

# ***Ways to Well-being* public dialogue**

## **Evaluation report**

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Public engagement  
with science and  
engineering

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# Summary

## ***Introduction***

In 2008 the Government Office for Science published a review of scientific research on the causes and consequences of mental capital and well-being. As part of this project, the new economics foundation (nef) was commissioned to develop *Five Ways to Well-being*, a set of simple, evidence-based public messages about the kinds of activities that promote positive mental health and well-being. The *Five Ways* are: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give.

This next phase of the same programme took place around the time the Coalition Government launched their new Mental Health Strategy, which highlights the importance of promoting positive mental health and well-being as well as improving access to mental health services.

The *Ways to Well-being* project included the following two questions:

1. To what extent do people feel able to make the kinds of discretionary changes in their lives that the scientific evidence – distilled in the *Five Ways to Well-being* – suggests would lead to increased subjective well-being or that they believe would enhance their well-being?
2. What are any structural or systemic barriers that prevent people engaging in activities that would improve their well-being (including the *Five Ways* but also others they identify as pertinent to them)?

Supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' Sciencewise-ERC programme, the Department of Health (DH) commissioned the new economics foundation (nef) to conduct this work and nef contracted the delivery of the dialogue to Corr-Willbourn. It consisted of:

- Twelve single-gender group discussions around 90 minutes long in six locations (London, Guildford, Exeter, Hartlepool, Altrincham, Coventry);
- A week-long self-guided deliberation in participants' own environments;
- Six mixed-gender workshops around 3 hours long in the same six locations, with the same 96 participants.
- Eight depth interviews with individuals with low levels of well-being.

## ***The evaluation***

Laura Grant Associates was commissioned to provide an independent assessment of the *Ways to Well-being* project's overall credibility, effectiveness and success against its objectives, covering both the project's processes and its outcomes (including an assessment of impacts). The evaluation also collected evidence of good practice and lessons to support future Sciencewise-ERC work.

The evaluation methodology comprised:

1. Structured observation, informal interviews and exit questionnaires at the workshops (covering three of the six locations, n=46 for questionnaire sample)
2. Telephone interviews with public participants (n=10) and stakeholders (n=6)
3. Cost / benefit analysis (through interviews and face-to-face meeting with nef)
4. Attendance at DH dissemination meeting.

The dialogue was already underway when the evaluation was commissioned, which meant that it was not possible for evaluators to attend all of the public workshops. This means that our samples are skewed towards older participants who were recruited for two of the three workshops we did observe.

### **Findings: Dialogue delivery**

*It was like everybody got a chance to speak, which was really good. And you could put your own point across and make other people think, oh yeah, that's a good point, that. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

All of the groups we observed felt conversational and engaging. The approach was participant-led and discussions appeared to be frank and open. These observations were reinforced by feedback from participants, who agreed that 'everyone had a fair chance to give their opinion'. In the longer sessions, a range of techniques was used (paired and group discussion, writing tasks, kinaesthetic activities) to maintain the groups' energy and offer different ways for participants to engage with the questions. There were many research questions to work through and some of the later activities were slightly rushed in the longer workshops. Stakeholders were also pleased with the way that the contractors had delivered the workshops.

### **Findings: Satisfaction**

*What we were trying to do in these exercises is not find out what people thought before the exercise particularly but to engage them in the process of thinking about these issues. (Stakeholder 4)*

Overall there was a high level of satisfaction with the dialogue. In the questionnaires, most public participants (84%) agreed or agreed strongly that the dialogue was a worthwhile experience. They described the process as interesting, thought-provoking, educational/informative and enjoyable. The opportunity to hear others' views and offer their own was particularly valued by participants.

The main criticism of the process from public participants was a lack of clarity over the purpose of the workshops. This was especially the case in one of the locations we visited where some participants were quite frustrated. Stakeholders explained that they had been vague about this on purpose in order that discussions were framed by participants rather than the workshop leaders.

From stakeholders' perspectives, there was a high level of satisfaction with the dialogue outcomes; they felt the dialogue had been robust and credible. However, the governance of the project had not run smoothly. There were two reasons for this: funding cuts meant that DH was going through considerable changes, and a lack of clarity at the start of the project meant there was no clear ownership. By the time of writing this report it was felt that these issues had largely been resolved, and that they did not affect the quality of the dialogue itself.

## **Findings: Impacts**

*I've actually increased my exercise, and I've signed up to do a few more sports activities and trying to get back into my running. (Male, 45-54, Hartlepool)*

The impact of the dialogue on public participants varied. Some were already engaged in *Five Ways* activities, but for those that were not the process of listening and being listened to seemed to have empowered some to make changes in their own lives based on the *Five Ways*. Others reported a greater resolve to continue the activities they were doing already.

## **Findings: Cost-benefit analysis**

*I hope we may have prevented government spending vast amounts of money on advertising campaigns which we've demonstrated pretty conclusively would not work. (Stakeholder 6)*

Most public participants and stakeholders felt that the dialogue had been 'money well spent', although the ultimate value of the dialogue was strongly contingent on who listened to public views. Stakeholders identified a range of potential audiences for the dialogue findings and had commenced a targeted dissemination plan. A strong impact of the dialogue was seen to be cautioning against spending public money on a messaging campaign around well-being that was likely to be ineffective. As well as being a large potential cost saving, this recommendation was suggested and discussed at the stakeholder meeting we observed, where there was also considerable interest in the dialogue from various parts of DH.

## **Learning points**

We have identified three key learning points from this dialogue:

- One of the main lessons emerging from the project is the importance of clear **oversight and governance**. That is, all parties involved need to be clear from the outset about their roles, who is 'in charge' and especially expectations of time commitments involved.
- Compared to other Sciencewise-ERC projects, this was a **dialogue on an established area of science**. Scientific experts were not involved in the workshops and the dialogue was able to be very participant-led. These aspects worked well during the workshops and useful findings were gained. Another interesting difference was in the nature of the potential policy impacts, which could affect a range of departments as well as the sponsoring department.
- There is an interesting **tailored dissemination plan**, developed in part because the dialogue was commissioned too late to inform the Mental Health Strategy. Working with various groups across government to co-develop recommendations has strong potential for influence.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In 2008 the Government Office for Science published a review of scientific research on the causes and consequences of mental capital and well-being<sup>1</sup> (MCW) and explored the challenges for government in supporting the mental well-being of the population in the future<sup>2</sup>. As part of this project, the new economics foundation (nef) was commissioned by the Government Office for Science to draw on the findings of the MCW work to develop *Five Ways to Well-being*, a set of simple, evidence-based public messages about the kinds of activities that promote positive mental health and well-being. The *Five Ways* are: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give.

While the *Five Ways to Well-being* messages were generally well-received, a number of concerns about the extent to which the messages could be taken on board by members of the public had emerged since its launch. One of the strongest concerns was that the pressures of daily life present significant barriers to participation in activities that promote well-being. This led to concerns about the potential effectiveness of a straightforward public education or marketing campaign (similar to those used in other areas of public health).

The Coalition Government launched a new Mental Health Strategy<sup>3</sup> in February 2011, which highlighted the importance of promoting positive mental health and well-being as well as improving access to mental health services. The *Ways to Well-being* project (a term used throughout this report to include the subcontracted dialogue and nef's corresponding work with relevant stakeholders) can be seen as an extension of nef's previous work with the *Five Ways*: to explore public attitudes and concerns around the issue at a similar time to the launch of the new strategy.

## 1.2 The Ways to Well-being project

The *Ways to Well-being* dialogue included the following two key questions:

1. To what extent do people feel able to make the kinds of discretionary changes in their lives that the scientific evidence – distilled in the *Five Ways to Well-being* – suggests would lead to increased subjective well-being or that they believe would enhance their well-being?
2. What are any structural or systemic barriers that prevent people engaging in activities that would improve their well-being (including the *Five Ways* but also others they identify as pertinent to them)?

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<sup>1</sup> Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project (2008) Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project: Final Project Report (London: The Government Office for Science).

<sup>2</sup> Aged J, Marks N, Cordon C and Thompson S (2008) *Five Ways to Well-being*: The evidence (London: nef).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health (2011) No Health without mental health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages; launched 2 February 2011

In addition the process aimed to explore ideas about how the evidence from MCW might encourage public participation in Big Society initiatives that would increase personal and communal well-being.

The objectives of the *Ways to Well-being* project as a whole are:

- to assist Department of Health policy makers in developing key policy around mental health and well-being
- to increase understanding of how to implement evidence-based mental health and well-being initiatives, including by providing insights into public attitudes to mental health and well-being and enhanced understanding of systemic barriers to its improvement
- to increase understanding of the type of messaging that is most likely to be effective from a cross-section of those at whom such messaging will be aimed
- to develop examples of possible health and well-being messages created by potential recipients
- to develop understanding of how well-being messages and initiatives might be tailored to encourage Big Society ideas and proposals that will enhance individual and communal well-being
- to create personal benefits for the members of the public participating in the dialogue process.

The Centre for Well-being at the new economics foundation (nef) was commissioned to oversee the project by the Department of Health (DH), with support provided by the Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre (ERC), a programme of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills<sup>4</sup>. The public dialogue aimed to explore the extent to which people felt able to make the changes suggested in *Five Ways to Well-being* and what barriers prevent them doing so. nef subcontracted the delivery of the dialogue to Corr Willbourn.

### **1.3 The dialogue**

The dialogue had three stages:

- Twelve single-gender group discussions around 90 minutes long in six locations across England (London, Guildford, Exeter, Hartlepool, Altrincham, Coventry);
- A week-long self-guided deliberation in participants' own environments captured in diaries;
- Six mixed-gender workshops around 3 hours long in the same six locations, with the same 96 participants).

In addition, the contractor conducted eight depth interviews with individuals with low levels of well-being.

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<sup>4</sup> The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre (ERC) funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), helps policy makers to understand and use public dialogue to inspire, inform and improve policy decisions around science and technology. It consists of a comprehensive online resource of information, advice and guidance together with a wide range of support services aimed at policy makers and all the different stakeholders involved in science and technology policy making, including the public. The Sciencewise- ERC also provides co-funding to Government departments and agencies to develop and commission public dialogue activities. [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

The **single-gender group discussions** lasted just under 90 minutes. Up to eight members of the public participated in each, and they took the form of a focus group. Following initial introductions, the groups discussed how they are finding life at the moment. This was left very open, and later these ideas were used by facilitators to explore the *Five Ways* (again participants were asked to suggest first, then prompted with the *Five Ways* later). The purpose of the workshops and the fact that they had been commissioned by nef to link in with DH was introduced about halfway through the session in London, but the commissioners were not mentioned in the other workshops we observed.

At the end of the session, participants were introduced to the **diaries** that would help them capture their thoughts and ideas in the self-guided deliberation. These contained details of the scientific evidence behind each of the *Five Ways* as well as references and links to further reading.

The **mixed-gender workshops** were three hours in length with a break for refreshments at the mid-point. They brought together the participants from the two single-gendered discussion groups, so in total up to 16 participants were involved in each. The workshops involved a larger range of different activities than their briefer precursors; starting with paired discussions then group feedback about the self-guided deliberation followed by whole group discussion, then moving on to 'line-up' activities where participants moved to different parts of the room based on their opinions. After the break, whole group discussions, spatial mapping activities (where participants stand near cards stating ideas they feel are important) and small group work with ideas captured in writing were employed.

Unusually for Sciencewise-ERC dialogues, no experts were involved as participants in the workshops, but representatives from nef and DH attended to observe some of the sessions. The scientific material from the MCW report and the *Five Ways* was provided in the participants' diaries, along with links to further information.

It is important to note that while in this report we refer to the *Five Ways*, this branding was not used with dialogue participants. The *Five Ways* were simply described as activities that could help people towards well-being.



## 2 The evaluation

### 2.1 *Evaluation objectives*

The three objectives of the evaluation are:

- to provide an independent assessment of the *Ways to Well-being* project's overall credibility, effectiveness and success against its objectives, covering both the project's processes and its outcomes (including an assessment of impacts);
- to gather and present objective and robust evidence of the activities, achievements and impacts of the overall project to support Sciencewise-ERC work in increasing understanding and awareness of the value of public dialogue;
- to identify lessons from practice to support Sciencewise-ERC work in capacity building across Government, and the development of good practice in public dialogue.

We used the following questions to guide the evaluation:

1. Has the dialogue met its objectives?
2. Has the dialogue met standards of good practice (Sciencewise-ERC principles)?
3. Have those involved been satisfied with the dialogue (value to them)?
4. Were there any particular challenges related to the topic of the dialogue (e.g. reticence to discuss mental health) and how were these overcome?
5. How successful has the governance of the project been, including the role of advisory panels, stakeholder groups and the Sciencewise-ERC support role?
6. What difference/impact has the dialogue made?
7. What was the balance overall of the costs and benefits of the dialogue?
8. What are the lessons for the future (what worked well and less well, and more widely)?
9. What insights were gained about how an engagement project on established (as opposed to emerging) science can feed into policy?

### 2.2 *Evaluation framework*

We used the Sciencewise-ERC principles for effective dialogue<sup>5</sup> as a framework of success criteria to evaluate the process against. In summary, the principles are that:

- The conditions leading to the dialogue process are conducive to the best outcomes (Context)
- The range of issues and policy opinions covered in the dialogue reflects the participants' interests (Scope)
- The dialogue process itself represents best practice in design and execution (Delivery)
- The outputs of dialogue can deliver the desired outcomes (Impact)
- The process is shown to be robust and contributes to learning (Evaluation)

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/TrackedDocuments/Guiding-Principles/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/TrackedDocuments/Guiding-Principles/Sciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf)

## **2.3 Methodology**

The evaluation methodology comprised:

1. Structured observation, informal interviews and exit questionnaires at the workshops (covering three of the six locations, n=46 for questionnaire sample)
2. Telephone interviews with public participants (n=10) and stakeholders (n=6, NB two of these were face-to-face interviews)
3. Cost / benefit analysis (through interviews and face-to-face meeting with nef)
4. Attendance at the meeting where results were discussed with DH and other stakeholders.

The dialogue was already underway when the evaluation was commissioned, which meant that it was not possible for evaluators to attend all of the public workshops.

### **Evaluation at the workshops**

Evaluators observed the following sessions:

- 4 single gender discussion groups (2 in London and 2 in Hartlepool) on 22 February
- 1 workshop (Guildford) on 23 February
- 1 workshop (London) on 28 February
- 1 workshop (Hartlepool) on 1 March

Observations were written up based on a series of prompts (see Appendix 2). These observations were augmented by feedback conducted through brief 'snapshot interviews'<sup>6</sup> with participants to check assumptions and gather informal verbal feedback.

At the end of the three longer workshop sessions, participants were invited to complete questionnaires that asked them to reflect on the initial discussion groups, the self-guided deliberation and the second-stage workshops. This technique had the benefit of allowing participants to give their views individually, and can be useful to triangulate with the views expressed in the group discussions and snapshot interviews. In designing the questionnaire we were mindful that some participants had low levels of literacy. For this reason two versions were created, a longer and a shorter version. In the group where literacy was likely to make the questionnaire inaccessible for some, we explained that participants could offer feedback via a telephone interview instead, and could simply complete the parts of the questionnaire that seemed relevant to them. A copy of the longer questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Due to the evaluation being commissioned after the first workshops had run, it was not possible for all participants to complete questionnaires. We will therefore rely on the sample from the events we attended as detailed earlier. Because of the way the workshops were organised this means that older people are over-represented in

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<sup>6</sup> DeWitt, J. (2009) *Snapshot Interviews* ECSITE conference poster

the sample of workshops that were observed and from which interviews and questionnaire responses were collected.

### **Telephone interviews**

To build on the findings from the questionnaires (and having sought consent for participation through the questionnaires) we conducted ten semi-structured telephone interviews with public participants, each lasting around 30 minutes. The breakdown of public interviewees was as follows:

- Four from the Hartlepool workshop;
- Three from the London workshop;
- Three from the Guildford workshop.

Public interviewees were selected to include a diverse mix of experiences with the workshops, locations, backgrounds, interests and our perceptions of their levels of engagement with the process. We also conducted interviews with 6 stakeholders suggested to us by nef. The initial list of stakeholders had a range of levels of involvement in the process. Two felt that their involvement had been too limited to offer useful comments, and declined the interviews. Two stakeholders were interviewed face-to-face, the others over the telephone.

### **Cost benefit analysis**

Conducting a basic cost-benefit analysis is a strong recommendation in Sciencewise-funded dialogues. Public and stakeholder interviewees were asked a series of questions about costs and benefits and these ideas were discussed in a meeting with nef.

### 3 Findings: Dialogue delivery

The findings in this section are drawn from our observations and snapshot interviews at four of the twelve single-gendered group discussions and three of the six mixed-gender workshops. We have also included participant feedback from questionnaires and interviews, and the feedback from stakeholder interviews where appropriate.

#### 3.1 *Public motivations and pre-existing attitudes*

Motivations for participating in the dialogue were explored during interviews with public participants. Because the purpose of the workshops was not explained to the participants in advance (as will be described later, this was an intentional decision on the part of the workshop leaders) participants were not motivated to participate for reasons connected to the topic of the dialogue. A few had thought it would be interesting to participate in some kind of market research or discussion and one individual noted that he had the impression that it concerned a non-profit organisation, which increased the appeal of participation for him. Three other participants had been given the impression that the discussion or research had something to do with health, which they thought sounded interesting.

In the follow-up interviews, public participants were also asked about their interest in science. Although it could not be considered as part of their motivation for participating (since they were uninformed about the purpose of the workshops), seven of the ten interviewees claimed that they were interested in science generally (two were not asked). In addition, three of the participants (all male) had been trained or worked in engineering or science.

*I'm quite interested in it, yes. I loved it at school, it was one of my favourite lessons at school, science. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

#### 3.2 *Observations*

##### **Single-gender group discussions**

The first parts of these discussions were led by participants (in response to open questions from facilitators such as 'how's life?') so these varied quite widely. In the four groups we observed, the female groups tended to focus their discussions on their children and families, while the male groups were more likely to talk about politics.

All of the groups felt very conversational rather than being as structured as a focus group. There were many interactions between participants as well as between participants and facilitators. In some groups these types of interactions dominated and facilitators had to work harder to ensure all views were aired. No ground rules were discussed at the start – these may have given the facilitators an easier time, but could well have been at the expense of the informal atmosphere that was created during the groups.

The facilitators used a number of techniques which were successful in eliciting a range of views. These included going around the group responding to questions, following up on particular words, seeing if others agree (especially those that had not contributed recently). Some groups appeared to achieve a very high level of openness very quickly, with participants speaking frankly about their experiences with depression or difficult periods in their lives. Participants also seemed to enjoy themselves and laughed quite a lot, in some cases the humour was an effective way to defuse the tension from talking about challenging topics. Facilitators frequently reflected participants' ideas back to check and/or move discussion on. Techniques such as asking for a show of hands or asking for ratings out of ten were quick ways to gain some feedback from everyone in the group and were often used to bring one part of a discussion to a close, ask participants to generalise and then explore reasons behind the ratings or agreement.

It is a small point, but in London the recruiter greeted the participants in the bar and bought them all a drink, encouraging them to meet each other and chat before going into the session. This acted as an early ice breaker and probably helped the group build trust more quickly given the session was only 90 minutes. While this was not observed directly in the other locations, a similar approach appeared to have been taken as all groups were observed entering the sessions laughing and chatting, rather than in some research or dialogue exercises where participants come in alone and quietly take their seats. In addition, the facilitators had made a conscious decision to avoid, where possible, using terms such as 'mental health' or 'depression' that could be seen as having stigma attached.

Altogether, we feel that the 'light-touch' facilitation style that was observed at the workshops meant that discussions were participant-led, diverse and engaging. While this meant that identical questions were not covered in all groups, they did all cover the main points that they set out to. This suggests that the amount of content was appropriate for the workshops we observed.

Some of the groups (especially the males) were more likely to be sceptical about the purpose of the study or the extent to which government or others would take note of the findings. One group also confused nef with the NHS. However they did seem to be comfortable with the *Five Ways to Well-being*, although none of the groups suggested the activity about 'taking notice' spontaneously and some found the idea difficult to grasp.

### **Mixed-gender workshops**

These workshops were more varied with a wider mix of activities than the single-gender groups. Because of the size of the groups, there was naturally some waiting while the facilitators sought feedback from everyone after the paired discussions or during the line-ups. So in some ways they felt less conversational than the previous sessions and more workshop-like, although participants remained engaged and listened attentively throughout. In some workshops we observed more side conversations between participants than in the single gendered groups, and in others there were fewer of these. Trust appeared to be built very quickly among the

group, even though they had not all met previously. It did seem that seeing some familiar faces from the previous week helped with this.

Participants had engaged with the diaries to different degrees. Some had researched the references provided online or made an effort to speak with friends and family about the project, while others had only written a little and not spoken to anybody else. Participants were invited to discuss their responses to the exercise in pairs or threes before feeding back. In one group we observed the group of three respondents discussing how they had found the diaries difficult to understand, but following others' positive feedback they did not report this in the larger group discussion.

Joint facilitation was valuable and especially effective with the two facilitators that frequently worked together. They had an informal style, chipping in to remind each other what they had forgotten and the odd humorous comment. This seems minor but greatly contributed to an overall feeling of friendliness and informality. The pair of facilitators that collaborated less frequently appeared less at ease and when combined with a naturally less conversational group this meant that there was less energy at one of the three sessions we observed.

Again a range of facilitation techniques were used (e.g. picking up on participants' language, reflecting ('can I just check what you mean?'), show of hands etc.) and switching between the two facilitators provided useful transitions between the different types of activity and the different questions that participants were asked to consider. Evidence that this was successful was found in the variety of opinions expressed: there was rarely universal agreement, suggesting that the activities did elicit the range of views that participants held. As with all groups, some participants contributed more than others, but the range of techniques and activities meant that nobody was excluded; also, no individual dominated discussions.

In one of the workshops we observed, a couple of participants referred to the 'abstract' nature of the questions. The point of the exercise wasn't really evident to them, which they found frustrating. Across the groups, participants were not especially clear about the purpose of the exercise, but two of the groups we observed appeared concerned about this: 'why is someone spending money to get me to answer very abstract questions?' This did not appear to impede their interactions or what they had to say, but the workshops may have been a more pleasant experience for these participants if it had been clearer who was supporting/sponsoring the activities (who the 'client' was) and what the purpose of the research (or 'dialogue') was.

The line-up activities worked well to maintain the group's energy and enabled everyone to express a view. In some of the groups, there appeared to be a little confusion over the questions, with participants interpreting them in different ways – some talked directly about the evidence itself (e.g. that it all seemed to be in favour of the *Five Ways* and no dissenting viewpoints were provided) and others spoke about whether they agreed with the evidence (that the *Five Ways* could be helpful).

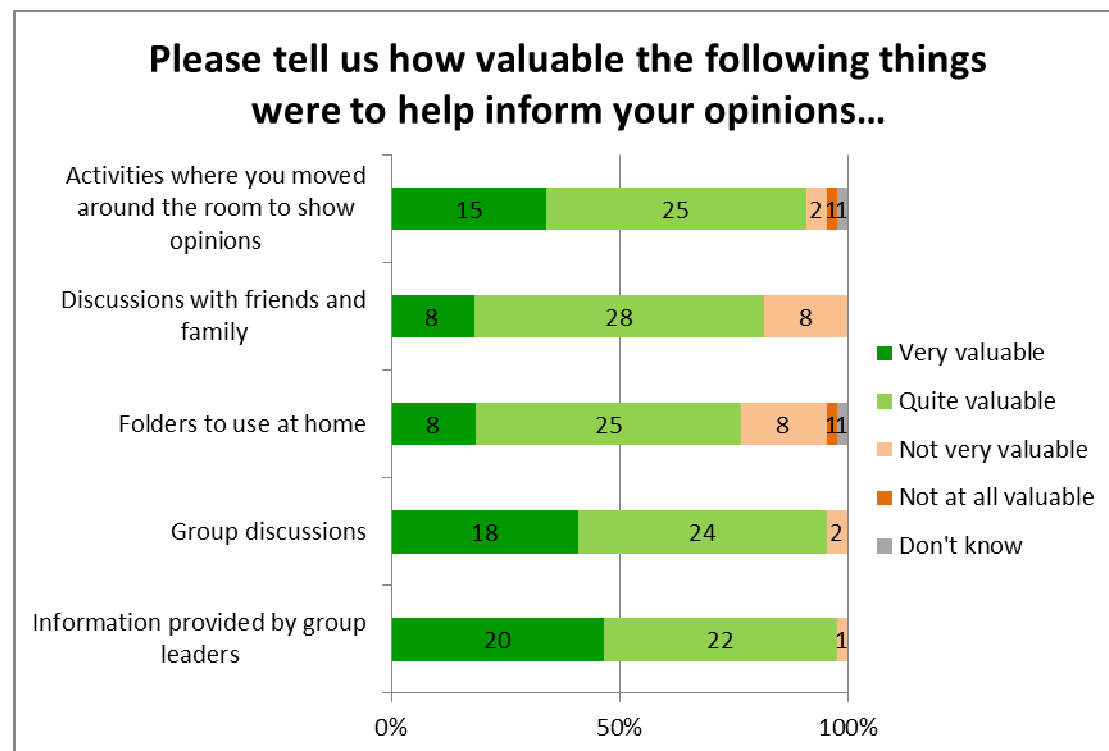
There was a strong feeling among participants that the *Five Ways* were ‘common sense’. These parts of the workshop were punctuated by participants speaking among themselves with others in physical proximity, laughter, speaking up/out to the group, etc.

All the sessions finished on time, but in some the last activities were somewhat rushed – considering the messaging for the *Five Ways*, and spatial mapping of words related to well-being. This suggests (and we feel the facilitators would agree) that there was a significant amount of material to cover in the workshops given the size of the groups. While all the tasks were completed, especially near the end of the sessions there was a sense at times of needing to move on to the next thing, rather than the more participant-led discussions that were had earlier in the sessions or in the single-gender groups.

All of the participants we spoke to informally during the workshops were very positive about the process, describing it as ‘interesting’ and ‘thought-provoking’. During the discussions, participants were asked whether they had attempted anything from the *Five Ways* over the week between workshops. A few participants (two or three) from each session said they had. These ideas were explored in greater detail in our questionnaire and interview work, which is presented in the next sections.

### 3.3 Public participants’ feedback

Public participants’ feedback was gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire asked how valuable the various activities were to inform participants’ opinions:



The chart clearly shows that most participants found most of the activities valuable. A minority of respondents did not find the diaries and discussions outside the workshops as valuable as the activities within the workshops. Even so, over three quarters felt that all aspects were at least 'quite valuable'.

With regard to the diaries, interviewees were more neutral or muted in their responses. That is, they generally had less to say and some acknowledged that they had not been able to spend as much time exploring them as they would have liked. At the same time, most felt that the level of information in the diaries was appropriate, although the diaries did not seem particularly memorable for most and no one named the diaries as being the most interesting aspect of the experience.

*To be very honest with you there was such a short gap between the first and second section, I did, I put some things inside the wallet but I wouldn't say I was elaborating too much about it, I just put some ideas, sketches or something but not making a very big deal. (Male, 65+, London)*

One of the London participants (Female, 65+) also reported that she and some of the others in her group had been somewhat confused by the instructions for the diary and they were not sure that they had responded to it correctly.

*I knew the sort of outline of it, but once I got there and they explained it, it was a lot easier. (Female, 65+, London)*

However, there was one participant who had been inspired to spend an evening looking up information and studies from the diary, and had continued to do so after the workshops had ended. This participant also noted, though, that others had not had enough time to look things up from the diaries.

*One lady works three jobs, she was telling me. So sometimes you just don't have the time to do it. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

A few participants also mentioned discussing the topics from the diaries with family or work colleagues during the week between the workshops. One even reported talking with her local librarian:

*I spoke to a lady in the library ... and she said it sounded very interesting and I was asking her a few questions. I don't know, I've never spoken to her before but she's always said if you want to come in and have a chat anytime and I just thought well I'd go over and have a chat with her and see what it was like. And she was quite interested in the things that were down on that piece of paper. (Female, 65+, London)*

### **Information provided**

The questionnaire respondents mostly accepted that they understood the information provided (91% agreed or agreed strongly) and most rejected the idea that there was too much information provided (61% disagreed or disagreed strongly). The 20% that felt there was too much information provided were spread across the three workshops, so this appears to be an individual response rather than one linked to a particular group surveyed.



For the most part, the information covered in the workshops was familiar in some ways to participants or resonated with their own experiences. That is, although the term 'well-being' (in the way it was defined in the workshops) was generally new, there was a general sense expressed by several participants that much of the information was 'common sense' or that the findings about the five activities (or at least some of them, such as the importance of being physically active or maintaining relationships) reinforced or linked with their own experiences.

*Well, the whole concept of well-being [was new to me] I'd never thought of it in that way before. Well-being to me was just being fit and healthy. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

Other respondents considered the information to be relatively new, as it was something they had not reflected on much previously.

*Yeah, it was new to me and it wasn't really very familiar because it's not something I've thought actively about. (Male, 55-64, Guildford).*

Additionally, even those who felt that the information was not particularly new valued the opportunity provided by the experience to reflect on the topic of well-being and others appreciated that it reinforced their existing activities and beliefs in this area. At the same time, it is interesting to note that some participants felt that the dialogue and the focus on the *Five Ways* 'missed a trick' when it came to well-being.

*That was a very nebulous topic and I'm not – well, I'm not sure all the scientific evidence really got to grips with what's truly the thing about well-being. (Male, 55-64, Guildford).*

This particular participant felt that the root causes supporting well-being would be having a sense of purpose – in particular, that provided by employment, as well as having a secure place to live. He felt strongly that until employment and housing issues were tackled, that a national sense of well-being would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

The inclusion of scientific research connected to well-being in the dialogue was discussed with stakeholders. They were not convinced that the scientific evidence (mostly included in the diary but also discussed in the mixed-gender workshops) really added to the dialogue – perhaps because participants perceived the topic as 'common sense'. On the other hand, one stakeholder noted that there was value in exploring how participants responded to the science behind the topic.

*So, in a sense, in terms of the overall objectives of the project it was a bit of an irrelevance. But it might not have been, so it was worth investigating. (Stakeholder 4)*

## Facilitation

In the questionnaire, all but one of the respondents (98%) agreed or agreed strongly that 'everyone had a fair chance to give their opinion'. Interviewees also felt that the facilitators had done a good job of eliciting different views and allowing for a range of perspectives to be expressed.

*It was like everybody got a chance to speak, which was really good. And you could put your own point across and make other people think, oh yeah, that's a good point, that. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

*Well the atmosphere itself, it was a very kind of relaxed atmosphere and the two people who were actually leading us they were very flexible so I think there was no problem, it wasn't regimental, everyone put their hands up and expressed their opinion. (Male, 65+, London)*

A small subset of interviewees felt that not everyone did have a fair chance to put forth their opinion. One participant mentioned that this was due to not having sufficient time, particularly given the size and complexity of the topic. Another felt that people who were more vocal had dominated the group. This participant was generally reluctant to speak in groups, which may have contributed to her impressions.

*I mean I'm not very vocal really and you know, for me to say something in front of a group like that is a bit alien to me. . . . You always get a variety of people don't you, some of whom are a lot more opinionated than others and they tend to rule the day, the actual activity. (Female, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

Nevertheless, she did feel that the facilitators had done a good job eliciting different views and allowing participants to speak. She suggested giving participants the opportunity to write down their opinions, or perhaps share them online, where they could later be responded to (either online or in person).

Given that participants generally felt that a diversity of opinions had been expressed, that the facilitators had done a good job of encouraging this expression and the sentiment among most (if not all) that participants had had a fair opportunity to make their voices heard, it would seem that the outcomes of the dialogue can be trusted as a faithful reflection of participants' views.

## Stakeholders' views on dialogue delivery

Stakeholders uniformly spoke in positive terms about the workshops and their observations were in alignment with our own observations about the process. Not all of the stakeholders had been able to attend a workshop, so some necessarily had more to say about their delivery than others.

Stakeholders felt the workshops had been well delivered:

*I was very impressed by the way that [the researchers] ran them, I thought they did it beautifully. Not a particularly easy subject and I was impressed really. (Stakeholder 6)*

*[A colleague who had attended a workshop] did feed back in some detail about how that went. And I must admit he was very impressed by the professionalism of the work and how engaged people were. (Stakeholder 1)*

Those involved with the workshops (facilitators, as well as stakeholders who attended) spoke positively about the diversity of opinions that the dialogue had elicited. Some also remarked on the openness of participants, suggesting that the process must have made them feel comfortable and at ease.

*I thought the process seemed to work pretty well; people were actually more forthcoming than I expected. (Stakeholder 5)*

It also seems that the structure of the dialogue being spread over two days supported this openness because at least some of the participants had met prior to the second workshop.

*The dynamic of people having met each other once was really quite important. (Stakeholder 5)*

On the other hand, it is also likely that the 'common sense-ness' of the messages may have also supported this openness.

The facilitator felt that perhaps the diary could have been piloted, as it contained quite challenging material – particularly in the data about meditation and mindfulness. However, this was not a major concern and did not seem to be particularly problematic in the dialogue itself.

In addition, there was a sense among a couple of stakeholders that the final activity, around how well-being might be messaged, worked less well than other activities (both in terms of its interest to participants and the level of insight it provided).

Although there was a general sense that the sample size was adequate, one stakeholder did feel that perhaps they could have included more people or a wider range of people if they had had more money. Had there been more time, more information might have also been gained by using a larger number of sessions, with more reading and thinking in between the workshops.



Others simply appreciated the opportunity for discussion and reflection. For some, this discussion was also most useful in helping them think about and put across their views.

*It's not very often you get to communicate with people, do you know what I mean, in that sort of model. Yeah, you can have banal conversations with people but this was proper talking and proper discussions. That's why I liked it. (Male, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

A few felt that there could have been (and perhaps should have been) a broader range of individuals included in the groups. However, most who expressed such opinions were in Guildford, where participants felt that most in the group were 'reasonably well off and comfortable'; this perspective did not seem to be shared by participants in London and Hartlepool.

*We were all of similar age and similar upbringing and that sort of thing. So of course you got a lot of very similar thoughts. It would have been perhaps nice to have a little bit of controversy here and there. . . . It might have been more stimulating – it might have evoked some better reactions and better arguments. (Female, 55-64, Guildford)*

Relatedly, participants seemed to enjoy the second evening more than the first and felt that the activities were interesting and had helped elicit the diversity of viewpoints. A few participants explicitly expressed the opinion that the second workshop had really provided an opportunity to hear others' perspectives.

*I preferred it when the men were there, than when it was just the girls. It was just a broader range of discussion I think. (Female, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

At the same time many also felt that having smaller groups for the first evening made expressing their views on the second night easier, as at least some of the group were familiar by then. Only one interviewee (Female, 55-64, London) reported preferring the first evening.

All of the interviewees expressed satisfaction with the overall experience of participating in the workshops and all agreed that they would participate again if given the opportunity.

*It was just really, really good. It beats sitting in and watching mind-numbing TV. (Male, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

*I like meeting people and I like sitting and listening. I thought it was good – what can I say? Not good entertainment but – it was just good to learn something rather than just sitting and reading a paper or reading a book. It was nice to be involved in something. (Female, 65+, London)*

Most participants did not really have any recommendations for improvement. The recommendations of those who did followed from their experience of the workshops. That is, some felt that more time would have been helpful to explore the topic in sufficient depth.

*I just wish it had been longer and we'd discussed more things, because everybody was trying to cram everything in at the same time and it got a bit overwhelming. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

## **4.2 Purpose of workshops**

Interestingly, most of the questionnaire respondents (77%) agreed that they understood the purpose of the workshops. The four (9%) that disagreed with this statement were all at the Guildford workshop, where the greatest frustration about the purpose of the exercise was observed. We found this high level of agreement surprising, since several participants had approached us to ask about the purpose of the workshops while we were observing. With questionnaires, sometimes participants can be influenced to tick what they feel is the 'right' answer if they have had a positive experience overall, and this may have been the case here.

The interviews were an opportunity to explore this issue in greater depth. It became clear that some participants had misconceptions about the purpose of the workshops. This may have meant that, in the questionnaires, they reported understanding the purpose.

*I was at the beginning very sceptical because I thought oh it's another research on behalf of a company and I'm reluctant to take part if it's too much interfering into people's living ... So but when I heard that it's actually on behalf of the National Health Service I said well that's fine, that makes sense (Male, 65+, London)*

Other interviewees were not clear about the purpose of the dialogue. Although they enjoyed participating and found it interesting, some expressed a degree of frustration over not being told the focus of the workshops. This lack of clarity is reflected to some extent in the feedback forms and was expressed quite strongly by a number of those who were interviewed.

*When we started off the first session we had absolutely no idea where this was going, which I'm not sure was the right approach actually, because we really weren't sure what this was all about (Male, 65+, Guildford).*

*I don't know, was it a government survey or I don't know. (Female, 55-64, London)*

Similar frustration was also apparent during the workshops (especially in Guildford) when a number of participants asked questions about their purpose – about who was sponsoring them, what the client was trying to find out, how the information would be used and so forth. Some even went so far as to ask 'Why are we here?' Other interviewees did surmise the purpose of the workshops – or felt that they had, and frequently connected it with Cameron's 'Big Society'.

*I personally think it was something to do with the Big Society. (Male, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

Still others had a more benign and straightforward view of the purpose of the dialogue, believing that it was simply to find out more about people's perspectives on well-being.

*Well in my opinion the whole purpose was to identify if the five items actually were the correct ones and the belief was going forward if there was any additions or changes to them to create the well-being – how satisfied we were. (Male, 45-54, Hartlepool)*

Another respondent (Female, 65+, London) said she thought the purpose was simply about the well-being topic ('about letting people know what was going on and trying to pass on information'), but remarked that she did not know what would be done with the information collected in the workshops. Along somewhat similar lines, a couple of other respondents seemed to believe that part of the purpose of the workshops was to serve as a benefit for the participants themselves.

*[The purpose of the workshops is] to encourage people to have a much more worthwhile and fulfilling life by following these ideas which actually work. And basically it's a blueprint for living if you like, and where it'll be more worthwhile for you and everybody. (Male, 65+, Guildford)*

The lack of clarity in public participants' perceptions of the dialogue purpose was discussed in the stakeholder interviews. The facilitator and nef explained their interest in keeping the focus of the workshops away from a discussion of 'mental health' and the desire to go beyond a simple test of perceptions of the term 'well-being'.

*You want to see the thinking happening in the room, so you don't want to give away too much before the start ... And a particular concern we had on the recruiting side was we wanted to stay away from anything that might sound like mental health. (Stakeholder 5)*

Because of this, the facilitators were intentionally vague with the public participants about the purpose of the workshops. Although this was an area of frustration for some public participants, the facilitator felt that the quality of the insights received justified this frustration.

*The penalties of framing the debate for them are that you then tend to get a slightly structured response and structured by our framing not by their world. And our job is to as much as possible get stuff that is spontaneous and comes from where they are and if that is a slight sense of confusion, that's fine. . . that's absolutely fine by me if they're a bit puzzled. Because what we wanted was what was made available by that. (Stakeholder 3)*

In addition, the facilitators had been careful to watch for any signs of distress, and would have addressed that had it occurred.

*Equally it's also our job to make sure that people aren't distressed ... I mean certainly there were people who were a bit puzzled for quite a large chunk of*



*various parts of it but I didn't think anyone was distressed so that's important (Stakeholder 3)*

Our feeling was that a clearer explanation of the purpose of the workshops for those that were concerned could have enabled them to focus more clearly on the issues under discussion. We do feel it would have been possible to balance this with the need to avoid bias, but it possibly would have needed a little more time to be adequately covered during the workshops. Despite this, there was a general sense that the dialogue process had been a positive experience for the public participants.

*There's a benefit of getting out of whatever it is you normally do on a Tuesday night, which is possibly watch too much television and those people who reported very high levels of well-being did appear to have time to reflect on and be grateful for their good fortune. (Stakeholder 3)*

### **4.3 Governance/Oversight Process**

This dialogue project was affected by a number of governance issues, many out of the control of the stakeholders, as will be described below. The complexity of the project – involving two government departments, other individuals affiliated with DH, nef, Sciencewise-ERC, and Corr Wilbourn – meant that good governance and communication were key to the smooth functioning of the project. However the number of different individuals and groups involved also meant that governance was particularly challenging.

#### **Timing**

Although from the perspective of the researchers, things had been 'cobbled together at the last minute', that way of working was not seen to be unusual and was not considered – by the researchers – to be particularly problematic. Moreover, once work started, the researchers felt that they had a very productive relationship, that the various individuals involved had worked together smoothly and that 'the client' had been very straightforward.

*Once we got to talk to them and meet the group it's clear everybody did want to know what they wanted to know and so we did know what we had to do and so we went off and did it as best we could. So turning it around actually from our point of view they were good clients to work for because they knew what they wanted and they agreed with each other. (Stakeholder 3)*

Other stakeholders also described working with the researchers as a positive experience.

*I think we've had a really good relationship with them. They've been very responsive to suggestions and tolerant of contractual issues that have not been of our making but have had impacts on them down the chain ... they were able to be flexible and willing to be flexible on the basis of sort of a trust relationship... (Stakeholder 5)*

The relationships between other groups, from a governance perspective, were more challenging. There were a number of delays in initiating the project, which was more



problematic for this project than perhaps it might be for other dialogues because there was an interest in having the dialogue completed prior to the launch of the new Mental Health Strategy. Additionally, there was a strong desire to have the research completed prior to the disbanding of the National Mental Health Development Unit (NMH DU). Unfortunately, delays to the project meant that this did not happen. Such delays were frustrating for the non-governmental stakeholders.

*The original project timetable was pretty tight but was tight precisely because we wanted to make sure that we hopefully had some input into the mental health strategy and then also would get things finished and done and dusted and out before NMH DU ceased to trade ... So we've bumped into exactly the problem we knew we'd have if we didn't get it done quickly enough which was that NMH DU and all the programme staff at DH just wouldn't be there anymore. So that's been a real frustration from our side and it wasn't that it wasn't predictable, it's just that it's come about and actually worse than we thought it ever would [be]. (Stakeholder 5)*

At the same time, it is important to note that all were very aware of the reasons for the delays (i.e. changes due to DH budget cuts and all the uncertainty surrounding those cuts) and agreed and acknowledged that they were due to circumstances beyond the control of the project and, indeed, government departments.

*I think this particular unit is taking a bigger cut and of course there's all this uncertainty about what's going on in the health service as well, which doesn't help either. So I think there's a just a general level of uncertainty that's perhaps higher than it would normally would be. (Stakeholder 4)*

That this was the case was also echoed by governmental stakeholders as well:

*These administrative and contractual issues are obviously a consequence of the considerable financial pressures that government and its departments are under and we're all working to new rules and regulations. (Stakeholder 2)*

Part of the difficulty in getting the project started also seems to have sprung from a misunderstanding on the part of officials at DH about the level of commitment needed.

*I thought basically that nef and Sciencewise had actually come up with a plan and that they just needed us as a sort of sleeping partner to get the funding from BIS. And that's where I started from, it was only when we started getting into the process that I realised that wasn't the case (Stakeholder 1)*

Indeed, this stakeholder was not certain they would have gone ahead with it, had they fully appreciated the commitment involved. This was not due to a lack of interest but a sheer lack of capacity, which, again, had been exacerbated by the redundancies in the wake of funding cuts.

In addition, the delays in getting the project off the ground and the issues involved in setting it up were not perceived in the same way by all stakeholders:

*The only complexity in this project was establishing the project within the structures and standing instruments and procurement arrangements of government. When all that was done the project I always thought was reasonably straightforward. (Stakeholder 2)*

Nevertheless, the timeline of the project was perceived as a problem by at least some of the stakeholders, as illustrated by, for example, the attendance at an early dissemination meeting – one stakeholder estimated that approximately half of the attendees no longer worked for the government at the time of interview six weeks later. This is discussed in greater depth in Section 5 on impacts of the dialogue.

## **Ownership**

Underpinning the concerns with the timing of the dialogue were issues around ownership. The uncertainty stemming from impending funding cuts led to a lack of strong ownership, at least at the beginning of the project, on the government side. From the perspective of non-governmental stakeholders, no one seemed to have overall responsibility for the project. This initial lack of ownership led to difficulties in getting oversight/steering/feedback from government, particularly in a timely fashion. Despite this frustration, there was also a sense that the situation was not due to a lack of interest on the part of DH, but rather was due to circumstances entirely beyond their control.

*I mean I think [DH] genuinely are very interested in the project but it's come about at a time when all this impending chaos was happening and obviously you have to feel for the people in the department who of course just lost their jobs. And I think because of all of those pressures coupled with a complex contractual arrangement where nobody felt a very strong sense of ownership, well we felt a sense of ownership of the project but actually contractually that's not right in a way. They should have done. (Stakeholder 5)*

There was also a sense that perhaps Sciencewise-ERC could have done more to 'push on' DH to be more engaged with or devote more time to the project.

*I would have thought they - Sciencewise - might want to initiate and keep some fairly regular dialogue with [DH]. (Stakeholder 5)*

Moreover, the contractual arrangements inherent in a Sciencewise-ERC project may have exacerbated the problem:

*It's such a funny contractual arrangement with the money and the grant giving ... it's hard to get a strong feeling for who's the real pay master ... who's actually kind of guiding, who should provide the oversight. (Stakeholder 5)*

From the perspective of the Department of Health, their lack of awareness of the expected scope of their participation had contributed to these problems – resulting in them being less likely to take ownership in the way that the other stakeholders would have preferred. This situation was exacerbated by the financial scope of the project.

*The amount – I mean I don't think it's a small amount of money, don't get me wrong, I think it's quite a big chunk of money but in the scheme of things for what we do it's quite small and for the amount of work and monitoring and support and involvement and so on, for £100,000 actually we need to do quite a lot of input ... for the Department of Health, we're dealing with many multiple millions most of the time, so I would want to delegate that to quite a junior person in a way. And of course they wanted us to be – BIS wanted us to take a very close interest. (Stakeholder 1)*

There seems to have been a mismatch between the scope of the project as perceived by DH (based on the budget of the project) and by other groups involved, who perceived it as a larger project that would require greater time commitment from DH. However, possibly due to having their interest sparked by the findings from the dialogue events (or possibly as the changes within the Department settle down) it appears that DH may increase their involvement as the project moves forward.

*I think like all of these projects there is an element of ownership that can sometimes waver and vary, depending on who's around. And I think initially the ownership within the DH required a little bit of support, but having got that support it's now much more clearly owned by someone, who now is ambitious for this work to make a difference across other directorates within DH. So I think what was slightly more problematic to begin with is now being solved. (Stakeholder 2)*

These sentiments were also echoed by other stakeholders, who felt that there was beginning to be a shift in the landscape and that DH was starting to become more involved and take more ownership of the project.

It is important to note that these issues were not seen to have affected the quality of the dialogue process for the public participants, but had made the process less easy for those involved.

*I don't think any of the kind of contractual delays in the project have made the quality of the engagement and dialogue and the potential that the project now has, none of that has been diminished by any of the administrative glitches. (Stakeholder 2)*

In addition there was the impact on timing discussed earlier. We discussed this in the meeting with nef near the end of the project, and an alternative view was put forward: that missing the timing for the Mental Health Strategy meant that there were now greater efforts going on to ensure the findings were influential in a range of government departments, rather than stating or feeling that the work had been influential because it was referenced in the strategy. In this way, it was felt to have moved 'from a text-based influence to something more real'.

## 4.4 Quality of the dialogue and its findings

### Dialogue design

Although different stakeholders articulated the purpose of the workshops differently they were generally in agreement about the objectives – particularly that they wanted members of the public to deliberate about (and reflect on) the topic of mental well-being. They hoped to gain insight into public attitudes towards mental health and well-being and into their perceptions of the barriers to engaging in activities that would promote mental well-being (the *Five Ways*). According to one of the stakeholders:

*What we were trying to do in these exercises is not find out what people thought before the exercise particularly but to engage them in the process of thinking about these issues. (Stakeholder 4)*

And he felt that the workshops had achieved that objective.

There was a high level of satisfaction with the delivery of the workshops, to the extent that almost none were able to suggest possible areas for improvement.

*I don't see any obvious ways where it could have been done better. (Stakeholder 5)*

### Dialogue findings

Very simply, the facilitators of the workshops were satisfied, in that they were able to collect the data they needed and because the clients (the other stakeholders) seemed satisfied with the result.

The other stakeholders reported satisfaction with the dialogue as well, in that they felt it had produced findings that were of value to them.

*One of the points about the dialogue process is you get the individual stories and the individual cases, which actually do make the point much better than summarised data. (Stakeholder 4)*

*I think they've nailed pretty well what we wanted them to nail ... it's produced the sort of results that we wanted. (Stakeholder 6)*

Other stakeholders remarked upon the high quality of the information that was produced.

*We've managed to get what is a pretty robust product in a very short time. (Stakeholder 1)*

There was also a sense in which the dialogue produced findings that may be useful in informing policy and in providing guidance for how to promote well-being more generally. A couple of stakeholders also remarked that the findings could be useful in informing policymakers and others about what *not* to do:

*In many ways it was as useful in discovering what is not useful for government and actually who should [be promoting mental well-being]. (Stakeholder 6)*

Some of the stakeholders also noted that some of the findings (e.g. about perceived barriers to engaging in the ways to well-being) were not surprising or were in agreement with previous work. However, this was not seen as problematic – indeed, in many ways it reinforced that the research was on track:

*There weren't lots of staggering surprises which always for me is in fact quite good, because it means that actually you're not wide of the mark. (Stakeholder 1)*

Another stakeholder expressed a view that while the findings were in some senses what was expected, they were also very interesting and went beyond what is already known.

*So I think like I always hoped for, we're going to get some sensible answers to simplistic messaging but we're also going to get a rich vein of further enquiry as to some of the more social and cultural areas that require more exploration. (Stakeholder 2)*

A couple of the stakeholders commented on the way in which the workshop discussions often 'scaled up into wider public policy kind of issues'. To some extent, that sort of discussion was not as valuable for stakeholders as discussion more focused on well-being. On the other hand, there was a sense that it is useful to be aware of the way in which participants reacted to or framed the topic of well-being.

*I suppose we saw the existence – the way we're coming to think about that in our analysis is that the availability of some kind of widely held narratives about what's wrong with society, the country, they're not literal barriers in the sense that the inequality may not literally be stopping someone doing whatever it is, but the fact that that narrative exists very strongly provides a ready reason for not making changes. (Stakeholder 5)*

Although this stakeholder then went on to question this idea, because evidence from the diaries supported the views aired in the workshops.

*One of the things that makes me think that wasn't just a sort of defensive reaction from people not wanting to talk about personal issues in the group was you get a lot of that in the [diaries]. (Stakeholder 5)*

This idea was revisited during the meeting with nef: for some of the participants there was a palpable sense of not being listened to, or not feeling empowered to do the activities suggested by the Five Ways. While this was not necessarily seen as surprising in itself, it is not prevalent in much of the existing literature on well-being.

One limitation of the process was the number of different research questions that were covered in the relatively short time, meaning the facilitators were unable to explore issues in as much depth as would have otherwise been possible. To some

extent it is also a limitation of the dialogic approach, where the facilitator must balance the research outputs with the need to keep participants engaged in the process. The dialogic approach was also seen as having a number of benefits, not least the opportunities for participants to listen and share views.

### **Credibility**

There was general agreement that the process was credible (and consequently the data produced and the findings). This confidence came from the variety of opinions that were expressed by participants in the workshops and diaries, the openness of the participants, and also from the range of public participants who attended.

*I actually was very impressed with the way in which they sampled people and got a very good cross section but also managed to get some of the people from the hard to reach groups that we were very keen to hear from. So in terms of getting the people to be at the events I always thought that was ambitious but I was extremely relieved and very impressed that they had managed to do that. (Stakeholder 2)*

One stakeholder was initially concerned with the small numbers of public participants (relative to larger, quantitative studies), but felt that the quality of the data alleviated his concern.

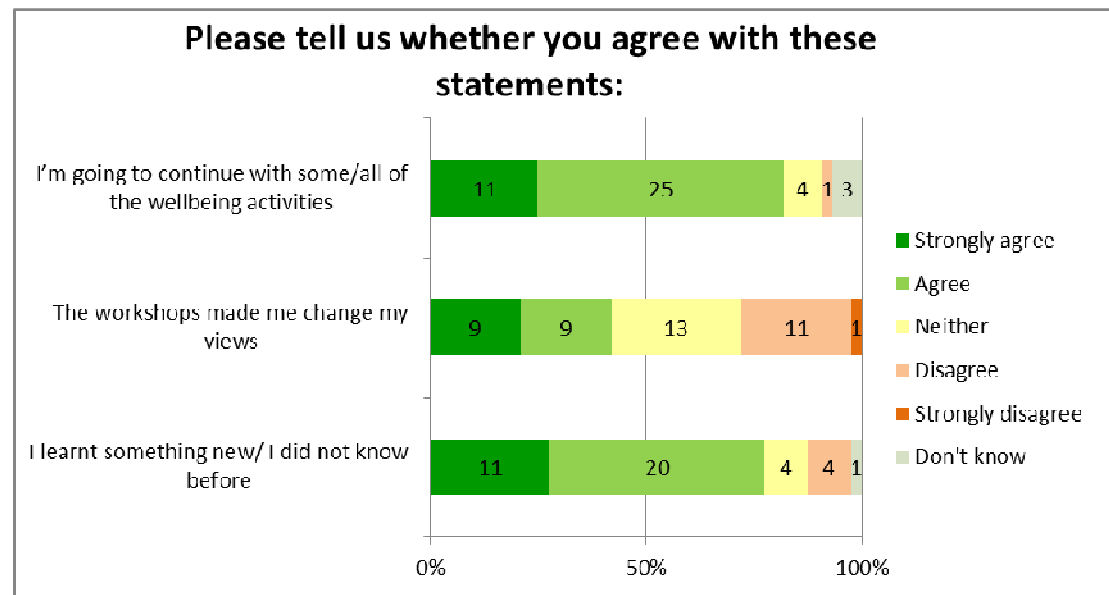
*You're getting quite high quality information out of it. (Stakeholder 1)*

Overall, the dialogue process struck stakeholders as generally 'robust' and 'rigorous', although a few felt that including further interviews and/or ethnographic work could have added extra depth to the findings, especially in getting beyond the initial barriers of 'time' and 'money' that participants raised.

## 5 Findings: Impacts

### 5.1 Impacts on public participants

Questionnaire respondents were asked to reflect on a number of statements about the dialogue's influence on them:



Most felt that they had learned something new. A large majority (82%) said they would continue with the activities described in the *Five Ways*, which is interesting because fewer than half agreed that the workshops had made them change their views. It is likely that this statement is too general to describe the types of influence that the workshops had on participants. The dialogue deliverers reported a 'research effect' whereby listening to participants and valuing their opinions empowered some to make changes that benefitted their well-being. We explored these impacts in greater depth during the interviews.

Those interviewed reported a variety of impacts connected to their participation, at a number of different levels. Some felt they had learned something new, or felt more confident, while others reported quite dramatic changes in behaviour.

*I learnt how to listen a little bit more (Male, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

*I've actually increased my exercise, and I've signed up to do a few more sports activities and trying to get back into my running. (Male, 45-54, Hartlepool)*

Indeed, for one participant in Hartlepool, the experience seemed to have been a life-changing event, resulting in new learning, changed behaviour (joining a gym, spending more time with her daughter) and sharing what she was learning with others.

*There were a lot of things that I hadn't thought about and it changed my perspective on things and broadened it ... It was the whole thinking about*



*things, rather than going out and doing [referring to mindfulness]. It was like the whole part of giving doesn't necessarily mean giving presents, it could be giving time rather than materialistic things. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

During the week in between the workshops, this participant had joined a gym, which she had continued to visit following the second workshop. She had also continued to find out more about well-being by looking up more research online during the weeks after the second workshop. She described being particularly fascinated by studies about 'older people – like how if they're more active they tend to stay – like their brains tend to be more active and healthier and things like that'. Consequently, she had engaged her family in discussion around the issue, which had resulted in her father and uncle taking the initiative to find out more about the topic on their own. She had also discussed the topic with her daughter who had, in turn, started chatting about it with her own friends. Finally, she had begun to set aside one night a week to spend exclusively with her daughter. Although she had considered doing things like joining a gym prior to the workshops, she felt that they had 'kind of kick started me into thinking, right, I am going to do this', and as a result, by the time of the interview she felt 'a lot happier in myself'. She even concluded the interview by claiming:

*I argue a lot less with people now and I was a very bad tempered bugger... I've got a happier household. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

Another workshop participant in Hartlepool, who had admitted struggling with depression, had also started volunteering at her local library. (She could not be interviewed, unfortunately.) A similar transformation was described by one of the participants in London, who had joined an IT group at her grandchildren's primary school and was planning to take a cookery course there as well. She had learned, in the course of the dialogue, that such opportunities existed and had gained the confidence to pursue them. During an informal interview at one of the workshops she described hearing about one of her fellow participants' activities as a big influencing factor in this.

*[What made the difference was...] I think listening to everybody else, that everybody had something to do, everybody did something. (Female, 55-64, London)*

Other participants reported that they had not made changes and did not really plan to do so. However, this lack of change was often due to their ongoing engagement with the five activities discussed in the workshops. That is, they were generally already doing such activities and were unlikely, generally due to time pressures, to engage in more. Nevertheless, they did feel that their participation encouraged them to continue with such activities and strengthened their resolve to do so.

*I think it's probably reinforcing, because I've done a lot of voluntary work already ... All of those things, I thought 'well, I'm doing that, I've done this' and you know, all those things. (Male, 65+, Guildford)*



For participants generally, but particularly those who had changed their behaviour, it seems to have been the experience of participating in the dialogue process that had stimulated action, rather than something about the nature of the messages themselves. This suggests that encouraging the uptake of the *Five Ways* among the broader public may require more than simply communicating the messages more effectively (i.e. wording them in a particular way, utilising particular distribution channels). Rather, there would seem to be a need to engage actively with individuals and groups over time. This idea reinforces one of the key findings from the dialogue itself.

The way in which the workshops provided space for reflection and discussion, which in turn stimulated change, is reflected in the following comment by a participant who had made some changes to his behaviour by increasing his exercise:

*It is generally common sense that these things are important to well-being, but what a lot of us tend to do is we push them to the background and we probably don't pay them as much attention as we should do. (Male, 45-54, Hartlepool)*

Another Hartlepool participant described how she was making an active effort to look into volunteering and attributed it to what she had learned during the workshops:

*When you think about well-being you generally think about diet and exercise and seeing your friends and things, but giving was one of the five topics and you don't tend to think of that as contributing to your well-being. And that did make me think that yes that is another thing that does make you feel better. (Female, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

And the participant from London who had embarked on a path of taking courses at her grandchildren's primary school spoke about how the experience of participation had encouraged her down this new road. Not only had she heard about the courses from a fellow participant, but had experienced quite a dramatic change of mindset.

*I've got a bit more confidence ... Like to find out where different groups are for my age group, to find out what's going on and to just ask. Do you know I didn't know, my two boys went to that school across the road. Now my two grandchildren are in there, I didn't know they did these workshops for adults and older people and parents, I didn't know they did it. (Female, 55-64, London)*

The importance of 'agency' was a strong finding from the dialogue, and this is reflected in these stories of participants who have taken it upon themselves to make changes in their lives following the workshops.

## **5.2 Who will listen?**

As noted earlier in Section 4.2, many public participants were sceptical about the (apparent) purpose of the workshops. In addition to this, only half (53%) agreed that

policy makers would listen to their views. The others disagreed, did not know or said they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Some interviewees also seemed doubtful that the outcomes would be listened to by policymakers or would make a difference.

*Well, to be perfectly honest with you, and I will be honest, no, I don't think it'll make any difference [to policy]. . . . [The views] might be listened to, but I'm not sure there's any great will to actively change the country or how it works. (Male, 55-64, Guildford)*

Others were more hopeful:

*I'm not convinced that much will come out of it although I'm always happy to take part in these discussions, just because I've always got this little glimmer of hope... (Male, 55-64, Guildford)*

*It's almost like giving – in comparison to people giving money to a charity organisation, you only hope that that money is going to those starving people or handicapped people or dying people, the rest you cannot really predict, you can only hope that it's being used properly. (Male, 65+, London)*

However, none seemed certain that the dialogue would truly 'make a difference' on a larger scale.

*My own personal point of view on the government, right, you can say whatever you want, they aren't going to listen. If they've got an idea they'll do it, you know what I mean? (Male, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

While interviewees were unsure as to whether government or policy makers *would* listen, all felt they *should*.

*I don't know whether they would but I think they should. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

Some participants thought perhaps the NHS or others involved in health care ('professionals') might listen and others felt that charitable organisations might also be interested. Another respondent said that she had 'no clue' who might listen to the outcomes of the dialogue, but did not think that policy makers would.

In contrast, stakeholders identified a wide range of potential audiences for the dialogue – reflecting the important difference that they feel the dialogue could make. Policy makers are an important primary audience for the findings from this dialogue, but this includes a wide range of policy makers – not just from the Department of Health:

*We want policy makers to be confronted with the very real obstacles that people face in doing those things which would enhance their well-being ... So there will be lessons not just for the Department of Health but for education and for transport, for whoever, all kinds of different people play a part in this exercise. (Stakeholder 4)*

Colleagues in physical public health were identified as especially important:

*So we want very much to get the messages out to our colleagues who work in physical public health who have not traditionally thought about well-being as meaning anything other than physical well-being ... and I think generally speaking we're pushing at a partly open door. (Stakeholder 1)*

The links between the public health strategy and the mental health strategy will be reflected in the development (currently in progress) of a new organisation, Public Health England. As part of this, a number of health and well-being boards will be established throughout the country and those boards are likely to have public health directors. These individuals, and the organisation overall, represent an important audience for the outcomes of the dialogue, although providing them with the right tools (such as summaries of the research findings) would be a central element in this process. These boards will be tasked with developing a health and well-being strategic plan for their areas. One stakeholder noted that this dialogue has the potential to impact on those plans:

*Within that they may wish to be exploring how they get messages on well-being that help other aspects of health improvement into their arena, then this project will have some significance. (Stakeholder 2)*

In addition to the above audiences, another stakeholder identified a number of additional potential audiences who he believed could benefit or make use of the dialogue outcomes:

- Employers (via BIS; as well as organisations like the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development and the Health and Safety Executive);
- Community and volunteer groups (which could also be reached, initially, by engaging with local governments);
- The general public.

### **5.3 Policy impacts**

#### **Dissemination**

Although all stakeholders described possible areas in which the dialogue could make a difference, most were also clear that there are a number of conditions that must be in place in order for the impact to occur. For example, the active involvement of DH in getting 'the relevant policy people to sit down in a room with us and talk about it' is perceived to be key to policy impact.

In addition, other stakeholders recognised the importance of the findings themselves and how they are framed and communicated as being important for impact:

*I suppose that what I think is if we have some good learning, I mean it has to be fairly crisp and we need to know whether the findings of the report mean that we need to adapt the Five Ways or the way in which you can affect the implementation of the Five Ways if you like and make sure we can get that out to people. (Stakeholder 1)*

Although the project is ongoing, one stakeholder in particular emphasised the importance of maximising impact by extending dissemination beyond the generation of a report.

*I don't think there's any reason why this project shouldn't have an influence. I think the challenges are the lack of will and commitment to do something beyond just producing a report and I would be extremely disappointed if that's the end point of this project. (Stakeholder 2)*

Dissemination of the findings is critical in the dialogue achieving an impact, and various stakeholders suggested very specific possibilities or opportunities for dissemination in addition to the event described above. These include:

- Following up the dissemination meeting with individual meetings with policymakers from those departments in attendance
- NHS Confederation conference (July 2011)
- Public Health England (as an organisation charged with diffusing best practice) could disseminate guidelines or other frameworks, etc emerging from the dialogue
- Dissemination event led by Sciencewise
- Viral marketing/YouTube video

In terms of a possible dissemination 'event' that could really increase the impact of the dialogue, one of the government stakeholders had very specific ideas:

*Wouldn't it be great if Sciencewise thought this was worthy of some form of event where the cornerstone of this event was the presentation of these findings but you then had other commentators also there. So you had someone from Public Health England welcoming, you had someone who's responsible for networking with health and well-being boards, you have someone within local government saying when I first heard this I thought this was a load of wishy washy nonsense but now I've seen it I can understand how beneficial this will be to my local community ... I think this could just be a very helpful contribution to the debate and I think there are many takers out there willing to hear the debate. (Stakeholder 2)*

## **Policy impact**

There was general agreement that the dialogue has the potential to impact policy, including (but not limited to) future developments of the Mental Health Strategy. A number of stakeholders explicitly noted that the Mental Health Strategy is still a 'work in progress', which offers the opportunity for the dialogue to make a difference in terms of its future direction. Moreover, the strategy itself seems to fit well with the concept of well-being as explored and promoted in the current project.

*The policy context is first of all the public health ... and the second one is the Mental Health Strategy and the third one is the growing interest from government and others in the measurement of the nation's well-being. So we have three reasons to be cheerful that this work has got the right policy context, we now need to make it happen. (Stakeholder 2)*

Additionally, it was felt if the dialogue impacted on the Mental Health Strategy (or other government policies) it had the potential to help save money:

*At a time of financial austerity one mustn't forget the preventive and promotional aspects. (Stakeholder 2)*

At the same time, attempts to influence policy do carry some inherent risks.

*You have a danger – on the one hand you could end up with some very small tweaks to the way the government communicates on these issues – not worth doing the project if that's all that's going to happen. On the other hand you could produce recommendations which are simply against the grain of existing government policy. So they're not going to be implemented because they just don't fit the way that the government's thinking about things. They involve more public expenditure for example or they involve more state intervention of some kind. I mean those are sort of useless recommendations because they're not going to be implemented. So the trick is to find a course in between where you are going with the grain but where you are actually doing something substantial and potentially quite radical. (Stakeholder 4)*

Nevertheless, the optimism of government stakeholders about the policy context is encouraging:

*I'm incredibly enthusiastic about the potential of this and would be disappointed if that wasn't somehow capitalised on. (Stakeholder 2)*

### **DH Dissemination event 18 May 2011**

We attended a dissemination event held at DH on 18 May 2011 entitled 'Ways to Well-being: Understanding the Public's Views'. This was the latest (and largest) in a series of meetings that had taken place with stakeholders and was the first where stakeholders from a wide range of areas within the department were invited. The goal of the meeting was to provide an overview of what the dialogue was about, with a view to stimulating enough interest to arrange further meetings with relevant individuals.

The meeting was very well-attended with barely enough chairs to go around. Twenty people were at the meeting, twelve of whom represented DH (others were from Sciencewise, nef, Corr-Willbourn and evaluators). Areas represented included substance misuse, DH marketing, health inequalities, mental health, the NHS confederation, children's health, action on alcohol and the public health outcomes framework.

Following a presentation of the key findings from the dialogue, attendees' questions revealed a high level of interest in the dialogue. A second brief presentation from nef focused on the next steps – reaching people, messaging and barrier reduction. The subsequent discussion suggested that attendees were beginning to think about the implications of the work for public health messaging that was able to build the sense

of agency that the presentations had described, possibly building on learning from the 'Change for Life' and 'five-a-day' campaigns:

*The start of the conversation is more important than the conversation itself. [It's] not just about telling people. (Meeting attendee)*

There was some interesting discussion about who was seen to be giving the messages, and whether complex social marketing campaigns would be able to reproduce the valorisation that was experienced by some of the dialogue participants. Attendees also provided some useful pointers about what the dialogue report could provide greater detail on.

At the end of the session, attendees were invited to leave their contact details on postcards (each printed with one of the *Five Ways*) in order that nef could arrange further meetings and discussions more closely linked to specific policy areas. Five attendees returned the postcards. At the end of the meeting, many of the attendees stayed to ask questions of nef and the dialogue deliverers.

nef felt the meeting went well and were pleased with the high level of engagement. Particular success factors were the presentation from the dialogue deliverers which was seen to have 'brought the participants into the room' by illustrating the trends in the data with quotes and vignettes. This was a powerful engagement mechanism and the fact that the dialogue was able to gather this type of rich evidence was seen as a strength of the approach.

At the time of writing this report, nef and DH are still in the process of engaging a range of stakeholders with the dialogue findings. There was also a suggestion to convene a seminar for well-being scientists (but also involving policy makers) to report on and discuss the project and explore opportunities for future work, including the potential for further public dialogue.

In addition, nef are planning to maintain contact with the public participants by informing them of the dialogue outcomes.

## **6 Findings: Cost-benefit analysis**

### **6.1 Costs**

The overall contracted cost of the dialogue was £132,000, including non-recoverable VAT as an allowable project cost. This includes:

- Project management, development of materials, analysis of results and reporting by nef;
- Delivery of the public dialogue workshops by Corr-Willbourn;
- Evaluation of the overall process by Laura Grant Associates.

This figure does not include internal costs at DH for project management, procurement, oversight, policy input, review of reports etc.; or internal costs at BIS or Sciencewise-ERC.

The Sciencewise contribution to the dialogue costs was £132,000, including non-recoverable VAT as an allowable project cost.

The stakeholders we spoke with put this into perspective qualitatively:

- It was seen as a rather small scale project for DH;
- It was seen as a rather large scale project for nef.

## **6.2 Benefits**

The perceived benefits are described throughout the evaluation report. They can be summarised under two headings:

- Policy impacts, including the intelligence gained from the dialogue;
- Benefits for public participants.

## **6.3 Was the dialogue money well spent?**

This question was asked of both public participants (during interviews) and stakeholders.

### **Public participants' perceptions**

Despite universally agreeing that they would happily participate in such exercises in the future, participants' views were mixed as to whether the workshops merited the costs. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two participants who had experienced the most dramatic impacts felt strongly that the benefits did justify the costs.

*I think so. Because you're getting normal opinions, you're getting like opinions from people on the streets. (Female, 55-64, London)*

*Definitely - it just gets people making decisions and being more aware of what's going on, rather than just taking a back seat and letting the government get on with it type of thing. (Female, 25-34, Hartlepool)*

This participant also felt that if others experienced the kinds of dramatic changes she had, it would contribute to a better society. Similar to her opinion about encouraging government change, others who had experienced less dramatic changes also believed that such activities do justify the costs because they give individuals a way to make their voices heard.

*If you don't do it, you'll never get to know how people feel and what their opinions are ... at the end of the day we're a democracy and sometimes that's the only way you can get the information back from the general public. (Male, 45-54, Hartlepool)*

A small number also felt that the dialogue was not worth the cost for different reasons. One participant from Guildford felt that the government was so far down the wrong track already that making changes participants would like (or changes likely to be recommended in any future similar dialogue) would be an impossible



task. Another, also from Guildford, felt that the events would not make a difference, although she also acknowledged that it could be beneficial to participants to feel as though they are being listened to (even though they actually are not). And one participant, who actually works in local government, felt that such activities were not a sufficiently high priority to justify spending money on in these straightened economic times (although she thought they would justify their costs in times when more money is available).

*We are going through a very, very difficult time at work at the moment and to think that tax payers' money is getting used for things like this, no I don't think it's a good thing. (Female, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

### **Stakeholders' perceptions**

Stakeholders agreed that the benefits of the dialogue – in terms of gaining information that could be useful – generally justified the costs.

*The dialogue itself was money well spent. (Stakeholder 5)*

Others described the balance between the amount of money spent, the (relatively small) number of public participants, the quality of the information gained and how that information would be used.

*I must admit I think the piece of work is in the scheme of things relatively expensive. It costs quite a lot of money and I suspect that although BIS are very happy to promote this sort of initiative, when I look at what the other sorts of work we do, it's quite a lot of money for quite a small number of individual contacts, the number of people that are actually engaged in the process ... But it is quite high quality, you're getting quite high quality information out of it. And if you can use that effectively I think that's ok. (Stakeholder 1)*

There was also a sense that spending slightly more money would not have led to 'better' information:

*I mean you can always talk to more people but my experience of doing this sort of work is that adding another ten or twenty or even thirty people does not actually make any real difference. (Stakeholder 6)*

There was a suggestion in the meeting with nef that extending the project to include further individual interviews or ethnography could have added greater depth to the findings. However this would have added a large cost to the dialogue and was not seen to make much difference to the value for money of the process that was undertaken. Rather it was seen as an additional or alternative project in its own right.

Finally, a strong case for the value for money of the dialogue was made by explaining its potential to prevent unnecessary government spending:



*I hope we may have prevented government spending vast amounts of money on advertising campaigns which we've demonstrated pretty conclusively would not work. (Stakeholder 6)*

#### **6.4 Future conditions on value for money**

Both public participants and stakeholders placed conditions on some of their responses about the dialogue being 'money well spent'.

Some public participants suggested that such activities could justify the costs, if opinions and outcomes were listened to and might actually make a difference.

*I do think they're important enough but it's if the government and whoever listens to what's being said. If they're not listening to what's being said then there's absolutely no point in doing it, but if people actually listen then yes it's worth doing. (Male, 35-44, Hartlepool)*

The interviews and the meeting at nef provided some conditions that stakeholders felt would need to be met (or already had been met) for the dialogue to be considered a 'success':

- That the workshops were credible and produced good information that can be used/shared: stakeholders generally felt that this was the case;
- They also produced information that was interesting and went beyond what is already known: again this condition was felt to have been satisfied;
- But, the information must be used or taken up by relevant individuals (policy makers) and groups – it needs ownership to drive this forward and dissemination should go beyond just the generation of a report. This is the area where nef and others are focusing their efforts at the time of writing this report.

On the final point above, stakeholders felt that if the information is not disseminated and it is not taken up by the relevant groups and individuals, it may not justify the costs.

*I think there's potentially things in there which they [DH] could benefit from but they have to engage with it. (Stakeholder 5)*

*The actual money spent on the dialogue was – yeah I would say it was money well spent. I mean but whether it is money well spent will depend on how effectively we do the next stage of work. (Stakeholder 4)*

These ideas were discussed in detail during the meeting with nef. Interestingly, they felt a strong responsibility to present the findings in a way that was sufficiently 'enticing' to generate interest among the range of stakeholders that had been identified (in a large number of government departments including DH, The Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education. The approach from nef was to make suggestions for further discussion or exploration from the dialogue findings, and seek further meetings with individuals to co-develop more structured recommendations for different groups. Ultimately,

success was framed as ‘citizens being empowered to use these activities as a tool for increasing their well-being’, while ensuring Government were still mindful of their own responsibilities in promoting well-being. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the dialogue had happened too late to be cited in the Mental Health Strategy was seen as meaning there was a greater imperative to ‘influence decisions around how to spend the money’, rather than giving stakeholders the opportunity to claim policy influence due to inclusion in the strategy.

We discussed how many and what type of follow-up meetings would provide the threshold for success – and of course it is not as simple as that. It was noted that different departments would have very different influences: for example a long-term success measure could be DforE promoting empowerment as a part of schooling, or, in the short-term, the Cabinet Office Behavioural Insight Team (the ‘nudge unit’) picking up on the ideas and influencing a range of other departments. There was some concern that because nef are not based in government, it can be difficult to tap into the infrastructure in the most appropriate place. Building on the relationships with DH and other stakeholders developed through the project and the dissemination activities was seen as crucially important in this regard.

## 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 *Reflections on Sciencewise-ERC principles*

The evaluation used the Sciencewise-ERC principles for effective dialogue as a framework of success criteria. A brief reflection based on the principles is provided in this section.

The **context** of the dialogue is interesting because it is the latest development in a longer collaboration between nef and DH on the topic of well-being and it came at a time when the policy context was changing rapidly. This had both benefits (that stakeholders in DH and across government are interested in the issue) and drawbacks (that changes meant the dialogue was launched at a time of uncertainty and loss of staff for DH which delayed its start). The result was that dialogue was not commissioned in time to inform the new Mental Health Strategy. While it is not possible to know whether there would have been larger impacts had it reported a few months earlier, this evaluation has found considerable evidence that the dialogue findings are being taken seriously by relevant policy makers and that both nef and DH are committed to making the most of the learning gained.

The evaluation suggests that if DH had fully understood the level of involvement that was required for the dialogue at the outset, the project may not have gone ahead because there was so little capacity in the Department at that time. In this sense, the lack of clarity about their role at the start of the project was a factor in making the dialogue happen. While this is not a sustainable approach in the long term, it does mean that the evidence on public views collected through the dialogue is now available and seen as valuable by DH and others.

The dialogue came about in part thanks to a journalist who tried the *Five Ways* and felt that modern life presented too many barriers to enable most people to do the activities, so its **scope** was linked to the way that the scientific evidence on well-being could be translated into actions in the real world. The dialogue was delivered in a way that put participants' interests first; indeed the topic very much lent itself to a participant-led approach. The fact that nef had their earlier work on well-being (and feedback they had received from those that had used it) to draw on meant that the scientific evidence was already available in a form that was accessible to public participants and that they were able to engage with readily, although in the dialogue wash-up meeting the extent to which the process was influenced by this framework was questioned. Stakeholders did not feel that the dialogue was compromised by this, but noted that a broader range of ideas related to well-being might be included in any future dialogue or public engagement work.

In terms of **delivery**, there was a tension between participant engagement and depth of insight with the dialogic approach. Creating personal benefits for participants was one of the objectives of the dialogue and this needed to be balanced with asking questions about individuals' lifestyle choices in a group environment, which could have come across as judgemental if not handled carefully. The topic of well-being is one that is close to individuals' lives and experiences so it was not difficult to engage them with the topic. The challenge was to cultivate a level of openness that would allow the real barriers to *Five Ways* activities to be revealed. Participants and stakeholders were pleased with the degree of openness that the dialogue achieved, and a range of views were elicited. Participants said that it was a worthwhile experience and stakeholders felt that the findings were robust and interesting. Some stakeholders felt that augmenting the deliberative workshops with more individual interviewing work and perhaps some ethnography could have allowed deeper exploration of the barriers, although it was acknowledged that this could have added significant costs to the dialogue.

The **impact** of the dialogue on public participants varied. Some were already engaged in *Five Ways* activities, but for those that were not the process of listening and being listened to seemed to have empowered some to make changes in their own lives based on the *Five Ways*. Others reported a greater resolve to continue the activities they were doing already. Both public participants and stakeholders felt that the value of the dialogue was strongly contingent on who listened to their views. Stakeholders had identified a range of potential audiences for the dialogue findings and had commenced a targeted dissemination plan. A strong impact of the dialogue was seen to be cautioning against spending public money on a messaging campaign around well-being that was likely to be ineffective. As well as being a large potential cost saving, this recommendation was suggested and discussed at the stakeholder meeting we observed, where there was also considerable interest in the dialogue from various parts of DH. At the time of writing, nef and DH are convening a number of meetings with relevant stakeholders before producing the final report. The aim is to co-develop meaningful yet realistic recommendations with various groups. The extent to which these get taken on board by decision-makers (especially those in control of action planning and funding decisions) would determine the extent to

which the dialogue is seen as a success in the longer term. Interestingly, this plan was developed in part because the dialogue was commissioned too late to inform the Mental Health Strategy. This may mean that greater efforts are made to ensure the findings are tailored to the relevant target audiences and could have more significant impacts.

The **evaluation** of the dialogue has revealed several areas of learning which are described below. The evaluation process was also discussed at the wash-up meeting. The idea of reflection was supported by all stakeholders and there was some regret that the evaluation was commissioned too late to enable observation of a wider range of the dialogue events. However, it was still felt that valuable learning had been gained. Some also suggested extending the period of the evaluation so that stakeholders (notably project leaders) were interviewed later. This would have allowed them to offer a more complete perspective on the dialogue and its impacts. If this is to be realised in future dialogues the timing of the wash-up meeting (which usually takes place after the evaluation has reported) would also need to be considered.

## **7.2 Learning points**

We have identified three key learning points from this dialogue.

### **Governance and ownership**

One of the main lessons emerging from the project is the importance of clear oversight and governance. That is, all parties involved need to be clear from the outset about their roles, who is 'in charge' and especially expectations of time commitment involved.

Related to this are issues around the scope of the project and its demands, relative to other projects that a government department may be engaged in. Stakeholders noted that the budget for this project is small relative to the annual spend on mental health and relative to the budgets for many other DH projects, yet it necessitated quite a lot of time. From a DH perspective there seems to be a mismatch between the scope and demands of the project. Such 'mismatches' can be problematic and should be negotiated prior to the start of future projects.

While no party was seen as being 'at fault' in this case (the delays were due to factors outside partners' control) and no stakeholders felt there had been an adverse impact on the robustness of the dialogue itself, the process could have run much more smoothly if early discussions between project partners had been as open as those between participants in the workshops. Building time and space for such discussions into project planning is an ideal scenario. However in this case there was a risk that had the team delayed any further the project would not have happened at all. The fact that the dialogue was delivered and its outcomes deemed valuable is a success for all involved. Furthermore, the role of nef in continuing the engagement after the workshops, when there can be a risk of losing momentum, is likely to help maximise the dialogue's impacts.

### **Dialogue on an established area of science**

This dialogue differed from some others commissioned by Sciencewise-ERC in that the area of science it focused on was neither new nor particularly contentious compared to other topics that Sciencewise-ERC dialogues have addressed. This had two main implications for the dialogue: firstly scientific experts were not involved in the workshops and secondly the dialogue was able to be very much participant-led. These aspects worked well during the workshops and useful findings were gained.

Another important difference was in the nature of the potential policy impacts, which are quite different to those that may have emerged from dialogues on emerging technologies or other issues such as nuclear power. There are potential impacts for a wide range of departments as well as the sponsoring department, and the impacts include those on the government's own public engagement or public awareness work. The suggestion that the dialogue helped avoid an expensive and ineffective messaging campaign points to the value of public engagement with these types of issues.

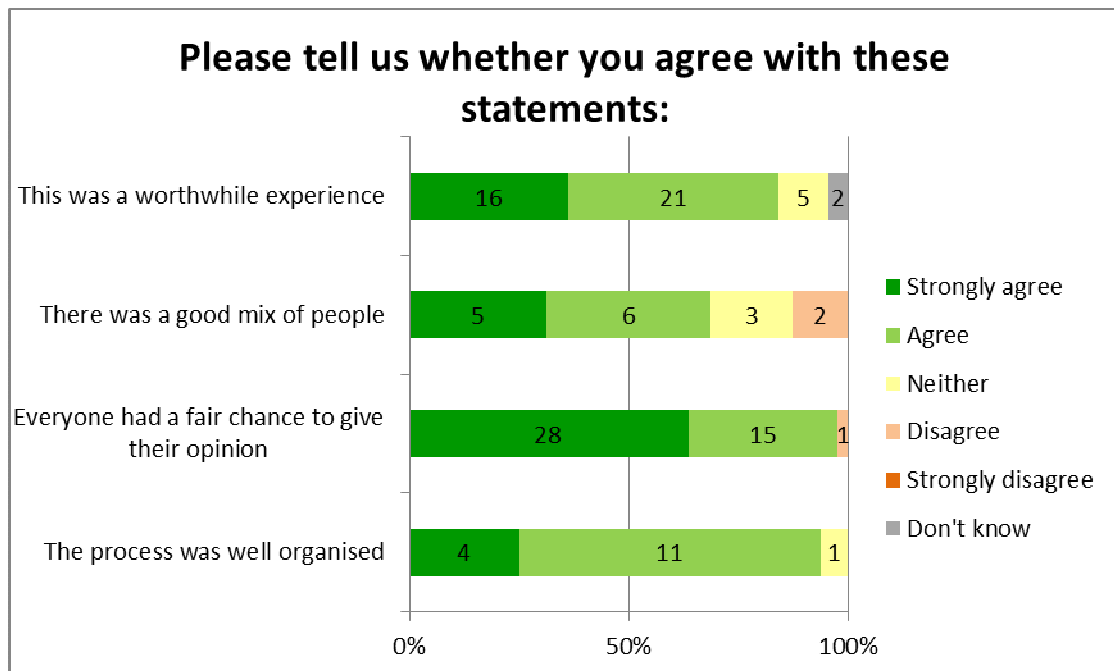
Basing the decisions about how to deploy limited funds on strong evidence is vital in the current climate, and learning on how to achieve the greatest value for money from dialogues and other processes is as important as ever.

### **Tailored dissemination plan**

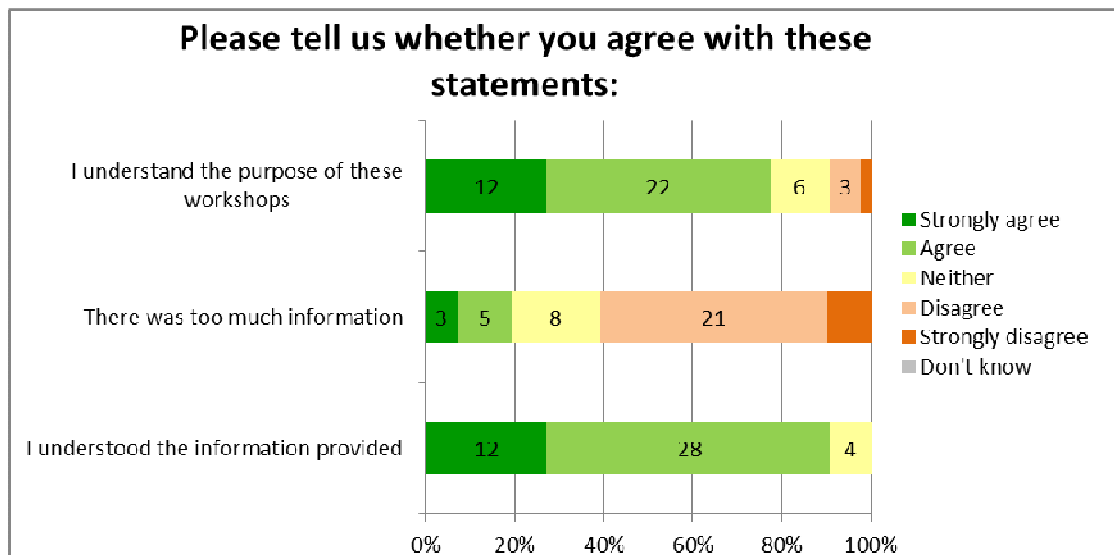
The team's strong commitment to creating 'more than a report' from the dialogue maximises the opportunities for policy impact. This suggests that future dialogues developed to inform a particular strategy should not stop with what one stakeholder described as a 'text-based influence'. Working with various groups to co-develop tailored recommendations has the potential to influence a number of government departments.

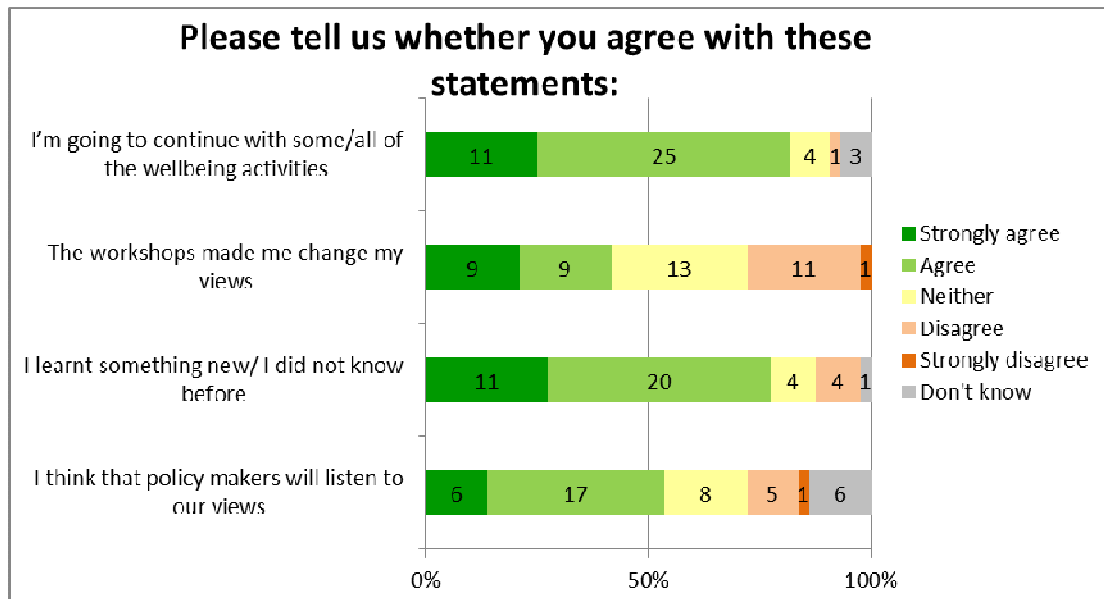
It is too soon to say whether this approach will be successful, and if they have not done so already it would be valuable for nef and their colleagues to record their dissemination plan in order to reflect on what worked and what was learned.

## Appendix 1: Questionnaire responses



NB the facilitators suggested we provide a shorter version of the questionnaire for participants in London and Hartlepool, so the ratings for 'There was a good mix of people' and 'The process was well organised' only reflect the views of participants at the Guildford workshop.





## **Appendix 2: Data collection materials**

As described in Appendix 1, longer and shorter versions of the questionnaire were produced. The longer version is included here.

In addition, we have included the prompt document we used during our workshop observations and snapshot interviews.



## Tell us what you think

Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. Your feedback will be used to help us understand how good the workshops were and to plan future events.

Think about the following when filling in this form:

- The discussion group you went to last week
- Using your folder and other discussions/thinking between the events
- This evening's workshop

## Now for the questions...

What aspect/s of the process stood out and why?

Good aspect

Why?

Poor aspect:

Why?

What three words would you use to describe the process?

Please tell us whether you agree with the following statements **about the workshops**:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The process was well organised	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Everyone had a fair chance to give their opinion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There was a good mix of people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This was a worthwhile experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us why you think this:

Please turn over → → →

Please tell us whether you agree with the following statements **about the information**:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I understood and could use the information provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There was too much information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the purpose of these workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think that policy makers will listen to the our views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I learnt something I did not know before	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workshops made me change my views	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After the workshops, I'm going to continue with some/all of the well-being activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us why you think this:

Please tell us how valuable the following things were to help inform your opinions:

	Very valuable	Quite valuable	Not very valuable	Not at all valuable	Don't know
Information provided by group leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Group discussions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Folders to use at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with friends and family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Activities where you moved around the room to show opinions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tell us: .....)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What else, if anything, did you get out of being involved?

What do you think should have been done differently? How would you improve it?

Please turn over → → →

## A few questions about you:

These questions are only used to monitor the response rate to our questionnaire.

Are you... ☐ Male ☐ Female

Your age: ☐ 18-24 ☐ 25 - 34 ☐ 35-44  
☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ Over 65

Your ethnic group: ☐ Asian or Asian British ☐ White British  
☐ Black or Black British ☐ White other  
☐ Mixed/dual/multi heritage ☐ Chinese  
☐ Other

Do you consider yourself to be Disabled?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

## And finally...

As part of our independent evaluation, we would like to have a longer conversation with some participants over the telephone. This will take place in the next few weeks.

Would you be willing to be contacted again?

### ☐ Yes I'd be happy to be contacted

If so, please leave your name .....

And your email/phone number .....

### ☐ No thank you

Please note that your contact details will only be used for the purposes of this evaluation.

**THANK YOU. Your feedback is really valuable 😊**

# Ways to well-being

## Prompts for observations

### Overall atmosphere

- How would you describe this? Relaxed? Lively? Quiet?
- Like the participants – sum up the session in three words!

### Logistics

- Was it clear what was expected of participants?
- Did the workshop start and finish on time?
- Was adequate care taken of participants' needs, e.g. appropriate breaks, comfort of surroundings, refreshments?
- Were a range of tools used to cater to participants that prefer to work/think in different ways?
- Was the info provided at the right level?
- What was the level of engagement with the self-guided deliberation?

### Group interactions

- Were groups overly dominated by a few?
- Were interactions mostly participant-participant or participant-facilitator?
- Did any power relationships emerge, and if so on what basis? (e.g. age, level of knowledge, gender etc)
- What techniques were used by facilitators to encourage interaction? How effective were these?
- To what extent did participants feel they were able to be open with each other on the issue of mental well-being? To what extent did we observe this?

### Purpose of the workshops

- Was this a. clearly explained and b. did the participants understand it?
- Did participants think policy makers and others would listen to their views? Or were they cynical about this? Who did they hope would listen?
- Did participants think this was a worthwhile use of their time?

### Experiences and immediate outcomes

- What were participants' experiences of the workshops? Enjoyable? Emotional? Good? Bad?
- How much had views shifted throughout the deliberation?
- Did any activities/prompts stand out as particularly shifting opinions?
- Did participation improve well-being of those involved?
- Are they likely to take up/continue any/all of the activities?

### What else was interesting?