were not listening at this point – even if, in reality, this reflected the representatives' efforts to avoid direct engagement with participants because they thought that all questions should be channelled back through the moderators.

The gentleman who was hosting the event asked us questions about what we were saying which I thought was good - it made me feel like we had raised points that were worthwhile. However, the industry representatives [DECC] never asked any questions about what we were saying. One sat on his mobile the whole time which I found extremely rude.

Participant, online discussion board

4. The hand outs

The project involved a large amount of supplementary information as hand outs, particularly in the first workshop during the more educative parts of the process. In addition to aiding the discussions, reactions to the materials was also interesting to DECC in the sense that the project was an ideal test bed to see how people react to existing information on shale gas.

The development of the stimulus materials had a significant bearing on the project timings, due to problems getting clearance to share internal materials. Nonetheless, the evaluation demonstrates that the materials were, broadly speaking, well received. Because participants were largely starting from a low knowledge base they needed information to help them reach a view about the subject. Furthermore, participants were positive about the inclusion of comments and perspectives from different organisations which helped – to some degree – to counter participants' concerns about bias in the process (see 2.8).

They were good and well laid out. I liked the pros on one side of the paper with the cons on the othergood idea. The diagrams were also easy to understand and for someone like me who knew zilch about fracking, they were ideal. So to sum up...loved the handouts!

¹³ E.g. Evaluating the Trajectories for Carbon Emission Reductions public dialogue project, Report for Sciencewise and the Committee on Climate Change

It was great to see a spectrum of opinions from organisations included throughout the topics (ranging from Greenpeace to the DECC) - this was reassuring and made me more willing to accept the information provided to me as open and unbiased.

Participant, online discussion board

Nonetheless, there was a great deal of information to take in across a wide range of individual sheets of paper, and some participants struggled to refer back to information seen earlier in the day. Several also suggested that it would have been better to present the information in a book or folder (or, as a minimum, to have some form of page sequencing) which – as an additional benefit - they would have found very useful to refer back to in the interim between the two workshops.

Maybe the hand-outs could have been one large booklet and when we needed to refer to a certain part we could have been told what page to refer to by the host. I think one booklet containing everything in one booklet would have been better than lots of pieces of paper.

Participant, online discussion board

The handouts were good and covered the presentation material well. A folder or ring binder to keep them in order would have been useful.

Participant, online discussion board

The TNS-BMRB report covers the ways in which participants reacted to the hand-outs and different presentations of information around shale gas. Supporting this, the following insights were picked up in the course of the evaluation:

- There was a strong desire among participants for visual presentations of information in relation to what an actual well¹⁴ looks like, either in terms of a working model or a schematic of a real example. It was something that participants were frequently observed asking for on their tables, since they found it difficult to imagine the scale of local impacts and risk based on a spoken or written description alone. It also ranked fifth in the post-event evaluation questionnaire as a spontaneous suggestion for improving the workshops (cited by 8%).
- On a similar theme, there was a demand for more tangible stories or case studies from real communities with local experience of shale gas exploration.

I feel it would have been beneficial to have some real life stories of positive and negative real life experiences of living near a fracking site. Instead we had a room full of professionals linked with the industry and no real life examples.

Participant, online discussion board

- Some participants noted, a dislike of highly simplified comparisons (e.g. that the chemicals used in shale gas extraction are similar to those used in common household products like

¹⁴ Shale gas and wells are similar to conventional oil and gas wells. In the UK, it is standard practice for all oil and gas extraction wells to have three layers of 'casing': a 'conductor' casing acts a foundation layer; a surface casing runs below fresh water sources; and a production casing runs into the target rock from where the shale gas and oil flows generally at least 1500m down.

make up or toothpaste). Another comparison that did not work for several participants was the comparison between seismic tremors and lorries passing by.

The seismic activity at the Fylde coast Cuadrilla site was described as minor tremors equivalent to a lorry driving past your house. I felt this was dumbing down the issue and a little disrespectful to the audience.

Participant, online discussion board

5. Presentations and technical input

This section talks about the design and overall approach to the presentations (as opposed to the style of delivery - see 3.3). Presentations were delivered by DECC representatives in person, and these were supplemented by a 'talking heads' video at workshop 1 and audio recordings at workshop 2 from different stakeholder organisations (e.g. a parish councillor, a shale gas operator).

This approach was chosen by DECC because of the difficulty finding experts with a broad base of knowledge of all of the disciplines involved in unconventional gas and oil exploration, as well as a desire to avoid having different experts across the three locations (potentially influencing the research findings with different styles of presentation). It was, however, questioned by two Oversight Group members who felt that presentations from independent experts would have added to the credibility of the approach.

The feedback from participants highlights several important lessons. For example, several found the presentations too wordy, which impacted on their ability to follow what the speaker was saying. By contrast, they were positive towards the video and considered this to be more engaging. In terms of the audio clips, these seem to have played a useful role in terms of adding to the plurality of perspectives and mitigating – to some degree – concerns about bias. However, they were not considered as effective as the video which, in turn, was not considered as effective as having presenters in the room in person.

The slides were a little too wordy and the sound equipment (as is always the case) was not fit for purpose. Tinny speakers detract from what you are listening to, especially with the radio clips. With slides being too wordy the viewer is reading the screen/handout rather than listening to the speaker.

Participant, online discussion board

I liked the fact that a range of sources were used - people who would be accountable for decisions at a local level such as a parish council official were asked rather than all information coming from DECC. However, I often found it hard to concentrate on the audio clips as there were no faces to them - video clips would have been better.

Participant, online discussion board

I found these videos useful - video and audio is great and brings more dynamism to the sessions than text quotations. However, if the individuals had been in the room it would have been more real and also it would have been useful to ask questions.

Participant, online discussion board

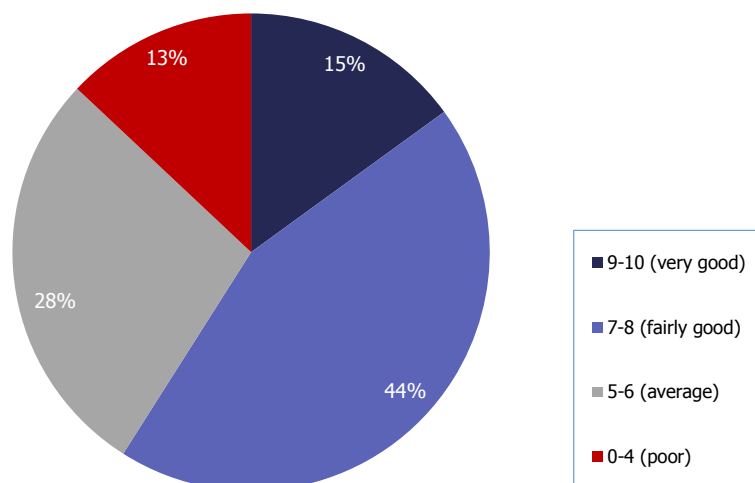
This feeds into a recurring theme in the evaluation feedback about the perceived lack of technical/scientific input. This was one the lowest scoring aspect asked about in the post-event questionnaire, relative to other elements, with only 15% giving a score of 9-10 out of 10, compared to a similar proportion (13%) who have a score of 0-4/10 (Figure 1). Furthermore,

when asked for spontaneous suggestions about how the workshop could be improved, the second most cited suggestion was for the involvement of more experts.

Figure 1 – Participants' views on the input from technical/scientific perspectives

Question: Please give the following a score out of 10 (0 = very poor; 10 = excellent): Having enough input from technical/scientific perspectives

Base: All 71 participants, post-event questionnaire undertaken at the end of the second event



I would have liked to have heard from unbiased scientists who could have given me an idea on the impact of fracking on the environment, etc. I would have found it beneficial to talk to people involved with the process of fracking too.

Participant, online discussion board

I wanted to hear more from the science professionals and what their perception of the risks were and how viable they thought DECC's ideas of mitigating them are. Also, we should have had someone there that was against fracking. Learning more about the negative impacts on the community would have given us a greater insight into the risks.

Participant, online discussion board

I would have liked to hear a broader range of discussion and expert opinion from both sides of the debate. I did feel that any negatives to non-conventional on-shore oil and gas extraction were played down.

Participant, online discussion board

6. Time for Q&A and engagement with representatives

The evaluation highlighted some concerns among participants about the processes for Q&A and the accessibility of the answers. Questions were compiled in the breakout groups and the top three questions were asked by their facilitator (although this could have been a good opportunity to have the participants directly ask the questions themselves). Additional questions were taken away and answered in the interim between the first and second workshops. This resulted in a large (40+ page) document of answers being brought to the second workshop, with participants led through a few key questions and told the document would also be available during breaks.

While comprehensive, this approach was not very accessible and did not lead many participants to review the document. Several noted that it would have been more useful to receive the answers in the interim between events.

My main criticism is that the presentations were 'transmit only' and there was little - if any - time for questions. There is a balance to be struck and I think there could have been a little more time for Q&A, if only to make people feel that this was a two way discussion.

Participant, online discussion board

They did indeed [bring a list of answers to questions raised at event 1]. BUT (a big but), they didn't go through all the questions, only left a document for us to read during break times. So that could have been better.

Participant, online discussion board

It would be useful for the answers to all questions be e-mailed out to participants between the sessions to help with opinion forming before they get together again.

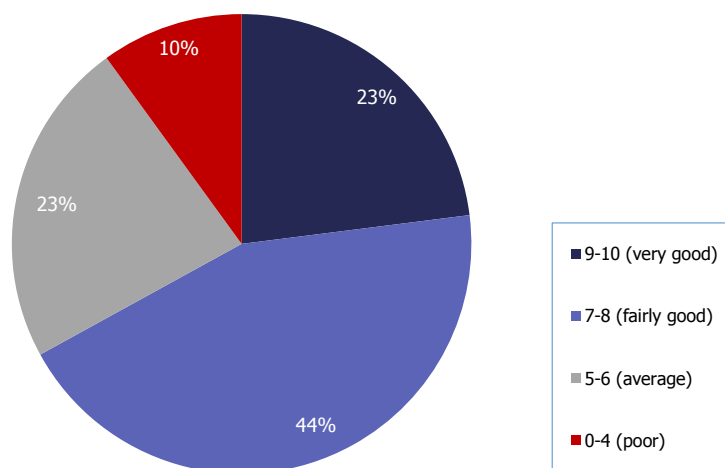
Participant, online discussion board

A desire for more time for Q&A was also evident through participants' feedback in the post-event questionnaire – for example, the top spontaneous suggestion about how to improve the events related to more time for Q&A/discussion with the DECC representatives (cited by 18%). Not all participants took this view, however, and in terms of ratings two thirds (67%) scored 'time to ask speakers questions' as 7 or more out of 10, compared to 23% who rated this 5-6 and 10% who rated this 0-4 (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Participants' views on the time to ask speakers questions

Question: Please give the following a score out of 10 (0 = very poor; 10 = excellent):
Time to ask the speakers questions

Base: All 71 participants, post-event questionnaire undertaken at the end of the second event

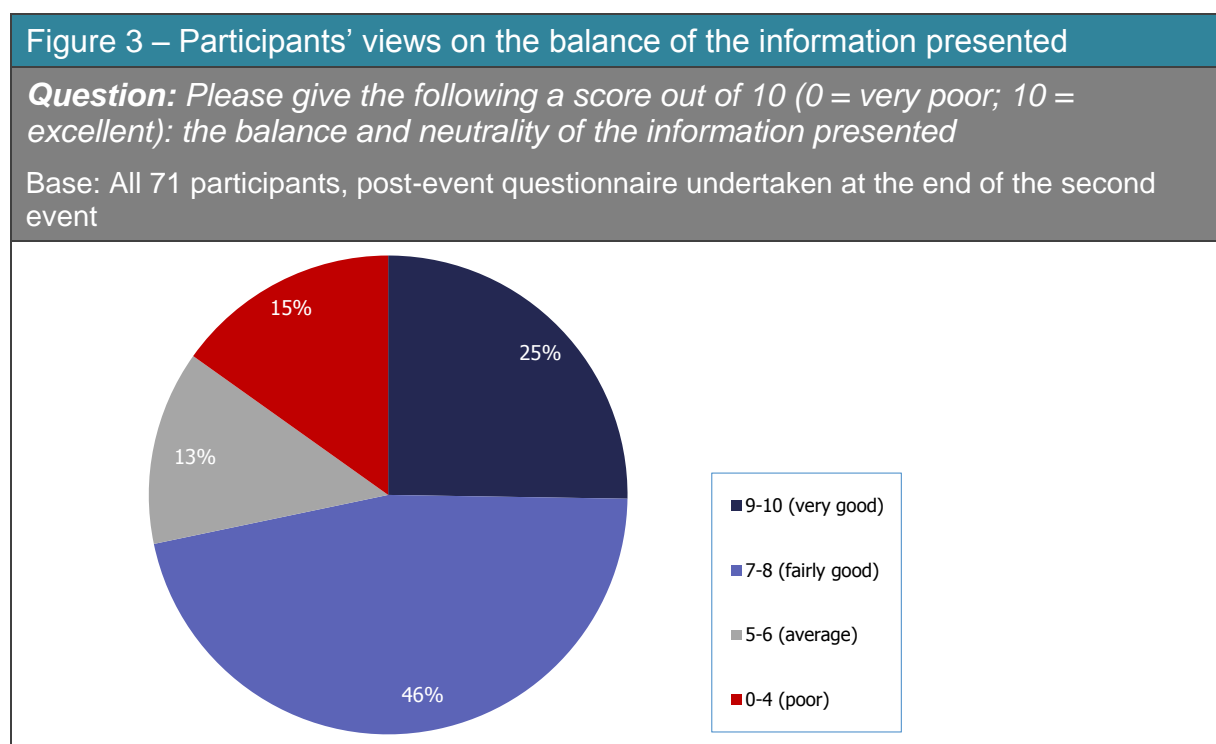


A key issue picked up by the evaluation is the fact that DECC representatives – outside of the confines of the presentations - sought to avoid direct engagement with participants. This was picked up by some participants and created a slight 'them and us' dynamic between lay members of the public and experts. As noted already, this reflected representatives' desire to ensure that all questions and clarifications were captured and channelled through the moderators.

It also reflects the fact the dialogue took a directed approach because it was approached with a strong social research perspective. It may have been that DECC representatives were over-influenced by seeing it as a ‘pure’ piece of research, where their interventions in discussion could have materially influenced the findings. However, in the context of a dialogue there was no reason for them not to be involved more and - if they had kept their answers neutral – then it would not have skewed the process.

7. Neutrality and bias

There was a perception among some participants that the process was biased towards a ‘pro-fracking’ stance. This was by no means true of all participants, and Figure 3 demonstrates that the majority in fact gave positive scores in the post-evaluation questionnaire. Nonetheless, the perception extended beyond one or two participants, and 28% gave this element of the process a score of 0-6.



The perception of a pro-fracking stance among this subset of participants did not stem from the hand out materials which, as discussed in 2.5, were recognised for outlining alternative perspectives from a range of organisations. Rather, it was the product of several factors:

- The difficulty communicating that the project was about engagement on shale gas (rather than shale gas itself) fostered a view, among some, that the important decisions had all been taken and that this project was of secondary importance.
- Some participants noted the fact that DECC were the only speakers, with no other organisations with different/counter perspectives physically in the room. Several participants, across all three locations, used the language of “being sold to”.

I thought I was being sold to, I know it was meant to be objective but it didn't seem that way.

Participant, online discussion board

The biggest input was from DECC who were clearly for shale gas. I would have liked to have heard more from science professionals and... someone who was against fracking.

Finally, one of the potentially most powerful influences was the basic sequencing of the benefits and risks sections. Whilst this may appear relatively incidental, it appears that presenting the benefits first fostered an impression that DECC were in favour of shale gas and so they reacted against this, rather than the materials per se. The discussion on benefits, for example, appeared to be limited to a degree because participants began to question the independence of the process. And even when the risks were subsequently introduced, in a similar fashion to the benefits and for an equivalent amount of time, participants still felt that the benefits had been given more prominence and the risks played down.

The balance of the first session felt skewed in favour of the pro-fracking lobby and although there was some attempt to provide the alternative side of the debate from environmental groups this was generally rushed, brushed over and not debated in any detail.

Participant, online discussion board

I did feel that the initial information was rather biased towards the pros of fracking. It was only when I went home that I researched on the internet about what all the fuss was about. I fully appreciate that they also put the negatives in, but they were not as prominent as the benefits. Also, all of the people from DECC did not really discuss any of the negatives.

Participant, online discussion board

From the evaluation team's perspective there was no suggestion of any deliberate or underlying bias, and Section 5 goes on to discuss the efforts made to present a range of different views. However, it remains both important to understand the factors that can lead some participants to feel a bias in one direction or another (particularly in relation to this project where this kind of process will be repeated in 'live' situations around potential shale gas exploration sites).

3. Delivery

This section outlines the key findings from the evaluation in respect of the delivery of the dialogue project.

1. Organisation and venue

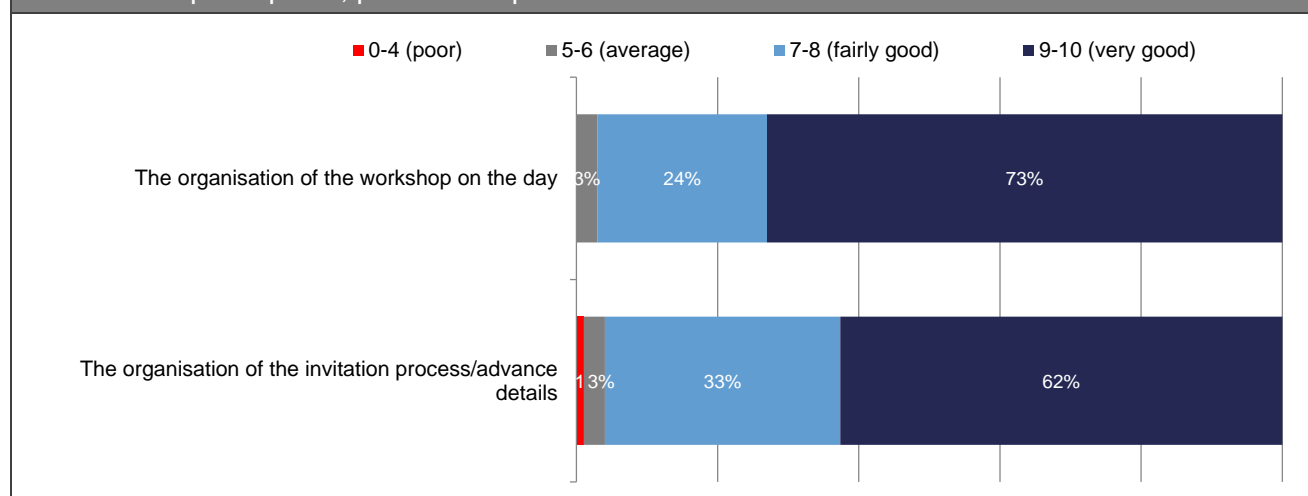
Very few concerns were raised about the event organisation which was exemplary. Almost all (95%) participants gave '*the organisation of the invitation process/advance details*' a score of 7 or more out of 10; as did 97% for '*the organisation of the event on the day*' (Figure 4).

In addition, '*the venue and refreshments*' also scored highly (83% scored it 7 or more out of 10), although in Northampton some participants raised issues about the food at the second workshop, while in Winchester the plenary and breakout rooms were on different floors and parking which also an issue for some. Furthermore, the fact that participants were not in the same room did make it slightly more difficult for DECC attendees to circulate between groups.

Figure 4 – Participants' views on the event organisation

Question: Please give the following a score out of 10 (0 = very poor' 10 = excellent)

Base: All 71 participants, post-event questionnaire undertaken at the end of the second event



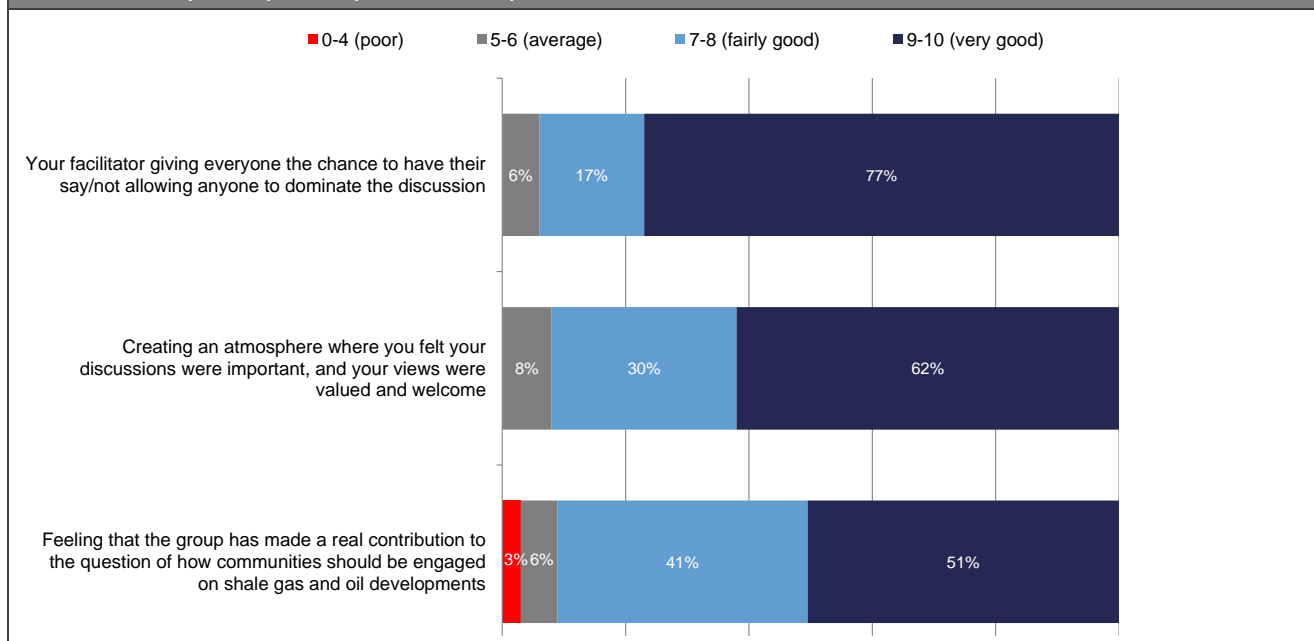
2. Facilitation

Facilitation was strong throughout the project and this is reflected in the post-event questionnaire feedback with very high scores (Figure 5). For example, 94% of participants gave a score of seven or more out of 10 for '*your facilitator giving everyone the chance to have their say/not allowing anyone to dominate the discussion*'.

Figure 5 – Participants' views on the facilitation

Question: Please give the following a score out of 10 (0 = very poor' 10 = excellent)

Base: All 71 participants, post-event questionnaire undertaken at the end of the second event



There were some imbalances in the contribution of individuals within some of the groups (particularly in those with some louder – and typically male – voices), with some participants not engaging until quite deep into the first workshop. These were addressed by the facilitators – importantly so, since it did influence the propensity of others in the group to engage.

The sessions were often steered by louder members in the group who had more previous knowledge. I sometimes felt intimidated expressing my opinion as I wasn't as educated in this area. The facilitator handled this well - if some members in the group were quieter than others she would ask them individually. I would have liked her to do this more, as it was often a discussion between two or three members of the group rather than the whole group.

Participant, online discussion board

Another useful technique for giving quieter individuals in the group space to talk and give their views was one of the early exercises around perceptions of the risks presented by different issues (e.g. driving, nuclear power, etc.). This was often done in small groups on the table which – aside from the insights generated (i.e. how people perceive risks in the wider context) - was a very useful methodological device to encourage engagement.

3. Presentations

The presentations were delivered effectively by DECC representatives, although there was the occasional use of acronyms that participants did not understand (e.g. 'HSE'). However, the key issue was the quality of the video and audio. For example, the 'talking heads' video failed to play in Winchester, while volume/poor sound quality was an issue in relation to the stakeholder audio clips. This detracted from these elements, particularly given the premium placed on them as a proxy for expert presence in the room.

Unfortunately the video presentations, which could have been helpful in hearing more viewpoints on the debate, had to be abandoned due to lack of any sound. Participant, online discussion board

4. Impacts

This section assesses the impact of the dialogue: both in terms of the impacts on DECC and policy decisions as well as on participants.

1. Impact on policy decisions

One of the key strengths of the project was the fact that it was designed to address a particular gap in the evidence base and satisfy a specific policy need. In one of the DECC team's own words, it "*hit a gap and hit it very well in terms of informing policy*". DECC's view is that, while there may be lots of theory about what public engagement should be like, this work has cut through that and given important insights about what the public want to see with regards to shale gas and oil.

At the time of writing, it is not possible to assess the publication strategy and its influence on DECC's partners. Nonetheless, discussions with DECC suggest that the emerging findings are already being used, alongside other sources of evidence, to develop thinking around public engagement on shale gas. Furthermore, it is already informing the design of local events around shale gas.

In terms of the impact on DECC itself, the interviewees feel that they have learnt a great deal from the process, especially the direct feedback from having attended the sessions in person. DECC report that they are considering some internal lunchtime seminars to feed back to colleagues in the Department on the use of dialogue approaches. DECC also report that they will continue to work with the Oversight Group when considering how best to implement the findings.

On the question of value for money, DECC interviewees feel that it definitely has provided value for money, by providing them with important detail and direction and generally adding value over and above what could be achieved through some of the more traditional social research methods (e.g. quantitative surveys or focus groups). One oversight group interviewee, however, does not feel that the project represents value for money, and questioned more broadly the usefulness of the approach and the validity of the findings.

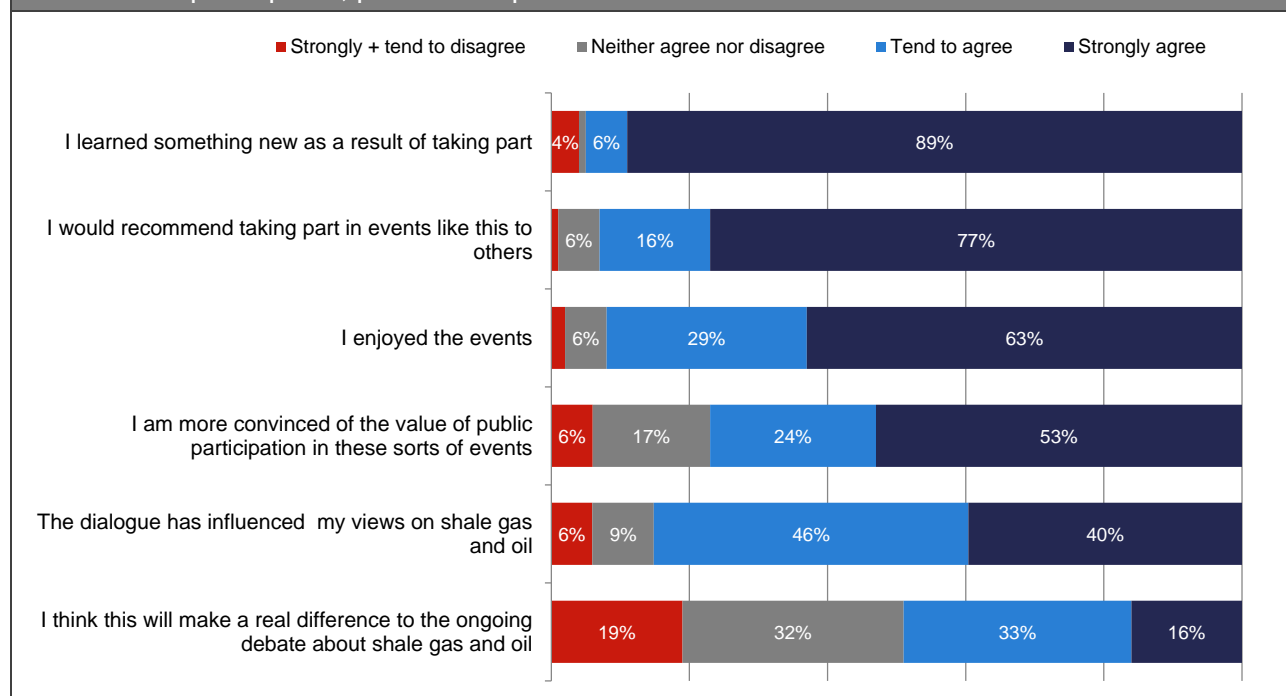
2. Impact from the perspective of participants

The dialogue had a positive impact upon participants (Figure 6). 95% agreed that '*I learned something new as a result of taking part*'; 93% would recommend taking part in events like these to others and 92% enjoyed the events. Furthermore, 86% agreed the events had influenced their views on shale gas and oil, and just over three quarters (77%) agreed that '*I am more convinced of the value of public participation in these sorts of topics*'.

Figure 6 – Participants' views on the impact of the event upon them

Question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree that...?*

Base: All 71 participants, post-event questionnaire undertaken at the end of the second event



Turning to participants' views on the likely impact on DECC, the lowest level of agreement – at 49% - was for the statement '*I think this will make a real difference to the ongoing debate about shale gas and oil*'. Feedback from the online discussion boards also suggests that there is demand to find out more about the outcomes of the project and – in one or two instances – to actually continue the dialogue with DECC.

It would be interesting to know how my participation will affect DECC's approach and decision on how to engage the public and local communities. I like to see cause and effect - a report or article giving a synopsis of the events and the key details gathered should be made available, along with how these discoveries will be implemented in communicating the topic to the rest of the general public and local communities directly affected.

Participant, online discussion board

I felt like I knew a lot about fracking after the process, but then started talking to some friends who have quite strong opinions about it. This has raised more questions, is there a forum where questions can be put to DECC directly?

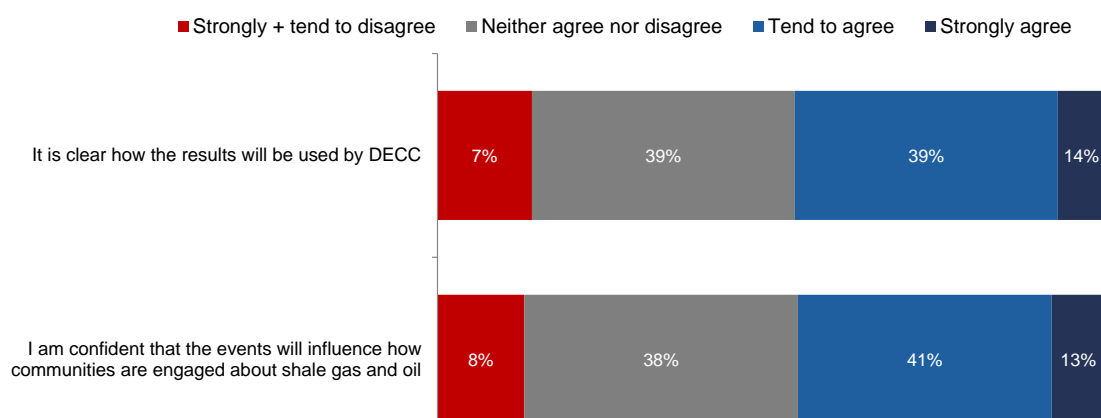
Participant, online discussion board

The headline results from the post-event questionnaire demonstrate mixed views on what will happen as a result of the work (Figure 7). For example, a substantial proportion (39%) neither agrees nor disagrees with the statement '*it is clear how the results will be used by DECC*'. A similar proportion (41%) neither agrees nor disagrees with the statement '*I am confident that the events will influence how communities are engaged on shale gas and oil*'.

Figure 7 – Participants' views on what impact the dialogue will have on DECC

Question: *To what extent do you agree or disagree that...?*

Base: All 71 participants, post-event questionnaire undertaken at the end of the second event



The comments from the online discussion boards also demonstrate a general lack of certainty about what might happen – or change – as a result of the project.

I am not sure. I said earlier that I felt that fracking was a foregone conclusion and that these workshops were just ticking appropriate boxes. I would like to think that this will make a difference on how communities are engaged. Sorry I am not very committal on this question it's just that I am genuinely uncertain of any impact there might be.

Participant, online discussion board

I think our responses will be considered, and they may inform some planning, but to be honest I would imagine that companies/local authorities will already have an idea about how this will happen based on what is affordable and achievable with the funds they have. We gave ideas with little consideration for time scales, finance and responsibility.

Participant, online discussion board

It is likely that this is – in part at least – a result of the challenge communicating to participants the distinction between commenting on shale gas and oil policy and commenting on the principles of public engagement around shale gas and oil. It may also be addressed through participants receiving feedback on the process, and DECC report they intend to send them (via TNS-BMRB) a link to the final published report.

5. Governance

This section assesses the management and governance of the dialogue process.

The evaluation findings in relation to the Oversight Group are as follows:

- The composition of the Oversight Group was well designed and included a useful plurality of perspectives. DECC interviewees felt that having a range of views was very useful and helped to “*sharpen things up*”.
- The ability of Oversight Group members to contribute was impacted on by the timetable constraints, which had three main impacts:
 - Meetings often could not involve the full group all together and/or that DECC had to engage in separate one-to-one discussions.
 - It precluded the possibility of running a pilot, which several interviewees felt would have been beneficial.
 - Most challenging of all, the timetable for commenting on materials was a key issue for all interviewees, particularly ahead of the second workshop where they had insufficient time (i.e. 24 hours) to feedback comments. They felt that DECC did try to take on board all suggestions but the timings precluded a second view of the amended materials.
- A number of interviewees commented on, and were positive towards, DECC’s attempts to seek wider views beyond the Oversight Group and felt that DECC was striving to achieve a balanced input into the process.
- Aside from DECC and Sciencewise, there was no Oversight Group representation at the events which may hinder their ability to understand the process and the information generated. Seeing, and being involved in, these events first hand can be particularly beneficial (indeed, the DECC interviewees all said they got something out of observing the events). While some interviewees said that they were invited but too late to be able to attend, one interviewee said that they did not recall receiving an invitation to attend;
- The role of the oversight is on page 9, but there was some confusion over the Oversight Group’s specific remit and terms of reference. One member felt that the Group’s role was not entirely clear, while another noted some confusion (and uncomfortableness) about whether they were expected to be ‘ambassadors’ for the project and its eventual outputs.

6. Overview and conclusions

Overall the dialogue delivered very effectively against the original objectives and research questions. It addressed a gap in the evidence base and met a specific policy need. There is evidence that the outcomes are being used by OUGO to inform policy and practice (i.e. in terms of local engagement events) even at this early stage.

As a relatively new method for DECC, the work has delivered credible findings that have added value beyond what can be achieved through traditional social research methods (such as surveys and focus groups). This is because – for an emerging subject like shale gas and oil - a dialogue-based approach allows the time to provide detailed information to participants over a period of time to help them come to an informed view. It also provides a much richer source of additional information to advise policy

Turning to the lessons that can be taken from the design and delivery of the process itself, the project demonstrated a number of strengths:

- The overarching two day structure was important. Participants were, in most cases, starting from a low knowledge base about unconventional gas and oil, and therefore needed the time and space to process new information before giving an informed view.
- The hand outs were well received and – crucially – included perspectives from different organisations that gave an important sense of balance and objectivity.
- The use of small groups as a mechanism to discuss issues and raise questions in between the presentations and plenary sessions was effective.
- One of the elements that worked particularly well was one of the final sessions in the second event where participants fed back their co-created engagement plans in plenary. They were very positive about the opportunity to feed back, and it was an important way of giving them confidence that their views were important and would have an impact on DECC.

The project also highlighted a number of important lessons for future dialogues in terms of where aspects did not perform as well:

- The project timescale was a significant constraint that had a series of impacts. While there were very good reasons for this in terms of the need to produce timely outcomes for both policy and practice, it did hinder the ability of the Oversight Group to comment on the materials, which is regrettable given their expertise.
- There were some practical difficulties in communicating the distinction between a debate about shale gas itself and the processes of engagement around shale gas. This led some participants, to believe that Government has already decided in favour of shale gas exploration.
- There was a demand among participants for more technical/scientific input and for a greater range of speakers / perspectives. The use of video as a proxy was effective but did not compensate for having experts in the room; while the audio clips added less value, in part because the audio quality in the rooms was not ideal.

- There was also a desire among participants for more direct engagement with DECC representatives, rather than via the facilitators. There was scope for more interaction that could have benefitted the process and the dynamic between participants and observers.

As an overarching comment, the project highlights an important distinction between different types of dialogue. In this instance, the slightly more controlled and research-orientated approach has led to an output that is very likely to add value to OUGO's work moving forward. However, there was less focus on empowering participants and giving them the time and space to set their own agenda. This is not to imply that there is a 'right' or a 'wrong' approach. Rather, the key lesson is the need for greater clarity about the distinctions between research and dialogue methods, how directed the methods will be, and the kinds of outcomes that can be expected to flow from them.

Appendices

1. Post-event questionnaire - copy

We are independently evaluating the events and would appreciate your feedback on how they have been for you. The evaluation report will be published but your individual response here will be treated anonymously and will only be seen by the evaluators. We will also be inviting some participants to take part in a short online discussion over the next few weeks to follow up on some of these questions – if you are interested see the final page.

Please consider BOTH EVENTS overall when you answer the following questions.

What three words would you use to describe your experience of participating in these events?

Q. Please give the following a score out of 10 (0 = very poor; 10 = excellent)		SCORE 0 - 10
1	The organisation of the invitation process/advance details	
2	The organisation of the workshop on the day	
3	The venue and refreshments	
4	Setting out the objectives for the workshop (i.e. why you were there; what the workshops were intended to achieve)	
5	The balance and neutrality of the information presented	
6	The accessibility of the information (e.g. avoiding the use of jargon)	
7	Pitching information at the right level, i.e. not too simplistic but also not too technical	
8	The structure of the sessions, i.e. the balance between working in small break out groups and plenary sessions when everyone was together	
9	Time to ask the speakers questions	
10	Having enough input from technical / scientific perspectives	
11	Creating an atmosphere where you felt your discussions were important, and your views were valued and welcome	
12	The facilitator on your table giving everyone the chance to have their say / not allowing anyone to dominate the discussion	
13	Having sufficient information to enable you to make an informed contribution on how communities should be engaged on shale gas and oil	
14	Feeling that the group has made a real contribution to the question of how communities should be engaged on shale gas and oil developments	
15	Overall, how satisfied you were with the events	

What do you think were the best things about the events?

And what do you think were the main things that could have been improved about the events?

Q. Thinking about what will happen as a result of the events, please circle one answer for the following statements.

1	It is clear how the results will be used by DECC	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
2	I am confident that the events will influence how communities are engaged about shale gas and oil	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know

Please tell us why you are confident or not confident that the events will influence how communities will be engaged about shale gas and oil?

Q. Please circle one answer for each of the following statements.

1	I learned something new as a result of taking part	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
2	I enjoyed the events	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
3	The dialogue has influenced my views on shale gas and oil developments	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
4	I am more convinced of the value of public participation in these sorts of topics	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
5	I think this will make a real difference to the ongoing debate around shale gas and oil	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
6	I would recommend taking part in events like this to others	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neutral	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know

What was the main thing you gained from taking part in this project?

Any further comments?

To continue our evaluation we are holding an **online discussion forum** over the course of the next few weeks with around 12-15 of the participants across the 3 locations. This will involve logging on 2-3 times to answer some questions along with other attendees. **It should take around 60 mins in total and you will receive a £20 cash 'thank you' for your time.** Your answers will be anonymous. Are you interested in taking part?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Sciencewise co-funded the dialogue project you are taking part in. It is a national programme that promotes public dialogue on policy issues involving science and technology. Would you like to receive other information from *Sciencewise*, including opportunities to be involved in other debates in future?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If you answered 'yes' to either of the two questions please provide the following details - these will only be used for the purposes described above and they will not be given to anyone else.

Name:.....

Home phone number (including area code):

Email address:.....

2. Post event questionnaire - Topline results

- This document summarises the results from the post-event questionnaire.
- This was completed at the end of the final session by all 71 participants who attended the second event (100% response rate).

Q1.	What three words would you use to describe your experience of participating in these events?	
	Informative	55%
	Interesting	36%
	Enjoyable/fun	13%
	Educational/knowledgeable/learning	11%
	Too long/repetitive	7%
	Thought provoking/eye opening	6%
	Engaging	6%
	Frustrating	4%
	Good	4%
	Biased	3%
	Worrying	1%
	Controversial	1%

Q 2.	Please give the following a score out of 10 (0 = very poor; 10 = excellent)					
		0-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	Average / 10
	The organisation of the invitation	1%	3%	33%	62%	8.8
	The organisation of the workshop on the day	0%	3%	24%	73%	9.1
	The venue and refreshments	3%	14%	31%	52%	8.3
	Setting out the objectives for the workshop (i.e. why you were there; what the workshops were intended to achieve)	1%	6%	44%	49%	8.4
	The balance and neutrality of the information presented	15%	13%	46%	25%	7.0
	The accessibility of the information (e.g. avoiding jargon)	3%	13%	56%	28%	7.8
	Pitching information at the right level, i.e. not too simplistic but also not too technical	3%	7%	55%	35%	8.1
	The structure of the sessions, i.e. the balance between working in small break out groups and plenary sessions when everyone was together	0%	4%	37%	59%	8.7
	Time to ask the speakers questions	10%	23%	44%	23%	7.1
	Having enough input from technical / scientific perspectives	13%	28%	44%	15%	6.7
	Creating an atmosphere where you felt your discussions were important, and your views were valued and welcome	0%	8%	30%	62%	8.7
	Your facilitator giving everyone the chance to have their say / not allowing anyone to dominate the discussion	0%	6%	17%	77%	9.1
	Having sufficient information to enable you to make an informed contribution on how	4%	7%	39%	50%	8.2

	communities should be engaged on shale gas and oil developments					
	Feeling that the group has made a real contribution to the question of how communities should be engaged on shale gas and oil developments	3%	6%	41%	51%	8.4
	Overall, how satisfied you were with the events	0%	7%	34%	59%	8.6

Q3.	What do you think were the main things that could have been improved about the events?					
	More time for Q&A/discussion with DECC representatives					18%
	Other perspectives (e.g. geologists, EA)					15%
	Better food					14%
	More balance/less bias					10%
	More information on fracking/seeing an actual well					8%
	Better presentations / quality of sound/ technical hitches					7%
	Less repetition/shorter sessions					6%
	More time/less rushed					4%
	Room temperature					3%
	More info on what happens next					1%

Q 4.	Thinking about what will happen as a result of the events, please circle one answer for the following statements						
		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neutral	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
	It is clear how the results will be used by DECC	3%	11%	35%	39%	7%	4%
	I am confident that the events will influence how communities are engaged about shale gas and oil	3%	10%	37%	38%	8%	4%

Q 5.	Please circle one answer for each of the following statements						
		Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neutral	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
	I learned something new as a result of taking part	3%	1%	1%	6%	89%	-
	I enjoyed the events	1%	1%	6%	29%	63%	-
	The dialogue has influenced my views on shale gas and oil developments	3%	3%	9%	46%	40%	-
	I am more convinced of the value of public participation in these sorts of topics	3%	3%	17%	24%	53%	-
	I think this will make a real difference to the ongoing	9%	10%	31%	33%	16%	1%

	debate around shale gas and oil						
	I would recommend taking part in events like this to others	1%	0%	6%	16%	77%	-

Q6.	What was the main thing you gained from taking part in this project?						
	Understanding of fracking	46%					
	Learning something new/knowledge	15%					
	Understanding of the agencies involved in the process/oversight	14%					
	Balanced view	6%					
	Meeting other people	6%					

3. Online board - initial questions

First batch of questions – general reflections

1. You've now had a few days since you attended the events. What are your main reflections looking back at the process? This can be anything at all, but please try to be as detailed in your answers as possible.
2. What do you think of the approach of having two events with a gap in between?
3. Overall, do you think that the events were too long, too short or about right?
4. What did you think of the break-out sessions when you were discussing the issues in smaller groups?

[4b. Specific prompt on whether everyone talked equally or some people dominated – and, if so, how the facilitator handled it?]

Second batch of questions – speakers, hand outs and information

5. What did you think of the presentations?
6. Did you feel you were able to get answers to key questions that you had about shale gas and oil?
7. What did you think of the hand-outs?

[7b. specific follow up prompt about whether they were pitched at the right level in terms of the language and facts/figures they used]

8. Do you think there was enough input from different perspectives e.g. scientific/technical?

[8b. Specific follow-up prompts about how useful they found the talking heads/audio clips in the presentations]

9. One or two participants told us that the events felt like DECC were trying to 'sell the benefits' of shale gas and oil; others disagreed and said that the quotes from different organisations/perspectives showed that all sides of the argument were being put forward. What did you think about the balance of information?

Final batch of questions - how the findings will be used

10. At the final event the main exercise involved each group coming up with their own process for how local communities should be engaged about shale gas and oil; and this was then fed back to the other teams and to DECC attendees. How did you find this approach?
11. How confident are you that what people said in the events will make a difference to how communities are engaged about shale gas and oil?
12. What are your views on the value of public participation in these sorts of topics?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we didn't cover in these evaluation questions?

4. Interview guide for discussions with stakeholders

Introduction

Interviewer to introduce themselves and Icaro.

Aims of project: independently evaluating DECC's public dialogue on unconventional gas and oil developments –learning what went well, what could be improved, and contributing to increasing the wider effectiveness and use of public dialogue.

Confidential: their name won't appear anywhere; any quotations will be anonymised.

Interview will last around 30-60 mins.

Permission to record; explain you'll be making notes throughout – for our memories only!

Any questions before we start?

Module 1: Background to them and their involvement

- Describe Role
- How and when they got involved in the dialogue
- What their involvement is/has been

Module 2: DECC's decision to undertake public dialogue

- [DECC only] Where did the idea for public dialogue come from?
- [DECC only] How much support did the idea receive internally? What about the engagement approach prompted enthusiasm or concern?
- [DECC only] What made DECC take the idea forward? What were you hoping it would achieve?
- [Other stakeholders] Why do you think DECC decided to undertake a public dialogue on this issue? How well has the OG functioned?

Module 3: The Oversight Group (OG members only)

- What has your role on the OG been?
- How did you first get involved? Were they involved at the right time – both initially and throughout the project?
- [DECC only] How was the OG selected? Why this membership?
- [Other stakeholders]: Why did you/your organisation decide to become involved in the OG and this project?
- How well has the OG functioned? PROBE ON: right membership? Opportunity to add value? Effectiveness of the communication to the group?
- What about it has worked well and not as well as hoped? How could it have been improved?
- Did you have an opportunity to comment on/contribute to:
 - The research objectives
 - The recruitment for the dialogue
 - The presentations and stimulus materials
 - The design of the 2-stage process
 - The structure/topic guide for individual dialogue sessions
- [DECC only] How important was the funding from Sciencewise? Would you have done the project anyway, without that funding? How did you find the support from Sciencewise? How did the support they give you make it a better project (or not)? Was there anything else you

would have liked Sciencewise to provide?

- [Sciencewise only] How have you found working with DECC on the project? Have you worked together to reflect upon and refine the deliberative approach?

Module 4: The dialogue process

- Have you had, or heard of, any prior experience of public dialogue? [to be able to compare and contrast as we move through this part of the discussion]
- What are your overall impressions of the dialogue process?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work as well?
- And thinking now about specific elements, what did you think of...? [NB. depending on whether they attended or not] [PROBE on specific aspects. For each ask: (i) What worked well and why? (ii) What worked less well and why? (iii) If it worked less well, how could this aspect have been improved?]
 - Recruitment
 - The 2-stage dialogue process and time in between the sessions
 - Venue
 - The structure of the sessions overall
 - The stimulus material (Probe: accessibility and quantity of information)
 - Expert speakers (e.g. DECC, the 'talking heads' and audio clips). Probe: accessibility and quantity of information; how were they decided? Range of speakers; time for participants to ask questions)?
 - The three break out groups
 - Establishing / setting out the objectives for participants
 - Being able to ask additional questions/feedback information across the sessions
 - The amount of interaction between public participants and stakeholders
 - If the sessions were sufficiently creative/included enough variety to maintain participants' attention.
 - Would they have suggested anything different in terms of how the events were designed?
- ASK IF ATTENDED: What, if anything, surprised you about how the dialogue went? What did you think of the quality of the questions, debate etc. among public participants and the quality of their contribution throughout?
- ASK IF DID NOT ATTEND: What, if anything, surprised you about the findings you've heard about so far?
- How was the approach different from other options, e.g. focus group research? What additional benefits are there from this approach? And any additional challenges?
- What are your thoughts on running future dialogues? When would they be most appropriate? When do you think they would not be appropriate?
- [DECC only]: Would you recommend a dialogue process to others? What advice would you give to other organisations considering public dialogue?
- Did you feel the dialogue process overall was sufficiently credible for you to be able to use the results with confidence in making future decisions? What added to or reduced that credibility?
- The project had financial costs. At this stage, do you think that it was money well spent, or not, and why?

Module 5: Impact

- What are your reflections on the dialogue report?

- [NON DECC only] What impact do you think the project has had on DECC? And your own organisation?
- Have the findings from the dialogue influenced your thinking about public engagement on shale gas/oil?
- How easy is it/will it to convert the findings/views from participants into your policy work?
- [DECC only] - How will the findings be circulated? And to who?
- [DECC only] - What are the plans for feeding back to the participants about the influence of their input?
- [DECC only] - What are DECC going to do next based on the results of the project?
- What have you personally learnt about using dialogue processes?
- What do you think has been most special and interesting about this dialogue project overall?

Wrap Up

Thank you for your time today and your contribution to this evaluation: we really appreciate your input. Before we close, is there anything we haven't covered so far that you think it is important for DECC and its partners to understand about the dialogue?

