



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

## **A Review of Open Policy Making: Methods and Implications for Defra**

**Report 2 from the ‘Understanding & Engaging  
Audiences’ Study**

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Defra**

**December 2013**

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Please cite this report as:

Darnton, A. 2013. 'A Review of Open Policy Making: Methods & Implications for Defra - Report 2 from the Understanding & Engaging Audiences Study'. Andrew Darnton at AD Research & Analysis Ltd. London: Defra.

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## Findings in Brief

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- This report presents the findings from a review of open policy making approaches, as called for in the Civil Service Reform Plan (2012). The Review forms the second part of a study for Defra on 'Understanding and Engaging Audiences', the first part being an exploration of the role of segmentation in Defra, including a review of Defra's Pro-Environmental Segmentation Model. This part of the study on open policy making was designed to address the central question of the role of audience insight and engagement in open policy making, and to identify opportunities and challenges for Defra in advancing 'open' approaches.
- This Review surveyed six methods associated with open policy making, as well as exploring the overarching concept itself. It began with a review of the (limited, and emerging) published and grey literature, followed by interviews and workshops (with Defra staff, other Government staff, and external experts). In keeping with the spirit of open policy making, a range of online and social media inputs also provided valuable insights. Given the fast-moving nature of the subject area, this mix of interviews and wide-ranging literature review represented the most effective way of building a picture of current practice and future directions. However, it does mean that interviewees' views make up a disproportionate part of the evidence base. Meanwhile a good deal of interpretation has been required by the reviewer to piece the sources and perspectives together.
- Open policy making ('OPM') is identified in the Reform Plan as the way forward for civil servants, although no definition is given, and its constituent methods are not definitively listed. The Reform Plan's emphasis on opening up combines two current strands in policy making: 'digital by default' delivery, and participatory democracy. It appears the digital strand is leading the way, opening up new tools and channels, and the democratic uses of those channels are being developed subsequently. It is unclear whether OPM as the "*default*" approach to policy making will be additional to current methods, or represent an alternative. If it is the latter, then interviewees for this Review expressed the fear that traditional methods of audience insight and engagement may be dropped, without the new open methods having developed sufficient rigour to replace them.
- The interviews for this Review revealed that the lack of detail forthcoming since the Reform Plan is a deliberate tactic on the part of the Cabinet Office's OPM team. Recognising that different 'open' methods (and with different degrees of openness) will be appropriate in different policy contexts, the OPM team are pursuing a non-prescriptive approach. Instead they are looking to work with each Department and encourage them to work out what OPM means for them and their processes, in each policy context. While this approach is admirably 'open' and co-productive, it requires Departments to understand the possibilities of OPM, and to prioritise the task of defining and developing open approaches. This Review can be seen as an early contribution from Defra to that project, by exploring OPM methods, and applying the learnings to Defra's policy contexts.
- In response to this new approach to policy making, both interviewees and related sources highlight the need for a model of the new open policy process to be developed, which can accurately show where the new 'open' inputs to the process can best be

made. The Reform Plan itself undertook to develop such a “*clear model*”, which has not been forthcoming – in part because of the OPM team’s non-prescriptive approach. However, without such a model (or more likely, models) it will be hard for stakeholders to play their part fully in co-productive policy activities, and it will remain impossible to evaluate policy processes and impacts accurately, including the ways in which their ‘openness’ has brought about better policy outcomes.

- As part of developing any overarching process model, the constituent methods within open policy making would also need defining (and sequencing). This Review has identified six ‘open’ methods of relevance to Defra, and has found that Defra has considerable experience in a number of these methods, although they have not previously been brought together under the banner of open policy making. In particular, the Department has longstanding expertise in consultation, and it continues to innovate in this area (eg. in its adoption of online consultation tools). It has also extensive experience of running working groups with stakeholder organisations, and co-delivering policies with sector partners. In the language of co-production, this variety of stakeholder engagement activities can now be considered as leading examples of co-production. Meanwhile, Defra’s involvement in citizen science projects is extensive, and these activities can be understood as a specialised version of crowdsourcing. However, there are other ‘open’ methods in which Defra has much less experience, and across the whole agenda there is room for the Department to do more, especially in terms of opening up policy making to wider ‘lay’ publics, and in making these methods the ‘default’ across all policy areas.
- The conceptual heart of open policy making is co-production, which also has the longest heritage. The co-production literature describes a sliding scale of approaches, with the most ‘open’ involving citizen-users as equal partners in policy design and delivery; this in turn requires the lead organisation to give away control over the policy process. It is an unanswered question as to how ‘open’ Defra (like any central Government Department) can be in its adoption of co-production methods, which may work better at local level. As interviewees explained, ultimately, Government must legislate alone, and open approaches early in the process inevitably need shutting down towards the end. More appropriate to the challenges facing Defra may be ‘co-production by proxy’ activities, in which Government works with stakeholder organisations to develop and deliver policy and strategy. Interviewees for this Review pointed out that such activities are not new: Defra’s longstanding use of working groups and delivery agencies means this is familiar territory, although there is an apparent need to gather and formalise best practice on co-ordinating stakeholder groups.
- Although not included in the suite of open methods mentioned in the Reform Plan, this Review includes consultation as a method, originally at Defra’s request (not least because they are the Department which runs the most consultations). Consultation procedures are also under review by the Cabinet Office: in future, undertaking ‘early engagement’ activities with stakeholder groups may exempt policy teams from having to run formal consultations. Because of the increasing overlaps between consultation and co-production (as stakeholder engagement), and the rich potential for sharing learnings between the methods, this Review argues that consultation should be included by Defra among its repertoire of OPM methods (and a similar strategy may also be beneficial to other Departments). On account of the increasing fluidity in consultation, there is much work to be done to delineate boundaries between its different phases, and the best practice methods for each phase (including evaluation).

This work should best be undertaken with and for stakeholders, to ensure their needs are put at the forefront of new approaches.

- As far as wider publics are concerned, interviewees suggested that they are best engaged through early crowdsourcing activities (such as using dialogue apps), and through structured social media conversations. Even here though there are questions about how open central Government can afford to be; interviewees expressed the view that it is “*too risky*” for Government to jump into existing online conversations (eg. Twitter streams about the badger cull). Meanwhile, encouraging online publics to join in “*policy debates*” on the Government’s terms (as advocated by the Reform Plan) is likely to prove challenging.
- Working through potential OPM methods and their applications one by one, it can be concluded that, on balance, new methods of engaging wider publics are likely to be at the less open and ‘radical’ end of the spectrum. Meanwhile expert stakeholders appear to assume a much more central role – as they already have in Defra (a shift in emphasis which prompted some interviewees to raise questions about both their independence, and their representativeness). Interviewees have also highlighted concerns that, through a focus on stakeholders not publics, and a reliance on digital media and early engagement, OPM may inadvertently result in “*a narrowing of engagement*”.
- Across all methods considered in this Review, it has proven impossible for interviewees to answer the question: ‘what methods lead to better policy making?’. In large part this is because there is no consistently applied or comprehensive method for evaluating policy processes and impacts. Interviewees called for such a methodology to be developed soon; this should also incorporate newer open methods such as ‘informal consultation’ which, being less bounded, are likely to pose considerable challenges to evaluators and auditors. These open methods are fast-moving, and evaluation methods will need to move fast to keep up. They will also need to be founded on true-to-life models of the policy process (as called for above): particularly ones that account for the apparent ‘impact gap’ between evidence (and other ‘open’ inputs) and policy outputs.
- One year on from the Civil Service Reform Plan announcing open policy making as the way forward, the Cabinet Office has recognised that “*our starting point is less advanced than we thought*”. The work to fill in the new open channels, platforms and policy labs with effective methods, partners and processes which result in better policy, all lies ahead. Some of this work can only be undertaken by Departments in their specific policy contexts, while other tasks are more cross-cutting, and no less urgent. This Review closes by identifying seven areas of work for advancing open policy making, which can be summarised here as follows:
  - i) New model(s) for the (open) policy process*
  - ii) New methods for evaluating (open) policy processes and impacts*
  - iii) Breaking the monopoly: how ‘open’ can central government policy making be?*
  - iv) Defining stakeholders, understanding their needs and wants*
  - v) Bringing together best practice guidance for co-ordinating stakeholder groups*

- vi) Developing 'open' consultation methods, with social research expertise built in*
- vii) A self monitoring service: Departments seeing themselves as others see them, digitally*

# Study Overview

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## i) Background

This Review is the second part of a study in two parts. It began life as a review for Defra's Virtual Centre for Expertise in Behavioural Insight into the impacts and effectiveness of the Pro-Environmental Segmentation Model.

However, a progress meeting was undertaken mid-way through the Review at which it was decided to change the scope of the research. This was partly triggered by difficulties in securing participation in the research by internal Defra staff (for interviews or workshops – although demand was notably high among external respondents). This practical finding threw into relief the structural changes occurring in Defra (including the closure of the Virtual Centre, and embedding of social researchers back into policy teams) and the fact that new ministerial priorities had been introduced which rendered the Model's focus on the pro-environmental behaviours of the general public beyond the Department's remit.

The second part of the re-scoped study focuses on other approaches to audience insight and engagement: specifically those relating to the new agenda for open policy making, which had been set out in the Civil Service Reform Plan (July 2012). In this way, part two of the Study smoothly picked up on the themes emerging from part one, and the two Reviews co-exist under the title of the 'Understanding and Engaging Audiences' Study.

The overall aim of this refocused Review was to explore the question:

*'What is the role of the public in policymaking for Defra in the immediate future, and what audience insight capabilities and tools does Defra need in order to facilitate this new relationship?'*

The overall question was to be pursued in the context of Defra's Four Ministerial Priorities, defined as:

- 1) Growing the rural economy, 2) Plant health, 3) Animal health,
- 4) Improving the environment.

Taking both parts of the study together, three specific objectives were agreed with the Steering Group, as follows:

1. *In what context did Defra develop and use its Pro-Environmental Segmentation Model, and to what effects?*
2. *What other segmentations have been developed in Defra, and what is their role in understanding and engaging audiences going forward?*
3. *A cross-government focus on open policy making calls for the use of approaches such as crowd sourcing and co-production of policy – how can current and new audience insight work contribute to help achieve this in Defra?*

This Report covers the findings from part two of the study, the Review of open policy making, which was designed to explore innovative approaches to audience insight and stakeholder engagement, and assess their potential applications in Defra's areas of work.



## ii) Methodology

This Review of Open Policy Making was required to deliver on the third overarching objective for the Study, as stated above. In so doing it addressed the following research tasks:

- *Explore the concept of open policy making, as introduced in the Civil Service Reform Plan, in terms of its provenance and dimensions;*
- *Assess recent developments in the promotion and adoption of open policy making since the Reform Plan;*
- *Identify the methods and processes which can advance open policy making;*
- *Unpack these methods in terms of their strengths and weaknesses for supporting policymaking in Defra, and their implications for wider Government;*
- *Review Defra's current practice in relation to each of the identified methods, and outline the implications for Defra of pursuing these methods in future.*

The Review used two main methods to undertake its survey and synthesis: literature review, and interviews (individual and group; with Defra staff and external experts). The four main stages of the method are outlined here:

### - Internal and External Interviews

Individual depth interviews lasting up to an hour were conducted by phone with key stakeholders inside and outside Defra, selected in collaboration with the Study's Steering Group. These included Defra staff in a wide range of policy teams, roles, and at different grades, as well as a few external experts with insights into current work on the open policy making agenda. The level of uptake of invitations to be interviewed was notably high. 21 internal interviews were conducted, and five with external experts; all interviewees are listed in Appendix i below.

### - Rapid Review

A rapid review of the literature relating to open policy making and the selected 'open' methods was undertaken. Sources comprised Government and Defra strategy and guidance, plus external reports, thinkpieces and published journal papers, as well as online blogs.

Following initial online searches, an iterative (or, in digital parlance, 'agile') approach was followed, with each interview and source leading to the identification of more relevant material. This approach echoes the emerging 'literature' it was tracking: emergent, fluid, networked (i.e. based on snowballing), and time critical (reflecting the fast pace of developments in digital applications, and civil service reform). Some key sources (and interviewees) were also identified through twitter feeds, mailing lists, blog updates and other digital channels.

It is worth reflecting that, as Government communications and guidance become increasingly 'digital by default', these kinds of 'agile' methodology are likely to become the norm for desk research in these areas. Systematic searches, performed through academic databases, have been becoming superseded by wider online searches (eg. through Google/Scholar - as is discussed in the Methodology for Report One of this Study). In this Review, those trends are accentuated because of the focus of the enquiry:

policy and guidance in a fast-moving (and largely non-paper based) area of daily practice. Internal Workshop

At the interim stage of Part Two of the Review, an internal workshop was held with Defra staff, at which emerging findings on the survey of open policy making methods were presented, and then debated in plenary. The workshop was held in Defra on 26<sup>th</sup> June, and lasted two hours. The 15 Defra participants are included in the list of interviewees in Annex i) of this Report (most also undertook individual depth interviews).

A separate note of the discussions was written up following the workshop, and agreed with Defra. The insights it contained have fed into the main body of the Review reported here.

- Working Debrief

Once the main stages of research had been undertaken, an early draft of findings was produced, and presented to an invited Defra audience in a 'working debrief'. Following a short presentation of the findings, a detailed debate was facilitated. Comments from the debrief fed in to final revisions to the Review report.

Despite the efforts taken to construct a robust multi-method approach to this Review, it is possible to identify some limitations to the methodology, as below. In part these relate to the level of resources available for this part two Review of the revised Study.

The possible limitations include:

- Gaps in the coverage of relevant source material given the rapid nature of the review, and its non-systematic methodology. It can however be argued that systematic review is not possible in such an emerging topic area where the total scope of available material is unknowable. It is also the case that much of the relevant literature is grey, in so far as it is not formally published, but posted online.
- The small number of previous reviews and peer-reviewed literature to build upon. Most of the sources relevant to the review are either strategy and guidance documents, or 'thinkpieces' in various guises; the extent to which these represent an 'evidence base' is disputable. Much of the reviewing task in this area is interpretative.
- Reliance on evidence from interviews, as opposed to written sources. Interviews are inherently subjective, although this effect can be (and was, in parts of this Review) moderated through group discussion.
- The representativeness of the interviewees, who were limited in number, and whose views cannot definitively be said to be typical of the majority of their colleagues. That said, the interviewees were carefully selected to represent a range of remits and views.
- The need to ensure anonymity for interviewees, such that a comment quoted in this report can only be vaguely attributed to eg. a Defra interviewee, means that some of the context in which those comments were made is not apparent to readers.

### iii) Reporting

This report presents the findings in full from the Part Two Review of Open Policy Making methods and implications.

It opens with an outline of current knowledge on open policy making, starting from the elements set out in the Civil Service Reform Plan. Having outlined the contours of the concept, and discussed areas of ambiguity, the report moves on to review in detail six specific methods for opening up policy making, and to explore their current and potential future applications in Defra. The report closes with Conclusions and Implications, both for Defra and for other interested parties in and around central Government.

The report also provides appendices, listing all those interviewed during the second part of the Study, and the selected references cited in this report.

The findings from the Review of Defra's Pro-Environmental Segmentation Model are published in a separate report. That report is supplemented by two standalone 'annex reports': the first being a formal Literature Review on the P-E Model, the second providing Model Overviews of the other segmentation models currently in circulation in Defra. Those reports are available on request from [better.regulation@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:better.regulation@defra.gsi.gov.uk).

# Main Findings

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## 1. A Review of Open Policy Making

This Review begins with a discussion of open policy making: its origins, its definitions, and dimensions – many of which are framed as questions, yet to be answered. This discussion takes the Civil Service Reform Plan (HMG 2012) as its starting point, and hence has cross-government relevance, as well as being written from a Defra perspective. The Report then goes on to outline six prominent open policy making methods: these are not necessarily all or even the most important ‘open’ methods, but they represent a blend of those cited in the Reform Plan, and those identified by Defra as the most pertinent to their work areas. An assessment of the relative strengths of each is provided, along with the implications for Defra of developing their capacity to use each method, and for what purposes.

### 1.1 Open Policy Making in Context

- **Origins**

*“Open policy making will become the default.  
Whitehall does not have a monopoly on policy making.”*

This pronouncement in the Civil Service Reform Plan (June 2012) has been the spark for work in the UK on open policy making. Much of that work has been – and will continue to be – to interpret and unpack the pronouncement, not least because there is no definition in the Reform Plan of what ‘open policy making’ might entail. The task of unpacking the pronouncement has fallen to the Open Policy Making (‘OPM’) team in Cabinet Office (themselves set up after the Reform Plan), and they in turn are encouraging each Department to work out what OPM might mean for them. The team’s approach is fittingly ‘open’ – although somewhat at odds with the more prescriptive tone of the Reform Plan, a document which tells civil servants what their job is, and will come to be.

While not defining open policy making, the Reform Plan does go on to mention some of the methods that it includes under OPM: Co-production; Crowdsourcing; Policy labs; Web-based tools, platforms and new media. (These methods will be reviewed in turn in the body of this Report). There is also a diagram illustrating the “*core components of open policy making*” (HMG 2012: 14) – reproduced here:

Figure 1: Components of Open Policy Making (HMG 2012)

Components of open policy-making



This is an interesting figure, as rather than defining when a policy process is ‘open’ or not (as “components” might) more strictly it lists a number of dimensions or facets of policy making, leaving the reader to infer that those in the left hand column are the most closed (“least collaborative”) and those on the right the most ‘open’. As such the table can be read more as a set of aspirations for open policy making, with the implication that approaches which are the “most collaborative” are the most sought after. However, this is unlikely to be equally the case in all policy contexts at all times. Instead it is safer to conclude that what is being advocated is a dynamic approach to policy making, whose precise methods vary according to context. Rather than a fixed set of methods, with threshold levels to mark out when a component is ‘open’, OPM appears more as a set of sliding scales. The plurality, variability and context-specificity implied here go a long way to explaining why open policy making resists simple and binding definitions.

It is interesting to consider the provenance of the figure, which also appears in a seminal report from the Institute for Government on ‘Opening Up Policy Processes’ (Rutter 2012). Although that report was published a few weeks after the Reform Plan, it contains the same figure, which on this occasion is traced back to preparatory workshops conducted by IFG in 2011. The dimensions are then applied to classify particular policies and processes which feature as case studies in the IFG report (it is notable that none of the six examples

ticks off more than five of the seven dimensions – interestingly that leading example is Defra’s Animal Health and Welfare Board - and even then it is not stated where on the continuum from ‘least’ to ‘most collaborative’ each of the examples is placed). Finally, what have become “*components of open policy making*” in the Reform Plan are originally “*different models of opening up*” in the IFG report – suggesting multiple alternative approaches to policy making.

These statements about OPM appear in Chapter Two of the Reform Plan, on ‘Improving policy making capability’; Chapter One addresses the size and shape of the civil service, with an emphasis on delivery. It includes the ambition that by 2015 every department will take a ‘digital by default’ approach to delivering its information and transactional services. This emphasis on digital by default infuses the Reform Plan, including in the sections on open policy making, with an emphasis on new tools “*to widen access to policy debates*”. The Reform Plan presents the two modernising agendas in parallel: digital should become the default delivery channel, while OPM should become the default policy making process. There are also clear overlaps between the two: for instance, digital being used as the medium for crowdsourcing ideas, or for undertaking consultation on proposals. However, OPM as defined in the Reform Plan appears to build on the foundations laid by the digital by default agenda – whatever approaches OPM may entail, there is the assumption that they will be delivered digitally (and therefore will achieve cost efficiencies); more face to face engagement is not advocated.

Some of the interviewees for this Review also took the view that the digital strand came first. In terms of the narrative, the emphasis on digital services does antedate that on OPM, and was made concrete in the 2010 report from Martha Lane Fox, ‘the Government’s Digital Champion’. The report, entitled ‘*Revolution not Evolution*’ (Lane Fox 2010), addressed the future of Directgov, and the wider issue of the online delivery of government services. The report calls for a shift in the approach to delivering government services, based on a “*service centred*” approach, focused on the user experience – also a key aspect in what would become open policy making. As well as proposing that all departmental websites and Directgov be brought together on a single site, Lane Fox also called for the establishing of a single co-ordinating team in government to oversee digital delivery – which became the Government Digital Service. According to external interviewees for this Review, the Open Policy Making team (itself within the Government Innovation Group) and the Government Digital Service operate as specialised offshoots (or “*Googley arms*” as one interviewee said) of the Cabinet Office: deliberately adopting inside/outside boundary positions in order better to draw in innovative practices from outside government. Interviewees contrasted this positioning with that of the Reform Plan, which comes from the more traditional, and more prescriptive, centre of the Cabinet Office. Where the Reform Plan’s approach to open policy making is black and white but short on detail, the OPM team’s is deliberately open, nuanced, and distributed across a community of practice.

Whilst searching for the origins of OPM, it is also instructive to look overseas to the United States. On his first day in office, President Obama issued a memo on transparency and openness, making it a presumption that agencies should disclose information they held on citizens. This has since evolved into a Freedom of Information Act; in September 2011 it was repackaged as part of the Open Government National Action Plan. The Plan aims “*to make our government more transparent, participatory and collaborative*” (US Government 2013:5), and to this extent it seems a fine paradigm for the Reform Plan’s open policy making, which was announced less than a year later. However, the two approaches are not quite identical: the US Plan places more emphasis on transparency and disclosure –

both have projects on open data (and websites with stems 'data.gov') – but the US Plan is more about government being opened up to citizens in a forensic manner (“*making unprecedented amounts of information available and accessible to the public*”). There are participatory proposals in the Plan, though they are heavily outnumbered by those on disclosure. Such proposals include a ‘We the People’ online petition platform, a consultation website on regulations (regulations.gov), a networking site to encourage links between policy and academia (ExpertNet), and apps to run competitions for policy innovations (e.g. Space Apps Competition). There is no explicit emphasis in the US Plan on digital by default delivery, but all the participatory proposals are in online formats.

The question of where the Cabinet Office’s concept of open policy making emerged from remains unanswered. When asked, one of the external interviewees for this Review suggested the phrase might also have digital origins, taking its root from ‘open source software’. However he went on to say that if that were the case, that would reflect “*multiple levels of wrong*”: because, for example, software unlike policy does not need to arise from some sort of representative process (the best idea wins), and policy unlike software cannot be picked up for free on the internet. That interviewee was among a number who underlined that policy making is a specialist task undertaken by specific people in government, for particular legislative, regulatory, fiscal or other ends; ideas however can be sourced more widely and fed into this process, but in the end the policy maker has to make the policy. Such comments were sometimes allied to concerns about the democratic dimensions of open policy making being somehow obscured, and these are also reflected in his response. But this suggested etymology for ‘open policy making’ also raises the question that, if the Cabinet Office’s approach is inspired by a move to electronic engagements, is that to be the creative, distributed and flat networks of the internet with their potential for transformation, or the more efficiency-driven approach to ‘digital by default’ delivery, where digital services replace paper-based, face to face, and other models of engagement? Such questions around the relationship between the two new ‘defaults’ for policy and delivery, interviewees suggested, are still unresolved.

- **Definitions**

The lack of a coherent definition of open policy making in the Reform Plan has been remarked on, and is a source of concern for some civil servants. For instance, a recent meeting of the ScienceWise Community of Practice recorded the conclusion from plenary discussions that the Reform Plan’s proposals for policy making are “*vague and too ambitious*” (Rutter 2013). A similar sense of empty rhetoric was found in the comments from interviewees; one external expert commented that the OPM agenda has “*a slight smell of religious zealotry*”, while one Defra interviewee remarked that OPM “*has the whiff of Big Society*” about it.

Given these challenges, and the apparent need among civil servants for a clear sense of direction, it could be argued that a priority task for the OPM team in Cabinet Office should be to provide a firm definition. However, based on interviews for this Review, it is understood that the team have a deliberate reluctance to do so, on account of the realisation that there is no one right approach to OPM, but that it is a range of methods and approaches, each to be drawn on according to the policy context, and stage in the policy development process. The task as the OPM team sees it is for each Department to work out what OPM means for them, as a set of methods and approaches to be developed and applied in keeping with the Department’s, and its policies’, precise needs. To prescribe a single approach (which in turn would require an arbitrary cut-off to decide

whether it was sufficiently ‘open’ or not) would be in direct contradiction to the kinds of unbounded and collaborative methods which OPM is advocating in the first place. Yet as the OPM team are aware, for such a ‘distributed’ approach to work it is first necessary to ensure that Departments are on the right lines, and have the same shared sense of the directions in which OPM might lead.

The OPM team are in effect balancing the need to encourage each Department to take OPM on with the need to provide some common sense of direction. To this end they have developed the ‘OPM portal’, a new beta site on the My Civil Service pages (see <http://my.civilservice.gov.uk/policy/> ). The opening page provides text on ‘What is OPM?’ although again no unified definition is given. However, a paragraph is quoted from the Cabinet Office submission to the Public Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Public Engagement in Policy Making, in November 2012:

*“This openness will keep policy makers abreast of new and innovative methods to solve problems. By being open and transparent about approaches used, and public sector information and data generated, policy makers also allow others to innovate to solve problems.”*

The operational definition above describes an ‘out-and-back’ dynamic (also familiar from US descriptions of open government) whereby open policy making involves being open to external input, and at the same time allowing externals in to policy making activities: a kind of two-way mirror. The looped structure suggested here was also apparent in interviews for this Review, in which some external interviewees described OPM in terms of its distinct phases and how they should be approached. The first phase, of policy design, should (they believed) draw on ‘ethnographic approaches’, in which engagement is used to understand the policy problem as stakeholders and end users see it. These views should also be drawn in using digital channels, which form the central phase of open policy making. Finally the resulting policy proposals should be moved quickly forward into a prototyping or pilot phase: effectively policy making by trial and error, not protracted processes of weighing the evidence and consulting on the details. This breakdown into phases is in line with the Reform Plan’s emphasis on OPM providing breadth, speed, and real world proof of what works.

These descriptions or sets of working principles do not amount to a firm definition but they do enable others to go further in attempting to draft such a definition. While this might not be advisable for the OPM team with their preferred approach of promoting innovation across Government networks (but not prescribing solutions), it may be appropriate for this Review to attempt a definition – even if only to ensure readers have something to refer back to. Such an attempt is in any case in line with the OPM team’s aim of getting each Department to work out what OPM means for them. Indeed this whole Review can be seen as informing Defra’s early contribution to the task of developing a bespoke approach to OPM, appropriate to its policy remit. Based on the current literature and interviewees’ perspectives, it is possible for this Review to suggest that open policy making is...



*A process (not e.g. a tool)...*

*Based on giving citizens and those outside government access to policy making activities at all points in their development, delivery and evaluation ('end to end participation' – or "involving people before the start and after the end" as one interviewee put it)...*

*Involving digital media and other innovative tools and mechanisms for participation...*

*In a process of idea generation and refinement around policy issues which are potentially unbounded (i.e. not pre-set by government, but determined iteratively through the collaborative process)...*

*Which results in better policy, subsequently refined through trial and error.*

- **Dimensions**

This remainder of this section on the open policy making agenda continues the task of fleshing out the concept of OPM, by highlighting a number of critical dimensions of this way of working which can also be considered as 'open questions'. A Sciencewise pamphlet earlier this year addressed the topic of OPM in a similar manner, asking a number of questions about OPM, and suggesting that "*The Civil Service Reform Plan represents the start of the debate*" (Burall et al 2013). A Defra interviewee for this Review put the same point more crisply, saying "*The Cabinet Office has chucked it out there, and the civil service has to work out what it means*".

The dimensions which follow summarise some questions and debates present in the emerging evidence base, including in the views of interviewees. More work should be undertaken beyond this Review to develop each of these dimensions – for instance, see the '7 Ways Forward for OPM' presented in the section on cross-cutting 'Implications' at the end of this Report.

- **Policy process(es)**

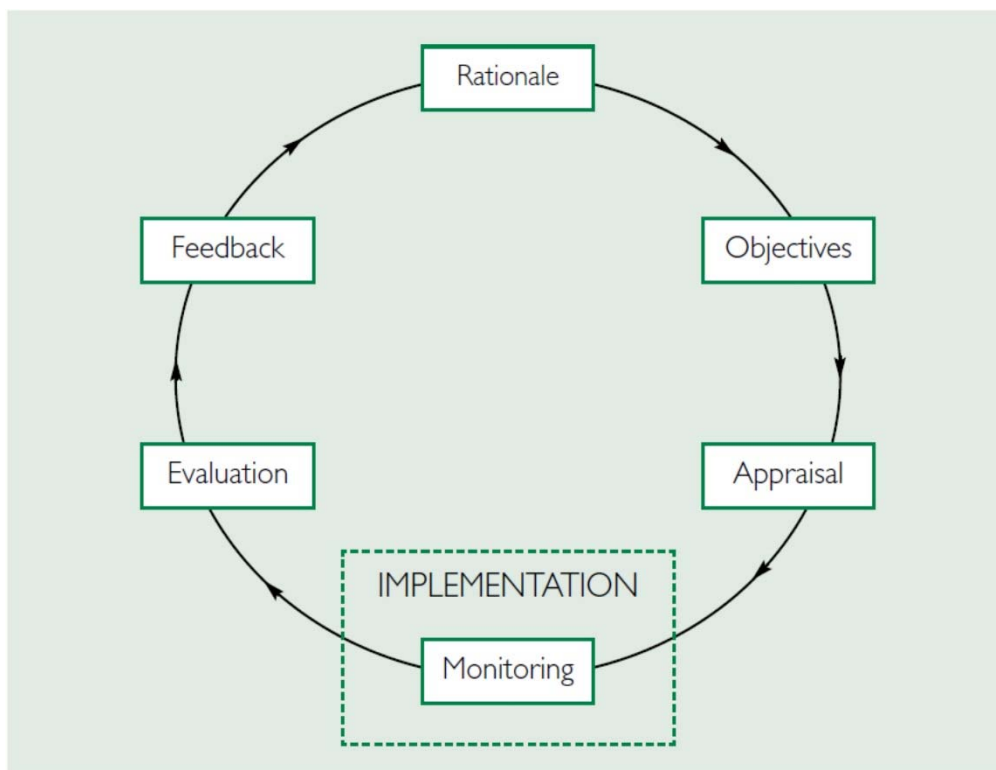
One of the most fundamental questions about OPM is whether it is additional to, or an alternative for, existing methods of policy making. The Reform Plan could easily imply the latter – that it will become the default approach, thereby superseding others. The Plan also states in its action points "*We will establish a clear model of open policy making*". However, the Report Card on the One Year On update tellingly comments: "*We are developing open policy making techniques, although our starting point is less advanced than we thought*" (HMG 2013).

So far, the "clear model" has not been forthcoming, and the interviews for this Review have established that this lack of a model is a deliberate omission by the OPM team, in line with their distributed and non-prescriptive approach. It can also be argued that a single model of 'the' policy process would be misleadingly simplistic. We have already seen how the IFG report describes what the Reform Plan has as 'components' as "*models*"; the author Jill Rutter comments that there will be no one model, as the appropriate methods will vary by context (including by policy area, and stage in the process – Rutter 2012). Nonetheless, the absence of a model, rather like the absence of a

definition, leaves the way open for divergent readings, and does not help those policy practitioners and stakeholders such as some of those interviewed in this Review who are looking for clear direction, to help them structure their work and understand when best to adopt open policy making methods. The uncertainties over the model(s) of open policy processes build on a longstanding lack of clarity around the policy process in any case – and if we are not clear on the policy process, how can we even talk about where in the process open methods should be used?

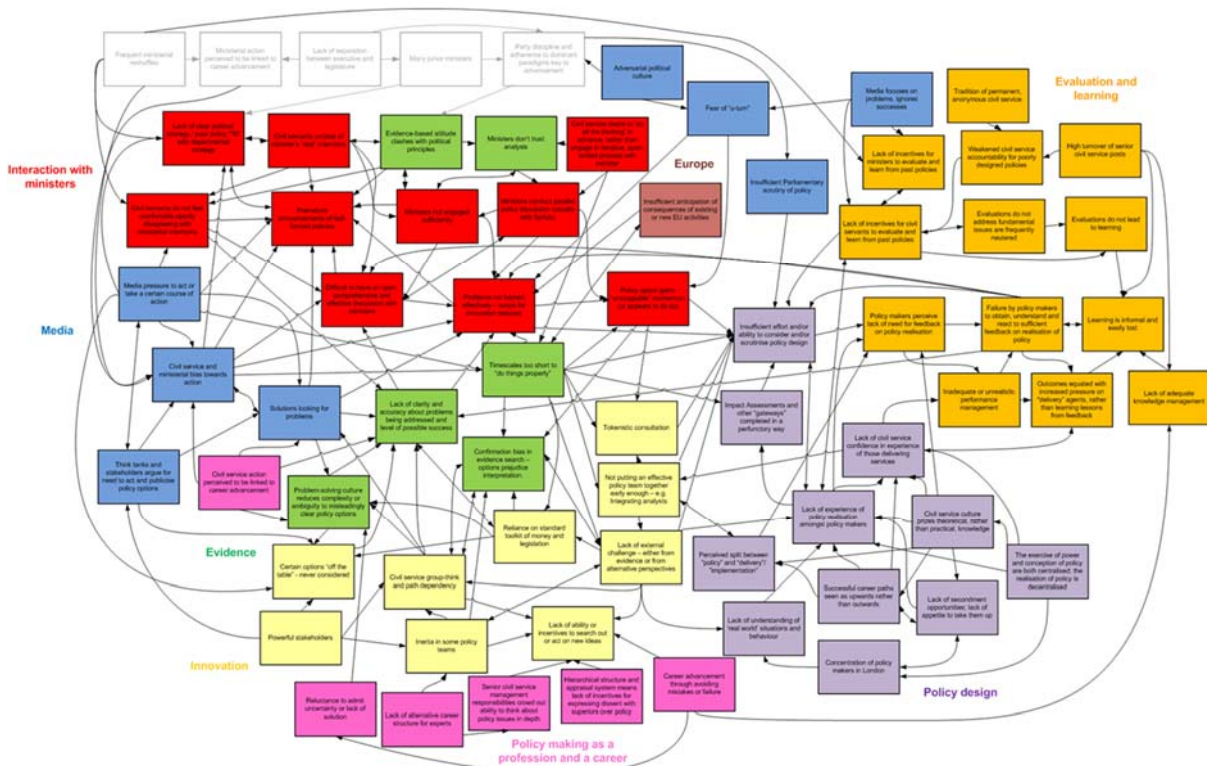
Jill Rutter was the keynote speaker at the Sciencewise Community of Practice event cited in the discussion of ‘Definitions’ above, and she presented two possible models of the policy process – one from an orthodox perspective, the other more exploratory (Rutter 2013). Neither was put forward as a model of the new open policy process, but lessons can be learnt from each about what that model – or models – would need to look like.

**Figure 2:** “The Government used to have a view of a very logical policy process...” (The ROAMEF Policy Cycle (HMT 2003) from Rutter 2013)



This ‘ROAMEF’ model above (named from the initials of its stages) is the classic policy cycle, as appears for instance in the HM Treasury Green Book (HMT 2003). It is widely used, and at the same time, widely understood as idealised, not to say a caricature. As Rutter’s Sciencewise talk, and discussions in the workshop and debrief for this Review, make clear, while this is how policy is supposed to be made, it seldom is. At best it is a deliberate simplification or synthesis of multiple policy processes. One notable strength is that it was originally presented in the context of policy evaluation (the focus of the Green Book): it is a model of an evidence based policy process, such that the policy process could be evaluated. Secondly, as an external interviewee commented, “*It may be fictitious, but at least it’s a cycle*” – i.e. there is the capacity for iteration (feedback, revision, and ultimately learning).

**Figure 3: “We think the real world of policymaking looks more like this...” (Civil Servants’ Policy Systems Map (for Hallsworth et al 2011) from Rutter 2013)**



This less orthodox system map was created by civil servants in deliberative research interviews facilitated by IFG in 2010 (for their study ‘Policy Making in the Real World’, Hallsworth et al 2011). The systems model they developed has a different strength from the ROAMEF cycle, that of improved accuracy (or at least verisimilitude) – although again it is idealised across contexts. It is more helpful from an open policy making point of view, as it allows for external inputs (coming from outside the – closed – ROAMEF loop). However, the model reveals policy to be a complex system, and as such it would be extremely difficult, and costly, to track the impacts of the different inputs in the system. It is also arguably not much use for citizens and other externals participating in an open policy process as it has no temporal dimension in it – there are multiple feedback loops suggesting multiple routes, rendering it impossible for a stakeholder to know where s/he is in the process (and hence what level or kinds of inputs they should be making, e.g. before it’s ‘too late’).

Neither of the above models is appropriate for mapping and evaluating all open policy making processes. Both however have something to offer Departments who might need to attempt such a task in order to help their civil servants, and their external stakeholders, to orientate themselves in the process, in order to contribute effectively to it. The systems map has the benefit of multiple inputs and feedback loops; it amounts to a messy model (‘messes’ also being technical terms for systems characterised by uncertainty – see eg. Chapman 2004). As such it chimes with Charles Lindblom’s view of policy making as “*muddling through*”, which dates back to the 1950s (Lindblom 1959; also cited in Burall et al 2013). This understanding further explains why it has proven (and will prove) hard to draw a single “*clear model*”.

The ROAMEF model on the other hand has the virtue of being a cycle, allowing for ongoing experimentation, learning and adaptation – as well as implying progress over (or at least the passing of) time: it is clearly a process. Such a model certainly has simplicity on its side, and it appears that this is the template on which the Cabinet Office – like so many others in Government - is basing its approach. The new OPM portal states: “*Open policy making does not change the core tasks of the policy process; the policy question still needs to be properly defined and analysed; options developed, tested, implemented and evaluated.*” Instead, OPM is defined as an approach “*that can help increase the pace and quality of policy advice*”. As such this is an efficiency argument, presumably inspired by the digital by default momentum. But in assuming a closed loop, and a question formulated by civil servants, it misses out on some of the more transformational possibilities of open policy making.

Meanwhile, it was reported by interviewees that the Cabinet Office team propose to develop a ‘matrix’ of open policy approaches, derived from case study activities. These case studies are currently being collected on the My Civil Service portal, and the Open Policy Making forum run by DemSoc (the Democratic Society) for (and badged by) the Cabinet Office. The intention is that the case studies will generate a matrix, the dimensions of which civil servants could use to see what kinds of open methods they should use for the particular policy questions they are facing, at particular stages of policy development. While this tool would fulfil the IFG’s criterion of multiple models dependent on context, it does not clarify the overarching policy process into which these approaches would slot. This Review concludes that, for practitioners and stakeholders alike, there is still a need for the “*clear model*” promised in the Reform Plan.

## - Evidence and Robustness

One of the chief concerns of civil servants and external experts interviewed in this Review is that open policy making methods may lack robustness or representativeness. As the overviews of methods below show, these doubts are well founded, especially because insights gathered via digital media often tend not to be systematically sampled, but rather to be self-selecting. The policy maker cannot weigh what is received in terms of the population it may or may not represent, but only by the perceived quality of ideas in what it contains.

Interviewees felt that this lack of robustness may not be a problem, but only if the open input is not taking the place of systematically developed evidence – and again this is where the question of the prevailing policy model comes in. Interviewees expressed concerns that open policy making might supersede or replace evidence-based policy making, in which case the results could be less democratic, and arguably less open. The Cabinet Office’s position as expressed on the OPM portal (that OPM “*does not change the core tasks...*” and including evaluation) may be reassuring in this regard, but the sense that the traditional cycle is to be replaced with something new still pertains, and that in turn raises the question of what may be lost. In the meantime, according to some interviewees, there is less social research being undertaken, and the new methods are not yet defined. This Study could be seen as a case in point: Part One established that there is only limited work being undertaken in Defra to refresh its segmentation models, while this Part Two Review highlights uncertainties over what kinds of audience insight can be provided by the use of the open methods which are currently being explored. It would be safer to assume the two approaches could be complementary; as one external interviewee commented: “*Use social research to make open policy work*”.

Interviewees considered that it is also not the case that open policy making should be antagonistic to a formal evidence base – it is just that Government may not develop and own that evidence base as they once did. External experts put the point that a more unbounded approach to evidence would invite external partners to bring their own evidence which would then feed into the collaborative policy development process. Likewise, the Reform Plan does include proposals for the ‘What Works’ networks, which will sit outside central government departments and gather insight and expertise from a range of practitioners (for instance, NICE leading the health network – see HMG 2013). In this way external research could be fed into a shared evidence base, while new proposals will be tested before roll out.

Of course, as with the models of the policy process above, there has always been the sense that evidence-based policy making was an idealised state, with reality sometimes diverging from the rhetoric. As one external interviewee commented: *“The Government’s very selective with what it calls evidence; if they don’t like the public’s view they’ll find evidence to contradict it. It’s more like policy-based evidence making...”*. Potential ways forward include open policy making building on the (idealised foundations) of evidence-based policy, or becoming an (equally idealised) new approach, which also may never be fully realised in practice. Another external interviewee argued on similar lines, that in effect evidence-based policy making was not very democratic, given its reliance on a closed profession of evidence making, and that open policy making could be a corrective to that.

#### - **Better Policy Making?**

There was a strong sense among interviewees that open policy making would result in better policy making (better, it is assumed, than current – evidence based? – approaches). Asked outright whether OPM would be better, one internal interviewee was typical in answering: *“Of course, because it’s based on inputs from a wider set of people, some of whom are actually experienced in the issues they’re talking about.”* However, no interviewee was able to substantiate this position with evidence, and in this regard, the second part of the Study echoed the first in establishing that it is rare to be able to plot direct impacts from research, insight or other inputs, across to final policy outputs.

As commented in Report One, this is partly a consequence of a dearth of policy evaluations, and partly of an inconsistent methodology for policy evaluation (this issue is touched on again in the Conclusions and Implications below). The contention that OPM will lead to better policy was also challenged by an external interviewee who commented: *“It’s only any good if the civil service are listening to, and acting on, the inputs”*. The comment highlights a key blindspot in the policy process, which will surface regularly throughout this Review, and which we might call the ‘impact gap’. This gap is a little like the gap between the two models of the policy process drawn above, the reality of how policy is actually made ‘in the real world’. In the IFG’s report, that gap is called *“the gap between theory and practice”*; one of the aspects of policymaking which accounts for its existence is the absence of ministers from the model (IFG 2011). That analysis seems to echo observations from interviewees in the Review in relation to open methods: inputs can be made into the process from the outside, but what happens next? This impact gap applies to both traditional evidence-based inputs and newer more open ones, but it may be more apparent when those making the inputs are more external, less professional, and more numerous (in the most unbounded of approaches: citizens). Identifying and bridging this gap could be a key to making better policy.

A further clue as to the nature of the gap between evidence inputs and policy outputs comes from the Civil Service Reform Plan itself. Chapter 2 on better policy making also announced plans for a Contestable Policy Making Fund, which would provide matched funding to external bodies interested in generating policy ideas in particular areas. Ten areas have been announced, and the first grant has been awarded (to the IPPR, for a project on how civil servants work when abroad). The One Year On report on the Reform Plan (July 2013) presents the Fund as a tangible sign that the Reform agenda is “*breaking the Civil Service monopoly on policy advice*” (HM Government 2013). However it is also notable that the extent to which the Fund represents an ‘open’ form of policy making is debatable: the Reform Plan clarifies that “*Ministers will continue to have the final say over whether to accept policy advice generated in this open way*”. The policy marketplace can be opened up so far, but ultimately ministers must have a monopoly over what goes forward to the statute book.

### - **Audiences of Interest**

The most unbounded and radical approaches to open policy making involve ordinary citizens who are included in policy development processes as equals – as is discussed in the next section, on ‘Co-production’. However, in reality, for instance in electronic consultations, or in early engagement activities with potential partners, the main audience of interest for central government is composed of stakeholder organisations, representative bodies and delivery partners (some of whom Government may fund or regulate in any case). In the context of this Study, the first part of which reviews segmentation models of the general public and its subgroups, it could appear that an interest in the public as the audience in question, is replaced in OPM with an interest in stakeholder organisations. This in turn could lead to “*a narrowing of engagement*”, as one internal interviewee put it.

Some of these concerns echo those above about representativeness. If the inputs from open methods are supposed to be representative of the general public, then there is likely to be a problem. As we shall see in the context of consultations, there are concerns about how representative membership organisations actually are. In turn of individuals, concerns were voiced by interviewees about groups who are less politically engaged, or digitally literate; these concerns overlay obvious limitations about digital methods reaching a self-selecting audience (what one internal interviewee characterised as “*people with free facetime minutes*”).

Again, interviewees felt that these problems could be lessened if social research methods were used alongside open methods, to “*make them work*”. This could either involve some element of profiling or segmenting respondents, or involve the two processes –the evidence based and the open – running alongside each other, such that innovative ideas developed through open methods could be tested and evidenced with systematic research methods.

## - **Openness, Innovation and Risk**

We have already seen how open policy making is not dichotomous (open or closed) but rather sits on a continuum – as in that from “*least*” to “*most collaborative*” (IFG 2012). Indeed those relative degrees of openness are one of the attributes that make OPM hard to define, and which argue for multiple models.

Those practitioners and experts who come at OPM from a participatory democracy perspective tend to argue for the most unbounded, and ‘radical’, approaches. For instance, in a recent review of the literature on co-production for the Welsh Government, the authors argue that the more open the approach to co-production, the greater the potential for innovation (Brook Lyndhurst 2013). However, at the same time, they also conclude that the more radical the approach, the greater the risks for policy makers. These risks chiefly relate to trying something new and failing – co-production being as yet a relatively untried set of approaches in public policy. The risks also include the threats to policy makers’ status, partly because the ‘external’ ideas may work better than anything the policy maker may have come up with themselves (they are supposed to be the experts). But partly the threat is a cultural one: the prevailing ethos of policy making is ‘command and control’ (see e.g. Chapman 2004), whereas co-production (especially in its most unbounded forms) calls for the sharing or devolving of control from the governing organisation to its partners.

For open policy making to take hold then, there must be a change of culture among civil servants and policy makers, whereby failures are viewed as opportunities for learning. This is not a new challenge: indeed the critiques of ‘command and control’ policy making go back further than Jake Chapman and his Demos pamphlet *System Failure* (ibid.). Chapman drew on systems thinking, and called on the Government to become a learning organisation. Those calls are being echoed in current approaches to OPM, grounded in digital thinking – which is in some ways unsurprising considering the internet as the epitome of a soft system. As one example, the Government’s Digital Strategy calls for the adoption of ‘agile’ platforms; technically, this means programmes or packages which are released in an early stage of development, then improved iteratively through use. Interestingly ‘agile’ has been watered down and now appears all over the Reform landscape, usually meaning low cost, or highly cost efficient. In its true sense however, ‘agile’ processes call for an acceptance of trial and error – and this in turn is what OPM will need to do if it is to be truly open, and consistent with digital approaches. As one expert interviewee put it: “*OPM requires new skills and a new culture. It needs to be more agile. Circular, never ending, all negotiable*”.

## - **Cost Implications**

At the workshop for this Review, some Defra staff were clear that the OPM agenda was being approached from the context of the austerity programme and strict budgetary limits. They argued that OPM processes would not just be risk-constrained, but cost-constrained. Echoing the arguments made by Brook Lyndhurst, they suggested that the more unbounded or open the approaches, the higher the costs would be – and this certainly makes sense in the context of an online consultation, where myriad responses from individual citizens will be more resource intensive to gather, process and analyse than pooled responses from a handful of expert organisations.

Similar concerns were apparent among the civil servants attending the Sciencewise Community of Practice event – “costs were a concern”, the minutes note (Sciencewise 2013). Furthermore, they endorsed the case that more open – in this case, more dialogic – forms of engagement, could be more resource intensive, fearing “a loss in capability if cuts affect the ability to do dialogue”. Again, these concerns about a drop-off in the amount of insight on which to make policy depend on the idea of OPM as an alternative to evidence-based methods: if traditional (research-based) methods are reduced or stopped, and OPM approaches do not fill the gap, then on balance there is less insight. A similar view was put by one external interviewee, who argued that either way, OPM was unlikely to represent a cost saving: “Any department who currently does engagement badly will need to spend resources to get better. There is no saving short term. Anything will cost you more.” The Sciencewise pamphlet from earlier this year comes from a very similar perspective in noting “the inconvenient lesson” from past public understanding of science stand-offs (e.g. the BSE crisis) that new mechanisms for participatory policy making will require new institutions, and these will require new funds (Burall et al 2013).

This reality is a challenge to both the participatory strand of OPM, as above, and those coming from the digital by default perspective. Indeed digital staff interviewed for this Review also commented that the digital agenda is also dependent on funds coming in – more of an ‘invest to save’ model than a simple ‘more from less’ model. The imperative, one internal interviewee noted, was for “ad hoc, low cost/ no cost, approaches to engagement”. And the worry was that, without OPM furnishing such approaches, where traditional methods of insight and engagement were stripped out, they would not be replaced.

What forms of OPM are developed, and how unbounded and open they are, is likely to be determined as much by what funds the Government puts in as by what risks civil servants are prepared to take on.

## - **Co-ordinating Open Policy Making**

As this section of the Review has established, the task at hand for Departments is to flesh out the concept, methods and processes of OPM. As one external expert said “At the moment it’s just a label. As a philosophy it needs a lot more work.”

The Open Policy Making team are themselves trying to co-ordinate that work, following the appropriately ‘open’ and non-prescriptive methodology of encouraging each Department (via their Heads of Profession) to explore what OPM means for them, and to develop their own bespoke approaches. In the spirit of co-production, they are pushing the agenda forward in collaboration with a number of external partners. This is indicative of the current approach to OPM: on the one hand the Government is rightly sharing ownership, but on the other, this could be seen simply as outsourcing tasks. If that outsourcing also is not resourced, then Government is in the hands of their external partners to determine if and where progress is made. This situation will be familiar to readers of Report One from this Review, in which progress on developing co-produced segmentation models in Defra is dependent on consensus building and shared resourcing.

This collaborative approach is also in keeping with the distributed nature of digital working. This in turn means that best practice grows iteratively, and there is no ‘guidance’ as such from the OPM team (who are “less coercive” than GDS, as one external interviewee put it). In this context, the most useful guidance for policy makers is as likely to come from



external providers as from the Cabinet Office team themselves. It can also be recalled that the lines between internal to, and external from, Government are deliberately blurred by the OPM team itself, and across many of those working on this emerging agenda.

The quick survey of the field undertaken for this Review suggests that the following network of organisations is currently co-developing the OPM agenda:

- The Cabinet Office Open Policy Making team – positioning themselves at the centre of the network, at least in so far as providing resources to civil servants as part of a co-operation-based Centre for Expertise. They currently run the OPM portal (<http://my.civilservice.gov.uk/policy/>); this may in turn evolve into ‘the Matrix’, a repository of case studies and best practice from across Government, arranged by context and stage in the policy process, such that other civil servants can search to find out what methods might be applicable to their current policies in development.

There are then three nodes, or clusters of organisation, in the network:

*i) Policy/Governance Organisations*

These include:

- The Institute for Government, who have set the high-level policy context (e.g. hosting the launch of the Civil Service Reform Plan, and providing some of the foundational thinking – e.g. in Hallsworth et al 2011, Rutter et al 2012).
- The Democratic Society (DemSoc), who currently run the Open Policymaking forum (<http://openpolicy.demsoc.org/>) on behalf of (and badged by) the Cabinet Office; the good practice collected here may feed into ‘the Matrix’.

*ii) Participative Policy Organisations*

These include:

- Involve is a not-for-profit group who champion public participation in social policy (especially in challenging areas like international development and climate change); they particularly champion offline and face to face methods of engagement. Involve is part funded by BIS and the research councils, and links into the Sciencewise network.
- Sciencewise is an Expert Resource Centre (ERC), funded by BIS to encourage the use of public dialogue in policy making, especially in the context of science and technology-related issues. Sciencewise runs ‘dialogue exercises’ on specific policy questions, bringing expert and lay publics alongside policy makers (recent projects have been undertaken with Defra, and DECC). Sciencewise regards OPM as an umbrella for its dialogue activities and methods – hence the contributions it has made to the debate through recent seminars (eg. Rutter 2013) and pamphlets (Burall et al 2013).

*iii) Digital Engagement Organisations*

These include:

- Delib, a software and viral communications company which have developed a number of digital democracy apps and software to enable public participation in policy. These

include CitizenSpace, Defra's preferred interface for online consultation (see in the consultation overview below, and <https://www.citizenspace.com/info> ).

- Helpful Technology, a web design and online participation consultancy led by Steph Gray (recently head of digital strategy in a Government department); they currently provide the digital engagement toolkit on the OPM portal: <http://www.digitalengagement.info/> ).
- FutureDigital is a think tank/consultancy founded by Andy Williamson, previously of the GDS. They specialise in digital engagement and public policy projects, and work with governments internationally. Andy is also an Associate of Involve.

External interviewees observed that, in keeping with co-production approaches by Government working with stakeholders (see below), what work gets taken forward by this network will largely depend on how much leadership Government puts in, and how much of the work will be done by whom. Resources will again determine outcomes, but so will questions of control. One interviewee went on to suggest that, unlike in classic co-production, it may be desirable for the Cabinet Office team to lead the work on their own terms, in order to retain control of the nascent Centre for Expertise, and so define what civil servants should be doing, thereby ensuring they deliver on their commitments in the Reform Plan. Again, the tensions of adopting a truly open approach to policy making for central Government are apparent.

#### - **OPM Methods**

The rest of the main body of this Review explores in detail each of the methods associated with open policy making. The Civil Service Reform Plan is slightly more explicit about methods for open policy making than it is on definitions. It lists the following:

*Co-production; Crowdsourcing; Policy labs; Web-based tools, platforms and new media.*

However, members of the Defra Steering Group for this Review commented in a workshop that there was also a lack of formal definition of these methods; hence the body of this Review explores each in turn. It is certainly the case that there is also room for considerable overlap between a number of these – e.g. crowdsourcing and co-production, and digital tools with everything (that being a medium more than an activity).

The Defra Steering Group also suggested two more specific methods that further overlap with the above, but are specific to Defra's areas of work:

*Consultation* (increasingly digital by default, but also overlapping with co-production, especially when it involves early engagement with stakeholders); and *Citizen Science* (a specific kind of crowdsourcing, it can be argued).

This bespoke selection of methods is again in keeping with the OPM team's calls for each Department to develop its own approaches to OPM. However, the two additional methods identified by Defra may not just be relevant to Defra's remit and ways of working, but may have wider applicability. In particular, this Review will argue that consultation in all its forms (including the more fluid forms of ongoing stakeholder engagement) should be explored as a tool for achieving open policy making. Reciprocally, 'open' and digital methods should be applied to consultation to increase its reach and effectiveness.

As with the methods, so with the other dimensions of OPM: the task is now for Defra and other Departments to understand and explore the main approaches and establish which they will benefit from taking forward, and how.

## 1.2 Co-Production

- **Background & Definitions**

Co-production has the longest heritage of all the methods associated with open policy making (see eg. Boyle et al 2006). While it is not a new concept per se, it is a relatively new term in central government policy making. In this context, what co-production might entail is still amorphous and ill-defined. As much as being a method, it is a mindset of loose ideas that are being examined by policy makers, and gradually beginning to cohere. Co-production antedates open policy making, and much of the participatory democracy strand (as opposed to the digital strand) in OPM relates to co-productive approaches. With its emphasis on opening up the design and delivery of services to those who will use them, co-production represents the conceptual heart of open policy making. But as we shall see, co-production in its most unbounded forms is challenging for central government, and achieving open policy making is likely to require a careful repackaging of its ideas.

The Cabinet Office issued guidance on co-production in 2009: subtitled ‘a new partnership with citizens’ (Horne & Shirley 2009). The guide defines co-production as “*a partnership between citizens and public services to achieve a valued outcome. Such partnerships empower citizens to contribute more of their own resources (time, will power, expertise and effort) and to have greater control over service decisions and resources*”. While the concept was being trailed as new to central government in 2009, it has a long heritage in community development and social cohesion. It first appeared in work on crime rates and neighbourhood problems in the US (specifically Chicago) in the 1970s.

The sociologist who coined the term, Elinor Ostrom, has since explained co-production by saying: “*Clients are acted upon. Co-production implies that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them.*” (Ostrom 1996). This description highlights the reframing of public individual as citizen not client, and shows how the citizen as user of services can become citizen as producer. Interestingly this approach came out of efforts to counteract urban decline: the idea of co-production being to bind citizens in to the places they live through having a hand in the decisions that affect them. In this way, co-production has a common inheritance with concepts of social capital (e.g. Putnam 2000) and collective efficacy (Sampson 2012). The concept first emerged from work on crime reduction and social inclusion; it has also been applied in the UK in the context of health and social care (e.g. patient as co-producer of outcomes with professionals).

It is notable that both definitions above identify the citizen as co-producer, and this is in keeping with more unbounded (or ‘radical’) versions of co-production. As with the discussion of the ‘components’ of open policy making in the previous section [see also Figure 1], co-production as a concept spans a range of approaches, some of which are more unbounded than others. In the context of co-production this not only relates to how much control is shared (or ‘given away’) by the co-ordinating organisation, but who that control is shared with. The originators of co-production saw the process from the citizen’s perspective. Other definitions assume that the main co-producers are the government, and its delivery partners or stakeholders; for instance a paper comparing participative policy arrangements in Canada with those in South America states “*Co-production concerns the application (or organization or production) of public policy. It occurs when the state is not alone in being involved in the implementation of a public policy, but shares*

*responsibility with non-state organizations, from the private sector, the third sector, or both sectors at once.*" (Vaillancourt, 2009).

In this definition focussing on the state level the individual citizen has been replaced by the stakeholder organisation. A recent review for the Welsh Government labelled this kind of mediated (and more bounded) co-production as "*co-production-by-proxy*" (Brook Lyndhurst 2013). The authors' closing question to the Welsh Government is how far do they wish to go (or indeed can they go) towards more 'radical' forms of co-production which directly engage citizen-users? In so doing they draw on a body of work presenting co-production as a sliding scale or spectrum of engagement, from traditional forms of delivery undertaken solely by the state, to 'self-help' or voluntary forms of delivery undertaken by citizens acting without the state's input. Co-production is the midpoint on this scale (see e.g. Loeffler et al 2012).

Co-production as a concept then is slippery (or adaptable) in terms of how open or bounded it is, and who is involved in the co-producing. The literature is also clear that co-production is also imprecise about where in the process of policy development and delivery the co-productive activity is occurring. Vaillancourt, for instance, draws a distinction between co-production as implementation, and co-construction (or co-design for other authors) as policy development. He states that "*co-construction stands upstream from the adoption of public policy, whereas co-production lies downstream, at the moment of its implementation*" (ibid. 277). This distinction seems important, especially from the central government perspective. For instance, Defra staff participating in the workshop for this Review commented how it was easier for Government to be open in the earliest stages of policy development, but that at some point they would need to shut down the debate and make some decisions on the way forward. Conversely, Government is also used to charging delivery bodies with co-delivering key Government policies (e.g. in the context of Defra's work, WRAP for recycling, or the Carbon Trust for business energy use). Given the potential limits to how far Government can give away control over policy development and delivery, it is notable that Cabinet Office guidance does not distinguish between these different phases of co-production. Meanwhile the Brook Lyndhurst review advises the Welsh Government that the leading examples of co-production feature "*either co-design or co-delivery, but rarely both*" (Brook Lyndhurst 2013:4).

At the most unbounded, radical, end of co-production questions can be raised about central Government's capacity to engage fully in co-production: as one external interviewee commented: "*Always remember: we're the Government and we have to legislate alone, ultimately*". Certainly co-production asks serious questions of Government, and about governance: in its most unbounded forms, co-production would change the government/stakeholder relationship and roles almost beyond recognition. Such an approach would certainly require a lot of new vocabulary, as well as different ideas of what is effective policy or 'better policy making'. Policy evaluation processes may also have to change radically, operating over longer timescales, and against more fluid objectives; who would be accountable for policy outcomes is also a good question.

Perhaps it is for these reasons that most of the co-production activity in Government to date is of the more bounded kind, and involving stakeholders and delivery partners, not individual citizens. Activities of this kind, as one internal Defra interviewee noted, are not so new at all: "*I can't think of any single policy that was entirely done by us alone.*"

## • Strengths & Weaknesses

In considering the benefits and drawbacks of co-productive approaches, it is worth retaining the distinction between more open and radical approaches featuring citizens, and more bounded versions featuring stakeholders.

On the former, citizen-partnered approaches, it is argued by some that the potential benefits to be gained from the activity are greater the more radical and open the approach becomes (Brook Lyndhurst 2013). A similar sense of balance is apparent in the Cabinet Office guidance, but those authors are more equivocal, saying that the risks inherent in a co-production approach should be balanced against the potential benefits to citizens (Horne & Shirley 2009). What both these conclusions have in common is the emphasis on risk, and on the sliding scale of co-production as some sort of equivalence between risk to government and potential gain to citizen.

The Brook Lyndhurst review is structured around the main “*benefits and challenges*” to adopting a co-production approach; the main benefits can be summarised as

- Improving the effectiveness of services (shaping them around ‘user experts’)
- Enabling services to deliver multiple benefits (i.e. ‘softer’ community development benefits such as enhanced social capital)
- Reducing the costs of service provision (i.e. citizen-producers commit their skills and time pro bono; their enhanced social capital is also likely to reduce their personal need to draw on the services they co-develop)
- Making services more resilient (i.e. avoiding erroneous policies, and rescuing failing services locally)

Chief among the challenges to central government adopting co-production approaches is the notion of risk (largely that these are untried methods, but also that they inherently involve trial and error), coupled with that of threat (to civil servants’ status as being in control of policy, and also to their identities as experts – this is an undercurrent in the Reform Plan’s proclamation that “*Whitehall does not have a monopoly on policy making expertise*” – HMG 2012). It is also interesting in the context of this Review to stress Brook Lyndhurst’s identifying of co-production as a challenge to policy evaluation. They note that the benefits of co-production activities (especially of the more open variety) often take a number of years to appear, and that many may be ‘softer’ and additional to the main aims of the activity – as such they will require qualitative evidence. It could be added that, since the precise specification (including objectives) of an intervention would also only be determined part way through the process of collaborative working, it would be difficult to evaluate against these from the outset. Just as fully open co-production challenges accepted models of policy making, so it asks questions of models of policy evaluation.

Turning to the more bounded approaches involving government and stakeholder organisations (‘co-production by proxy’), it should be reiterated that these are not new in Whitehall. For instance Defra has long been involved in running working groups and stakeholder fora of various sorts, out of which policy is developed and projects are taken forward (e.g. social research, or pilot projects). Indeed, the review of the Pro-Environmental Segmentation Model also found that it was a tool in part developed with stakeholders, and certainly designed to be used by them more than by Defra (“*It was basically a tool for others...*”) in an approach that could be called co-delivery. Given this

familiarity with co-production it was notable that several Defra staff in the interviews and the workshop for this Review put forward the criticism that co-production could also be considered “*just outsourcing*”. This criticism bit harder when it came with the observation that it was “*just outsourcing without resourcing*”.

Based on the evidence from the interviews for this Review, the main downside to co-production approaches from the Government’s perspective is that they can easily become reliant on the stakeholders: it is their agendas, their energy and ultimately their say-so that will determine whether a policy agenda or activity will move forward, and in what direction. For some internal interviewees, it was this recognition that made them feel outsourcing along more traditional lines, in which Defra paid partners to deliver policies or services for them, would be more effective and accountable. Bringing nothing to the table, Defra could be short of leverage on stakeholders who became reluctant to move forward on a joint agenda (a point made in reference to a number of the stakeholder working groups below). One interviewee commented that Defra should bring a budget with them to each group, effectively to seed-fund ideas developed by the group: “*currently there is a lack of funds to get early agreed actions off the ground*”.

This question of how to ensure working groups go beyond early engagement (or “early talking” as one internal interviewee called it) to undertake co-design, and then co-delivery activities has been raised in the first part of this study, in the context of the development of segmentation models in Defra. That Review of Defra’s Pro-Environmental Model highlighted the way in which the Model acted as the catalyst to assemble a large community of stakeholders with a common interest in sustainable lifestyles. By developing the P-E Model, Defra brought “*collateral*” to the new community, and was able to encourage others to take action. Indeed so strongly built were the connections in the network that stakeholder organisations are continuing to make use of the P-E Model, long after Defra has stopped providing resources for its further development. The Review goes on to highlight other Defra segmentation models – notably the Farmers Framework, and the Biodiversity Tiered Typology – which have succeeded in building strong stakeholder groups, and galvanising them to take action. Segmentation is highlighted in the Report as one type of ‘collateral’ which it is highly beneficial for Departments to bring if working groups are to move forward to undertake meaningful collaborative action.

Lack of resources for collaborative working from central Government was also felt to be a problem from stakeholders’ perspective. Indeed, there was a sense among interviewees that the amount of stakeholder engagement – mostly in the shape of informal consultation and participation in working groups – is on the increase, and that this is placing a burden on stakeholders (what one might call ‘collaboration fatigue’ – something wider than the traditional ‘consultation fatigue’). This is especially true for smaller stakeholders, and those from the third sector who may be struggling for core funding. A lack of resources (both money and time) could effectively exclude such groups from participating in co-productive activities, leaving a selection of stakeholders which was skewed towards the interests of bigger and better-off groups. It might also jeopardise the long-term involvement of all kinds of stakeholder organisations in these processes. Offering core expenses to release key staff from stakeholder organisations was one of many suggestions put forward by interviewees for how to run working groups more equitably; another was to introduce regulation in some sectors or bodies, making it part of their duties that they participate in such processes.

One of the implications from this Review is that guidance on best practice in running working groups is necessary, and then ensuring that groups follow this consistently (see

the Conclusions and Implications below). Jill Rutter's paper on opening up policy making ends with a set of bulleted recommendations for how best to run such groups (IFG 2012). Key points include that working groups show their thinking as well as their conclusions, and that other bodies outside the process (e.g. government departments, smaller or different stakeholders) are also invited to comment on their decisions. She concludes that, if in doubt, working groups should disclose more rather than less about their remit and deliberations.

- **Applications in Defra**

As noted above, there are few examples of unbounded or radical co-production with citizens anywhere in central Government, let alone in Defra. About the closest example identified in this Review was the community in-shore fisheries project, as a result of which local fishers were reported by interviewees to be coming together to sell their catches through a community-owned fish box scheme. This could be considered towards the more radical end of the spectrum of co-production, as it has worked with the audience for intervention (here the fishers) throughout, and they have gone on to deliver the scheme (albeit they are not the end users of the service, and the service is not a 'policy' as such). Further credentials for the unboundedness of the project are that it emerged through a Defra-funded action-based research competition, which identified the context (fishers, the fish market and the supply chain), but not the problem or methods (bidders suggested these – hence a genuinely co-designed and iterative approach). Finally, the project has come about by creating links between the fishermen and communities through wider consultation, precisely not through the usual stakeholder organisations (80% of inshore fishermen not being members of the Under Ten Association).

The more obvious, and much more numerous examples, of co-production in Defra involve stakeholder fora and working groups. While these are not normally considered in Defra as examples of co-production, they clearly fulfil definitions of more bounded forms of 'co-production-by-proxy'. It is also notable that these kinds of groups form the bulk of the case studies in the IFG report on opening up policy making (Rutter 2012); as has been briefly mentioned, the leading example of open policy making cited in that report is the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (which gets a tick against 5 'components' or "*models*" of open policy making, although it is not stated whether the Board is at the 'least' or 'more collaborative' end of each component).

The interviews and workshop for this Review revealed an increase in the number of stakeholder groups convened by Defra. While working groups have always been part of Defra's method and practice (their core areas of natural environment, farming and fishing involve many agencies and stakeholders) it was notable that no register or list of such bodies was found. Indeed, one interviewee asked us to draw an inventory up, with the view that Defra should be working towards reducing the number of groups (thereby streamlining the process of engagement for stakeholders). Most interviewees were involved with one group or another, and nearly all spoke of a wide variation in process and resourcing across the groups.

This Review has identified eight working groups, plus three expert advisory panels whose principal role is to keep policy makers up to speed with developments in the academic and wider research world. This is only a selection of the current and recent stakeholder groups in Defra, and a thorough audit will be necessary to capture them all. In the context of this Review, it is interesting to note that Defra is currently reviewing the work of its 'evidence



advisory committees' (including the three Panels described here), to see whether they are contributing effectively to Defra's use of evidence, and whether there may be opportunities for streamlining their number or remit. In itself, that review suggests the relationship between stakeholder engagement (here, with academic experts) and better policy making is a live issue in Defra.

Notwithstanding the incomplete selection, each of the groups identified is briefly described here, in part to illustrate the variations between them – interviewees noted the different approaches, remits and range of resources allocated to each, and speculated that there may be better and worse ways of co-ordinating such groups, even allowing for the different contexts and purposes pursued by each.

- **The Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE)** was established in 2011 based on the independent advisory group report 'Responsibility and Cost Sharing for Animal Health and Welfare'. The AHWBE is one of the few examples of open policy making in practice; it brings together independent appointees with farming/welfare expertise and Director-level Defra officials to make joint, published, recommendations to Ministers on strategic animal health and welfare policy issues. It is interesting to note that external members serve in an individual capacity as non-executive board directors rather than as formal representatives of particular sectors or organisations. The Board advises on all strategic health and welfare issues relating to livestock kept in England. Policy recommendations and updates are published online (e.g. reducing bovine tuberculosis).

The Board is the only open policy making activity named by Defra in its 'One Year On' submission on Civil Service Reform (Defra 2013). An internal interviewee commented that the Board is an example which takes collaborative working "*to another level*". However it was not always the case that the Board was able to reach consensus, and in such instances the Board was reported by interviewees to "*stick to the 80% which could be agreed*" - reflecting difficulties in tackling the most contentious issues, which are not wholly overcome through adopting co-productive approaches. Finally, the Board was saluted in the IFG report as "*a step change in breaking the civil service-ministerial monopoly on policy formation*" (IFG 2012:32).

- **The Farming Regulation Task Force** was established in June 2010 by James Paice, then Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, as part of the Coalition Government's growth agenda. The Task Force, chaired by Richard MacDonald, ex-Director General of the NFU, was tasked to carry out an independent review of relevant regulations and their implementation, and advise on how best to achieve a risk-based system of regulation whilst maintaining high environmental, welfare and safety standards. In terms of their review of farming regulations, the Task Force is reported to have been "*more moderate*" as a group than its individual voices might have been.

Subsequently, the **Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Group** was established in February 2012 to hold Government and industry to account in meeting the commitments made in response to the Task Force report. The Implementation Group, also chaired by Richard Macdonald, is designed to be independent of Government; however Defra provide a full-time secretariat for the Group which sits within the Better Regulation team. One internal interviewee commented that "*giving them policy input helped them to be more realistic*" – for example, the Group acknowledge the benefits from regulations in giving smaller farmers a level playing field. In keeping with open policy making principles, the Task Force's

recommendations, implementation and policy updates have been published regularly online.

- **The Green Food Project** was developed in response to the Natural Environment White Paper, published in June 2011, which emphasised a commitment to bring together Government, industry and environmental partners to reconcile policy goals for improving the environment with those for increasing food production. It was launched by James Paice (then Minister of State for Agriculture and Food) and brought together a steering group of interested stakeholders and organisations (including the World Wildlife Fund, University of Oxford, Defra, National Farmers' Union and the British Retail Consortium) to debate the challenges related to the food system up to 2050. These included research and technology, knowledge exchange, future workforce, investment, building effective structures, valuing ecosystem services, land management, consumption and waste.

The Project serves as a good example of bounded, stakeholder co-production, with Defra in the convenor role. For instance, participants in the three working groups in the Consumption strand (Behaviours; Diet; Growth) co-developed final reports in their areas, and agreed on how useful the opportunity to develop strategy together on these issues had been. However, interviewees also reported the Project to suffer from some of the limitations of stakeholder co-production. These included a lack of Defra resources to seed-fund early ideas, instances of stakeholder fatigue, and inertia when different members could not agree consensual ways forward (on the components of a healthy and sustainable diet). One interviewee commented "*There is ambiguity over who will take this work forward; we'll be in partners' hands*". One example of this is in the context of segmentation, where a Defra-commissioned scoping report (Darnton 2010) was discussed by the group, but it will fall to external partners to carry the work forward, with Defra in an advisory role.

One additional 'open' element to the Project involved an online forum, which was designed as an accessible way for citizens to share their views and become involved in the early stages of the Project. The forum ran from 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012 and was hosted on the Defra website and advertised through stakeholder organisations and project partners, as well as on the Defra website and Twitter feeds.

- **The Greenhouse Gas Action Plan (GHGAP)** was developed as part of a commitment by the agricultural industry to help tackle climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by three million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year from between 2018 and 2022. The principle of the Action Plan is that Government works in partnership with industry and environmental organisations rather than increasing regulation or additional budgetary demands for incentives. The initiative involves a partnership between 16 organisations across the agricultural industry to help farmers, growers and land managers carry out the GHGAP's priority actions (e.g. by being more energy efficient, better management of crops and livestock and reducing their carbon footprint). In addition to the co-productive process, regular progress updates communicate ways that changes in agricultural practice are reducing carbon emissions.
- **The Biodiversity People Engagement Group (PEG)** was created by Defra to support *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* (Defra 2011b). Defra established the PEG to drive effective delivery of Outcome 4 of Biodiversity 2020: "*By 2020, significantly more people will be engaged in biodiversity issues, aware of its value and taking positive action*". It is expected to stimulate greater

and more effective public engagement activity supporting delivery of real and significant outcomes by 2020. The PEG is part of the overall governance structure for Biodiversity 2020 and reports to Defra's Biodiversity Programme Board. It is chaired by Doug Hulyer, and has a diverse membership drawn from 25 delivery partners and independent stakeholders. The Group's role is primarily advisory, as a think tank and ideas generator. In addition to advising government, it has an important outward-facing influencing role seeking to promote its ideas and to catalyse more effective action by all partners; as an internal interviewee said "*There is an assumption that the partners will do the work. ...Engagement is not seen as a priority at present.*" Each member has committed to put in four days' work a year, although that is mostly spent in PEG meetings, and it is debatable how much resource they have to carry the work forward outside meetings. The interviewee observed "*There is very little secretariat support, and very little capacity for us to act*".

- **The Ecosystem Markets Task Force** was launched in June 2011 as a key commitment of the Natural Environment White Paper, *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*; it sat until Spring 2013. It was chaired by Ian Cheshire of Kingfisher Group and reported jointly to the Secretaries of State for: Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Business, Innovation and Skills; and Energy and Climate Change. The Task Force was charged with advising the Secretaries of State about the opportunities for UK business from expanding green goods, services, products, investment vehicles and markets which value and protect ecosystem services. The Task Force was hosted by Defra, who provided secretariat support to enable its smooth running and reporting; it also commissioned independent reviews of the evidence base. The Task Force's membership included business leaders and the aim was that its recommendations should marry environmental protection with opportunities for growth. The Task Force's final report in March 2013 ('Realising Nature's Value' – EMTF 2013) identified a number of win-win areas including biodiversity offsetting (as part of planning and development processes) and water cycle catchment management (alongside production processes). Underlining the Task Force's independent status, the Government issued a written response to the final report in September 2013.
- **The Natural Capital Committee (NCC)** also arose from The Natural Environment White Paper, and was established in 2012 as an independent advisory body to government. It is chaired by Professor Dieter Helm and consists of seven experts from academia and business (ecology, environmental science, economics, business). The Committee is co-ordinated by Defra, which supplies a substantial Secretariat (reportedly of four or five permanent staff). The NCC reports to the Economic Affairs Committee (chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer) and aims to provide independent expert advice on the state of English natural capital. The Natural Capital Committee is designed to ensure that Government has a better informed understanding of the value of Natural Capital, and will help it to prioritise actions to support and improve the UK's natural assets. As such, it aims to underline the relationship between the natural environment and economic and individual wellbeing, and to advise on the sustainable management of England's natural wealth.

It was also reported in an interview that co-ordination of the **Offshore Windfarms Group** has been passed from Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to Defra—principally on account of risks to birdlife.

As mentioned above, the Review has also identified three expert panels; while these are less clearly cases of a co-production approach, they fulfil the broader criteria of open

policy making, and link into another area of the literature on the role of expert advice in policymaking (usually written from the academic's perspective – see e.g. LWEC's Knowledge Exchange Guidelines, 2012).

- The Decc/Defra **Social Science Expert Panel** provides a useful example of inter-departmental working in setting up a joint Panel to improve policy by increasing the impact and quality of their social science research capabilities. The terms of reference of the Panel include identifying research needs, supporting the commissioning of research, providing expert advice and independent challenge, quality assuring social research projects, championing social science, and promoting inter-disciplinarity.
- Similarly Defra's **Science Advisory Council** operates under terms of reference pertaining to co-production, for example; 'co-opting experts to time limited sub-groups, chaired by a SAC Member, to review Departmental evidence plans or other cross-cutting or strategic issues.'
- Defra's **Economic Advisory Panel** has the stated purpose of supporting capacity and setting independent challenges to Defra's economists, and to provide novel insights into Defra research activities.

## 1.3 Consultation

- **Background & Definitions**

The Civil Service Reform Plan does not mention consultation as one of the open policy making methods it identifies. It was included in this Review at the request of the Steering Group, itself reporting in to Defra's Better Regulation Team (consultation being prerequisite of better regulation). Because consultation is inherently about opening up policy processes to external inputs, it can be seen as a forerunner of the open policy making agenda explored here. Indeed, on account of what can be learned from consultation activities to date, this Review will argue that it should be included among the methods considered by all Departments for achieving OPM. It is also important that it is considered alongside other open and digital methods, as there is much that consultation can learn from these innovative approaches. As this overview will demonstrate, consultation processes are already undergoing transformation: most obviously digitally, but also in terms of what constitutes best practice.

At first sight, consultation is a much more secure term than co-production or other methods associated with open policy making. Put simply, consultation can be defined as a regulatory process in which the opinions of public groups are sought. Consultation has always had its roots in participatory democracy: a primary rationale for consultation is to improve efficiency and transparency through citizen involvement in the policy making process. However, at this point (and the usual reference to 'the policy process') stability of terms breaks down. Indeed one of the main obstacles that arises in the literature is a lack of clarity over what is meant by '*consultation*'.

A joint ESRC/Defra funded study looked at how best to take account of stakeholder and public perspectives in policy development (Barnett 2007). The author Julie Barnett states that whilst consultation appears to be a generic term, it masks a range of processes involving stakeholders and citizens, including formal and informal consultation, pre-consultation and statutory consultation. Barnett argues that these are best taken together, and more meaningfully understood as '*engagement*'.

That report also defines engagement in a number of phases – in some ways presaging the discussions in this Review over how to model more open policy processes. Referring to a House of Commons Science and Technology Report, Barnett notes that consultation is typically viewed by officials in multiple ways. She goes on to define three broad types of engagement; *consultation* is characterised by an information flow between the initiator (e.g. Defra) and stakeholders or citizens, but without dialogue. *Communication* is defined as engagement by which information flows from the initiator to stakeholders but without feedback being sought. Finally, *participation* involves methods that allow negotiation, dialogue, debate and deliberation, with potential for stakeholder input in decision-making processes.

Although the Civil Service Reform Plan does not mention consultation in the chapter on open policy making, the following chapter, on 'Implementing Policy and Sharpening Accountability' explicitly points to methods for "*consulting on new policy ideas*" (HMG 2012: 18). Consultation is also alluded to in relation to freeing up civil servants from the bureaucratic burdens of policy making: what the Reform Plan calls replacing "*dead process with real engagement*" (HMG 2012:18). The language of 'real engagement' mirrors that used in the new Cabinet Office Consultation Principles, published in the same

month as the Reform Plan (July 2012 - see Cabinet Office 2012). Notably neither document defines “*real engagement*”.

Like the Reform Plan, the Consultation Principles are framed around capitalising on new digital technologies – all consultation activities should be ‘digital by default’. Because these technologies make it easier to consult “*more quickly and in a more targeted way than before*” (ibid.), there is an opportunity to remove the mandatory time limit on formal consultations: the 12 week default period is replaced by a flexible window, which could range from two weeks to eight weeks (although 12 weeks will still remain the maximum limit). Moreover, “*In some cases there will be no requirement for consultation at all and that may depend on the issue and whether interested groups have already been engaged in the policy making process*”. What this amounts to is a “*loosening up*” of consultation arrangements (as a Defra staff member said at the workshop for this Review), which in some ways recognises the ongoing spectrum of engagement which Julie Barnett wrote about in 2007. The net result is that consultation has become a more open-ended activity, and that stakeholder engagement functions in Government departments are growing in importance, as a new equivalent to customer insight. As one internal interviewee commented: “*Consultation shouldn’t be about big set pieces, but an ongoing understanding of the audience*”.

It should be noted that the process of consultation reform is not plain sailing. The House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee responded to the Cabinet Office’s new Principles in a report in January 2013 (*‘The Government’s new approach to consultation – Work in Progress’* – HoL 2013a), and then issued a further letter on hearing Oliver Letwin’s response (HoL 2013b). The Committee raised concerns in relation to the two main thrusts of the Principles: “*that they be shorter, and ‘digital by default’*”. In comments which have resonance across this Review on open policy making methods, they commented that while the Principles have “*the superficial attraction of speeding up consultation... quality would suffer if [stakeholders] were not given sufficient time to gather appropriate evidence*”. The Committee underlined its fears that the new approach meant that “*consultation will become a mere public relations exercise rather than a genuine means of influencing policy*”. The Committee closed by calling for a review of the Principles (more consultation on the consultation arrangements, as some have observed). At time of writing, the Government’s response is pending.

## • **Strengths & Weaknesses**

The benefits and drawbacks to more ‘open’ approaches to consultation are outlined below, arranged under three aspects: informal consultation as early engagement (note here obvious overlaps with co-production, as discussed above); formal consultation; online consultation (which overlaps with ‘formal consultation’, but also with ‘crowdsourcing’ and ‘social media’ in subsequent sections).

### - **Early engagement**

The main benefit of earlier engagement is, as it implies, that the opportunity for input comes earlier in the policy process; that in turn implies that the policy is more ‘open’ and malleable. In such contexts – and assuming that the area for consultation has in some way been sketched out - stakeholders should have a chance to frame questions as well as answers.

However, for some Defra staff interviewed for this Review, there was the possibility of too much engagement, too early. One said *“We do too much early talking here – for fear of not having stakeholders on board. But then the Government behaves independently and tries to dictate terms.”* This situation was felt to be ineffective from both parties’ perspective: over-engaged stakeholders and over-cautious Defra. Other internal interviews put forward the view that Defra should be able to frame a consultation exercise without too much ongoing engagement. Quite often these criticisms were framed as a sign of weakness or reluctance to claim expertise, among policy colleagues; one interviewee said *“Maybe we should be a bit stronger and clearer in what we’re consulting on, and say ‘this is our policy’. It might lead to mistakes, but at least it would be transparent”*. Meanwhile there was a challenging discussion at the workshop for this Review about how open it is truly possible for government to be when conducting informal consultation by means of early engagement. At the very least it was felt Defra should define the problem – but that even that was closing down the possibilities for open participation.

A Defra interviewee explained how the Department was beginning to understand the skills and resources required to offer effective opportunities for early engagement. First, it is proving very resource intensive; for example, Defra has a list of Top 50 stakeholder organisations and each needs engaging on a regular (for some, weekly) basis. Second, stakeholders prefer not to have that regular engagement remotely: *“Stakeholders want face to face time with you – then to tell everybody else they’ve had that face to face time! Perversely the call for more open consultation is pushing us towards more face to face engagement”*.

What emerges is a picture of ongoing conversations, which feed generally or strategically into the policy process. On one level this fulfils calls from those in the participatory democracy strand of open policy making, for continual engagement *“before the start and after the end”* of the process. However, such an unbounded approach raises questions on all sides about whether the shared activity amounts to informal consultation or ongoing conversation. From a civil servant perspective, this has implications for how the engagement is approached and reported; one interviewee commented *“Informal engagement is fantastic - but how do you evidence it? You need minutes, or some sort of report, but then that needs sharing with the stakeholder, and they want to circulate it for comment, and...”*. These procedural and methodological challenges are only just beginning to be understood by the civil servants involved in stakeholder engagement. The ambiguity also poses a serious challenge at policy profession level: if early engagement substitutes for formal consultation, as the Cabinet Office Principles suggest, then how can its outcomes be reported, and would or could the effectiveness of the engagement as consultation be evaluated?

The fluid nature of early engagement also raises material problems for stakeholders. A number of interviewees commented that stakeholders have two related problems: one is to work out *“where in the process are we?”*. The second is to judge how much effort and resource to put into the process at which points to influence the outcome most effectively. Such concerns might suggest that stakeholders would be more comfortable with a slightly less fluid and open approach, in a similar way to how policy makers have suggested more bounded (yet still informal) consultation based on a problem or proposal which Government has already defined. In any case, Defra staff at the workshop put forward the idea of a *“roadmap”* for stakeholders on each policy process or journey, thus enabling stakeholders to make strategic decisions about when and where best to concentrate their efforts. As one participant reported: *“My stakeholders are saying to me ‘Where’s the*

*timeline? What are the key points for influencing and engagement?'* Drawing such a roadmap would clearly be a challenge in the emerging landscape of open policy making, and again puts the emphasis on efforts to develop a new "clear model" (or models) of the policy process - see the discussions on OPM above.

Further worries emerged from Defra interviewees in relation to the potential substitution of early engagement for consultation, as the Cabinet Office Principles suggests. There is an assumption – among interviewees as well as in the Principles – that most of this early engagement will be with "*interested groups*" (Cabinet Office 2012). As in areas of co-production, policy makers may effectively become reliant on their partners in developing effective policies. The challenge here is not just one of control or consensus, but also of representativeness. If the stakeholder groups involved in these early engagements are not representative either of their members' view, or the rest of the audience group who are not members, will the outcomes of the engagement be representative of the whole audience, and thus valid? One internal interviewee commented that in this way "*open policy making could narrow engagement*".

#### - **Formal consultation**

The House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee's short response to Oliver Letwin's appearance includes the charge that the current system "*appears to be functioning reasonably on all sides*" – hence there is no pressing need for reform. The current system they endorse involves formal, often statutory consultation over a 12 week period. The Committee's main concern was that a shorter window to respond in would prevent stakeholders from submitting considered and complete evidence. This concern appears well-founded based on the interviews for this Review; a number of consultation staff commented that stakeholders need long lead times for formal consultations, so they can plan them into their workloads. A shorter timescale would be a barrier to processing responses from their members: "*How could they manage the amount of returns they'd get, especially in a six week window?*".

This comment underlines the assumption explicitly voiced by a number of interviewees that most meaningful responses will come from stakeholder organisations. There is nothing in the revised Principles which looks to change this – although one of the benefits of digital consultation is the apparently increased ease with which individuals can comment. To a great extent stakeholder organisations hold the key to whether formal consultations work well: in terms of number, representativeness and quality of responses. With an open policy making lens, the relationship between Defra and its stakeholders in conducting consultations could be described as one based in co-production, although some would say it was closer to outsourcing. For instance, on the CAP reforms, the NFU has agreed to undertake 40 consultation events around the country with its members. This has the obvious benefit of sparing Defra the need to reach a large number of farmers face to face; NFU will also handle the reporting of the workshops. The potential downsides of this approach are, once again, that Defra is dependent on the skills and characteristics of the NFU as stakeholder organisation. First there is the problem of representativeness: fewer than 50% of farmers in England are members. (Defra in fact has access to nearly all farmers through the Rural Payments Agency database; however an interviewee said that Defra simply could not find the resource to consult with each farmer individually on that basis, and then analyse the incoming responses.) Then there is the problem of analysis and reporting: stakeholder organisations were generally reported to submit a single synthesised response, which was felt to resemble the views of their



senior management. There is a challenge in ensuring that the breadth of views of members is reported (it was commented that NFU members are particularly diverse).

For these reasons, respondents tended to agree that good consultation should not rely simply on the views of professional stakeholder organisations, but should also include the views of non-members and other individuals. The desired balance between the two types of respondent was seen to vary from policy to policy: in many cases, interviewees felt that they only needed to seek expert views, as the proposals were specialist or technical. In these cases a greater openness to the consultation process would simply increase the amount of low quality or 'junk' responses, not 'declutter' the process at all. This issue of which audiences policy processes should be opened up to is a live question, not just for consultation but also other open policy methods, and it is discussed further below.

#### - **Online consultation**

The Cabinet Office identifies the main strengths of moving to a digital by default approach to consultation as speed and targeting (Cabinet Office 2012).

It is certainly true that digital consultation tools mean a consultation can be up and running more quickly than a print-and-post version. Topline analysis can also occur more quickly – often in real time – although that would also be true of any automated method of analysis. Reporting on the analysis is likely to require equally as much time, so the focus is again thrown back onto the timescale for responses: which is where there is a perceived trade-off between speed and quality of consultation – hence the Scrutiny Committee's concerns.

It is unclear whether digital methods enable better targeting of invitations to contribute to consultation. They are certainly helpful in getting a wider array of responses; online communications offer a direct route to individuals, and make it easier for policy makers "*to go over the heads of the usual suspects*" (as Jill Rutter writes of the Red Tape Challenge – Rutter 2012). However, digital by default methods (not just in terms of consultation but across the board) are often subject to concerns about inclusion: in activities relating to participatory democracy it matters that everyone is equally able to participate. These concerns are present in the Scrutiny Committee's response to the Cabinet Office Principles, expressed in relation to "*vulnerable groups*" (HoL 2013a). These concerns were echoed by Defra staff participating in this Review, not because their two key audience groups of farmers and fishers are especially vulnerable but because they are not very online. It was reported that between 17% and 20% of farmers live in broadband blackspots, while fishers were said to be "*even more un-online than farmers*". It is understood that in moving to 'digital by default' consultations, Defra will make special dispensations to ensure these audiences are reached.

However, according to external interviewees for this Review, the level of response to a given electronic consultation largely reflects the extent of promotion put behind that activity, and it is notable much of this is offline. (Incidentally one interviewee suggested that the number of responses to the Red Tape Challenge was pitifully low relative to other online engagements by Government; however, official accounts tell a different story – see below.) This promotion relates to the "*targeting*" that Cabinet Office describes, but if it is an effort to go beyond the usual suspects this is likely to require more blanket approaches than discreet targeting. Such approaches tend to be relatively ineffective, and to net relatively inexpert responses.

This tension was the source of vigorous debate at the workshop for Defra staff held during this Review. On the one hand, a few of the internal interviewees felt that it was right that

inexpert voices should be included, on the basic principle that they were taxpayers too, and the ultimate customers of the policies and policy outcomes. By contrast, others were vocal in their opinion that gathering these views was at best a waste of time for all involved. These comments were later echoed by an internal interviewee experienced in running consultation exercises, who commented: *“Sometimes you don’t need lay views; the priority is more open processes with stakeholders, not with lay publics”*. This is an important debate to replay in this context, as it can inform the question about how ‘open’ it is necessary – or desirable – for central Government to be in its policy processes. As mentioned above, interviewees observed that much policy making involves technical or specialist knowledge, and that stakeholder organisations are often much better placed to comment than their members. The learnings from consultation for other open approaches are evident, even if unresolved, with the right degree of openness likely to vary with policy context. The importance of these questions certainly supports the case for the inclusion of consultation among the suite of open methods which Departments should be exploring.

There are further limits to openness in formal consultation relating to the more technical aspects of survey design and question wording. For a consultation to work efficiently, interviewees felt it needed to be fairly tightly defined, but still leave room for wider comment. As such formal consultation needs to be a fairly bounded engagement; it would appear that the most open approaches are not feasible or desirable in this context. This is further illustrated in the problem posed by open-ended questions in a consultation form: quite simply, how can they be meaningfully analysed, when there may be over 40,000 of them (as there were on a formal Bovine TB consultation from Defra in 2007 – see Barnett 2007)? Digital tools like Delib’s CitizenSpace (see under Defra applications below) have superficially removed this problem, as there is some automatic analysis of write-ins as part of the package. However, concerns were still voiced by some interviewees over that process: for example, does it follow best practice in qualitative research methodology, and is it mindful of the fact that however many responses are collected they cannot be representative of a given population as there was no element of sampling? More ‘open’ consultations raise a further problem for analysis, that of how to decide what weight to give to the views of a stakeholder organisation relative to individual members of the public (whose responses may be numerous): what one interviewee called *“the Mr Smith of Gravesend versus the CBI problem”*. Finally, automated analysis tends to be fairly topline, and still leaves the civil servant with the tasks of interpreting the analysis, and reporting in full.

The act of providing topline analysis marks the end of the online consultation task, although the interpretation and reporting are still to follow. However the final step - to ensure that online consultation leads to better policy - still lies beyond reporting. The interviews with external experts pointed to this particular gap in the open policy process saying *“the onus is on civil servants to know how to feed these results into policy”*. Based on the observation from a Defra member of staff that *“As yet there is little link from digital consultation methods to better policy results”*, it seems these approaches are just as liable to the ‘impact gap’ as other policy methods, open or closed.

- **Applications in Defra**

Consultation is a method in which Defra has considerable expertise, and this was recognised by those interviewed for this Review: *“We should be the experts on consultation; I think we do more than any other Department”*. This pattern of Defra leadership has a long heritage too; it is notable that Julie Barnett’s paper on better

consultation was undertaken while she was on an ESRC fellowship in Defra in 2007. In that paper, she reviews the 78 consultations which started and finished within 2006, and provides the statistic that: “*For each of the past four years Defra has undertaken at least 100 formal consultations – more than any other Government Department*”. Defra is active in gathering and circulating best practice in consultation, both through their internal Regulators Network, and by feeding in to the cross-government Engagement and Consultation Group. One of the reasons Defra has so much experience of formal consultation is that it is the lead department on so many regulations: the current total of live, in-force regulations is estimated to stand at 2,150. As one interviewee said “*Consultation is effectively mandatory for better regulation*”, and the work on consultation methodology in Defra is driven largely by the Better Regulation team.

Defra is an early adopter of online consultation methods in central government, and the decision was taken in May 2013 to make Delib’s CitizenSpace platform the default tool for Defra consultations – with a 12 month review scheduled for 2014. CitizenSpace is described by Delib as the leading online consultation platform for UK central government departments (it has also been used by DECC and DH, as well as many local authorities, in the UK and overseas). However it is notable that at present Cabinet Office has not committed to making it the default tool across Government; while gov.uk will offer a one stop shop search facility for all current consultations, it is anticipated they will be run by each Department separately on platforms of their choosing.

The appeal of CitizenSpace is its simplicity: Defra staff have described it as easy to use, with helpful online guidance such that minimal training is required. The platform has features to improve ease of use for the consultation owner, including a central hub where all live consultations can be monitored, a range of tools for helping draft questions, and real-time feedback on quantitative findings. One drawback may be the system’s capacity to report qualitative feedback and write-ins; the package helps to tag keywords, but the owner is still left needing to complete the analysis. Indeed there were comments in the workshop that online tools of this kind result in “*superficial responses*” – first by limiting respondents to replying to narrowly framed closed questions, then by struggling to provide rich analysis of any open-ended.

The first Defra consultation to use Citizen Space was that on The Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA), which ran in April and May 2013. It has also been used on a bovine TB consultation, which according to interviewees has garnered tens of thousands of responses (perhaps as much for the topic as the promotion or tool itself – compare these numbers to the reported extent of Twitter traffic on the 2013 badger cull). This consultation in particular has made clear the way in which CitizenSpace acts a “*handling tool*” for the volume and content of consultation responses: it is reported that Defra has only “*a very small team to handle it*”.

Defra has experience of online consultation tools from previous consultations. The ‘Help Shape the Nature of England’ initiative conducted between July and October 2010 to inform the Natural Environment White Paper, included a short online consultation survey consisting of just four questions. The online consultation was conducted via the Defra website and run using SurveyMonkey. In total, 8,629 responses were collected (7,810 direct online, and 805 via Kent Wildlife Trust and other stakeholders). A systematic methodology was developed to break down the consultation feedback, question by question, and taking into account the depth of responses to individual questions (e.g. identifying, analysing and conveying principal themes for each). The results were then reported in full (see Defra 2011a). The report makes mention that it was difficult to

categorise and quantify the more detailed, qualitative responses. In an interview for this Review a Defra staff member described the analysis of the four open-ended questions as “a nightmare”, but went on to say “*It was a great example of public engagement though: long, detailed, heartfelt responses ...very rich data*”.

The largest scale online consultation exercise of recent years is also at the core of the drive for Better Regulation, namely the Red Tape Challenge (‘RTC’). This is a cross-government exercise, although once again Defra has been in the forefront of it, given that it owns the largest number of regulations: by the end of 2013, all its stock of approximately 2,150 regulations will have been consulted on through the RTC, then reviewed by a Defra, and then a cross-government, Star Chamber. CitizenSpace was deployed to help in this process, such that a total of 30 regulatory themes were offered up for consultation sequentially between April 2011 and April 2013 (e.g. health & safety, environment, pensions) covering over 5,121 regulations across Government Departments. More than 29,180 public comments and over 1,000 private submissions were received, with decisions so far reached on 3,375 regulations.

The value and effectiveness of the RTC have been a subject for debate throughout the interviews and workshops undertaken in this Review, as well as in the wider literature. Jill Rutter’s report on opening up policy making gives the official side of the story: Sir Gus O’Donnell is quoted saying RTC is his “*favourite case study*” (presumably of open policy making) in that it had “*scrapped*” or “*done away with*” over half of the regulations reviewed by the time he left his post (Rutter 2012:29). Rutter herself is more ambivalent, reserving judgement until it is clear whether the “*decluttering*” has been achieved “*without exposing the public to disproportionate risk*”. Defra staff participating in this Review were still more split on the issue; one workshop participant unflinchingly described the RTC as “*a valueless consultation involving uneducated citizens - who did not understand regulation and could therefore not comment meaningfully – resulting in valueless data*”. Others concentrated on the methodological learnings, about how to ask the right questions (e.g. “*not ‘what regulations would you scrap?’ but ‘how can we help you to do things properly?’*”) and how to handle the responses. Most constructively it was described as “*a useful learning curve*” for Defra; as well as the methodological learnings was the actual discovery of how many regulations Defra was responsible for (the 3,000 figure): “*if nothing else, the Red Tape Challenge spurred us to answer some fundamental questions*”. An unexpected outcome of the exercise for Defra was that in many areas (e.g. fisheries) the recommendation of respondents was for more regulations to be introduced. The workshop discussions underlined Defra’s sense that regulations in the environmental sphere are seen by those they apply to as positive in establishing a level playing field across all operators (see also the summary above on the Farming Regulation Task Force). This is in contrast to the central (BIS) framing of regulation as a burden, and obstacle to growth, under which the RTC was conducted.

As a final point in this section on consultation, it can be noted that the RTC is an interesting boundary case, highlighting the overlaps between OPM methods. The IFG report cited above features the RTC as a notable example of crowdsourcing, and it is true that in putting a set of options to the public vote it does resemble other bounded online tasks, such as the Chancellor’s ‘Spending Challenge’ (see the section below). However, the RTC’s focus on better regulation means that the learnings from the activity are best applied to other consultation approaches. Meanwhile the fact that consultation provides a rich context in which to review the RTC strengthens this Review’s case for giving consultation a place of its own among the suite of open policy methods.

## 1.4 Crowdsourcing

- **Background & Definitions**

With the exception of ‘open policy making’ itself, crowdsourcing is the youngest of the methods and terms associated with OPM. As a wide range of approaches to organisational problem solving, crowdsourcing is described as “*in its infancy*”, especially in terms of uses by central government (see e.g. Brabham 2013). So far it has been driven from the US, largely by web developers and other computer scientists. However, the Open Government Programme from President Obama, with its emphasis on transparency and participation, has recently encouraged its adoption for public policy purposes (ibid).

Within public policy, crowdsourcing can be explained simply as a method of obtaining ideas, opinions, knowledge and expertise from a large group (or groups) of people rather than through more traditional, expert-led means. The term ‘crowdsourcing’ implies that knowledge is sought from undefined groups (e.g. the public) rather than in relation to a specific group (e.g. experts or stakeholders). In this sense it taps into a wider literature on knowledge networks and public participation: ‘the wisdom of the crowd’ can be presented as in opposition to elite or specialised expertise. It can be observed in the context of this Review that the margins between different methods of open policy making are fine: if the definition of crowdsourcing was stretched to include stakeholders, then we could be talking about co-production-by-proxy, or consultation as early engagement.

The term ‘crowdsourcing’ was coined by journalists Jeff Row and Mark Robinson in 2006, and was first used in print in an article for Wired Magazine later that year (see Brabham 2013). The use of the term, and development of applications that employ crowdsourcing approaches, has mushroomed in the past seven years, and there is now a substantial literature about what it is (and what examples count as crowdsourcing) as well as how best to approach it. One tenet of the available definitions is that crowdsourcing is a strictly online activity – it inherently builds on the ‘one to many’ approaches of online communication. The term is a partner to the more widely deployed crowdfunding (see eg. Beck et al 2012) in which individuals incrementally fund projects, businesses and causes. The contributions of thousands of individuals (using platforms such as Kickstarter, Peoplefundit, Buzzbnk, Zopa, Funding Circle and Crowdcube) helps to generate billions – as was the case with Barak Obama’s first presidential campaign. This approach is somewhat analogous to that of crowdsourcing, although ideas and information are qualitatively different (for instance, the task is not over when a total ‘number’ of ideas have been reached, and there may be concerns about the quality of the ‘currency’ or ideas that are gathered).

US academic and now crowdsourcing consultant Denis Brabham has spent the last five years analysing crowdsourcing activities in the US, and has begun to formalise approaches and definitions (e.g. in a new book, *Crowdsourcing*). In a recent review he undertook for IBM’s Center for the Business of Government, Brabham succinctly defines crowdsourcing as an ‘online task’ performed for the mutual benefit of an organisation and an online community. He skirts over the enormity of the task of pulling together a watertight definition from all the examples of crowdsourcing projects which are beginning to be reported in the literature. He does though cite a paper which performs a systematic analysis of those published projects which include a definition (Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-de-Guevara 2012). Based on 40 existing definitions, the authors generate the following integrated description:

*“Crowdsourcing is a type of participative online activity in which an individual, an institution, a non-profit organization, or company proposes to a group of individuals of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of a task. The undertaking of the task, of variable complexity and modularity, and in which the crowd should participate bringing their work, money, knowledge and/or experience, always entails mutual benefit. The user will receive the satisfaction of a given type of need, be it economic, social recognition, self-esteem, or the development of individual skills, while the crowdsourcer will obtain and utilize to their advantage what the user has brought to the venture, whose form will depend on the type of activity undertaken.”*

This definition is not snappy but it does appear to be watertight. There are a number of key features that mark out crowdsourcing approaches from other open methods: notably there is a task, which remains the property of the organising institution, even though it is worked on together with the crowd. There is also the idea of exchange, common to many marketing theories: there is a transaction going on between organisation and crowd member, who will derive some specific benefits from the exchange (most obviously “*economic*” benefits, i.e. cash). As such crowdsourcing is closer to open policy making methods that involve outsourcing (e.g. co-production, or particularly, co-delivery involving stakeholders) than to more unbounded approaches. Brabham writes of how crowdsourcing represents a risk for governments in the role of lead organisation; however, if they define the task and pay the citizen participant then those risks may be minimised. In an example of such a transactional approach, Amazon offers a platform called the Mechanical Turk, in which organisations with large datasets to crunch can recruit multiple citizens to work on those data in chunked-out packages – in return for a small fee per package.

Brabham goes on to differentiate crowdsourcing from other forms of online participation by stating that it features both a top-down management mechanism and a bottom-up process involving an online community. The degree to which control rests more towards the top or the bottom will vary, although the sharp contrast with co-production should be apparent. Co-production has its roots in urban renewal and community empowerment; it requires that the organising institution and citizen are equal in the engagement. The task-based nature of crowdsourcing appears to require that, while the balance of control sits to varying degrees between owner and community, the citizen in the community remains in the subservient role of worker (or ‘Turker’ in Amazon’s parlance).

To help with the slipperiness of definitions in this field, and in order to classify and formalise it into a regulated discipline, Denis Brabham has developed a four-part typology of crowdsourcing activities. He has written this from the perspective of a government user, thus enabling policy makers to see what form of crowdsourcing may be best for them (and then to follow best practice accordingly). His typology is set out in the table below, but short summaries of the four types might run as follows:

**Type 1: Information Gathering** - citizens provide new data items to populate a pre-set field

**Type 2: Information Handling** – citizens are tasked to work through small chunks of a large pre-existing dataset, to reach a collective solution

**Type 3: Idea Generation** – citizens offer innovative solutions to existing data problems (which may already have suboptimal solutions)

**Type 4: Idea Selection** – citizens prioritise or choose between rival solutions (especially on aesthetic or subjective grounds)

**Figure 4: A Typology of Crowdsourcing Problem Types for Governance (Brabham 2013)**

TYPE	HOW IT WORKS	Kinds of Problems	Examples of Uses in Government
<b>Type One:</b> Knowledge Discovery and Management	Organization tasks crowd with finding and collecting information into a common location and format	Ideal for information gathering, organization, and reporting problems, such as the creation of collective resources	Example: SeeClickFix; USGS's Did You Feel It?; USPTO's Peer to Patent Possible Uses: Reporting conditions and use of public parks and hiking trails; tracking use of public transit; cataloguing public art projects and murals for historical boards
<b>Type Two:</b> Distributed Human Intelligence Tasking	Organization tasks crowd with analysing large amounts of information	Ideal for large-scale data analysis where human intelligence is more efficient or effective than computer analysis	Example: Transcribing digital scans of old handwritten census records Possible Uses: Language translation for documents and websites; data entry; behavioural modelling
<b>Type Three:</b> Broadcast Search	Organization tasks crowd with solving empirical problems	Ideal for ideation problems with empirically provable solutions, such as scientific problems	Example: White House SAVE Award; NASA's use of InnoCentive for a solar flare prediction formula Possible Uses: Finding better algorithms for timing traffic signals; improving actuarial formulas for Social Security
<b>Type Four:</b> Peer-Vetted Creative Production	Organization tasks crowd with creating and selecting creative ideas	Ideal for ideation problems where solutions are matters of taste or market support, such as design or aesthetic problems	Example: Next Stop Design bus stop shelter design competition; ITS Congestion Challenge for alleviating traffic congestion Possible Uses: Designs for public structures and art projects; urban plans; transit plans; policy proposals; school redistricting plans

• **Strengths & Weaknesses**

Defra staff who participated in the workshop for this Review could quickly see the benefits of crowdsourcing. First and foremost, it would enable the gathering of ideas from a wider population, who could throw up something that policy teams and their stakeholders might have missed, by ‘thinking outside the box’. Denis Brabham however concentrates on the benefits arising strictly from this being an online problem solving or ideas generation endeavour. These include that crowdsourcing can avoid logistical problems that beset face-to-face interactions (e.g. arranging meetings so that all interested parties can attend). He also highlights crowdsourcing as a way round what might be termed problems of facilitator bias: power dynamics, identity politics, facilitator influence and so on (Brabham 2013).

However, as well as seeing the obvious benefits of such wide spectrum engagement, Defra workshop participants were very confused about what counted as a crowdsourcing approach (the typology above could be very helpful in this regard). In particular

crowdsourcing was mainly understood as relating to the early planning stages of policy development: opening up an issue together to brainstorm problems and solutions. It may be that this is more accurately pursued as a co-production or early engagement endeavour than a crowdsourcing one, given both the broadcast nature of the call in a crowdsourcing project, and the need for a bounded task. Participants did not seem fully to appreciate the bounded nature of crowdsourcing compared to those other more open methods of engagement.

There were also concerns that crowdsourcing approaches could be inefficient if thrown open to the general public; as with some Defra staff's comments on the Red Tape Challenge, there were concerns the exercise would generate a great number of responses, including fewer expert ones. How to handle such responses was a subsidiary concern: how would one systematically evaluate the quality of ideas? Given that many responses would be likely to come not only from un-usual suspects but also the "*vocal minority*", what store should be placed in their responses? One participant in the workshop raised the topical example of the badger cull: "*how much weight do we give to the opinions of 'badger-huggers'?*". To which, another countered that neglecting the opinions of certain groups could be a dangerous tactic as "*people want to be heard*". It was said that failing to attend to public opinion during the long history of public consultation on bovine TB had set delivery of the badger culling policy back. In the context of the badger cull, which is reported to have generated unprecedented quantities of social media and online traffic (see 'social media' below), the practical question about adequate resourcing to handle the response surfaced again – a further example of where open policy making could be at odds with the 'more from less' agenda.

Finally, there were suspicions that crowdsourcing, with its lack of methodology and analytical rigour, could replace desk research in the earliest phases of policy development. While some Defra staff perceived this as a current threat, others commented that ideally the two activities would be complementary. For instance, crowdsourcing could help with idea generation, which ideas were then fed into desk research to establish whether there was an evidence base to support them or not.

## • Applications in Defra

First it should be noted that the only true examples of crowdsourcing being used by Defra relate to Citizen Science projects. Because they are so central to Defra's work they have been described as a method in themselves – summarised in the section immediately below. They do not however fall neatly into one of Brabham's four types of crowdsourcing, but come in various types.

Away from citizen science, there are very few, if any, examples of crowdsourcing approaches being used in Defra to date. As established in earlier sections of this Review, there is a great deal of early stakeholder engagement, and some open conversations conducted by social media, but there are few examples of activities which fit the definitions provided here.

Perhaps the initiative with the closest fit is The Red Tape Challenge (discussed under Consultation above) – it is certainly presented as an example of "*crowdsourcing policy*" in Jill Rutter's paper (IFG 2012:29). Running it through Brabham's typology, we could see it as a Type 4 task: in which citizens pick from a basket of options, in a choice informed by subjective preferences (not e.g. statistical proof). But it is not an aesthetic task, like a taste



test or naming exercise. Moreover, it is not entirely clear what direct benefit the citizen gets from agreeing to engage in the task; one could argue 'freedom from regulatory burden or dead-wood' might be the benefit, but only in cases where the citizen agreed with the questions framing all regulations as burdens. In any case, this Review argues that consultation should have its own place among the suite OPM methods, on account of what those other methods can learn from it – as well as vice versa (see also the Conclusions and Implications below).

The other possible Defra initiative that fits well is the Smarter Environmental Regulation Review. The Review is using crowdsourcing techniques with the online community of Defra and related agencies' website users to get views about what would make information on regulation and environmental compliance guidance easier to find and use on government websites. The work is being led by Defra, working with other Government Departments and bodies. The pitch to users is that 'smarter' guidance and data will make it easier, quicker and clearer to understand what environmental rules apply in a given situation, and simpler to report essential environmental and farming information. Given the process involves users reporting their experiences of the online 'landscape' of government regulatory information, this activity could be considered as Type 1 crowdsourcing.

Some of the clearest examples of crowdsourcing however do not involve Defra, but HM Treasury and the Coalition Government. These activities have made use of another of Delib's online engagement tools, the Dialogue app, which is used to crowdsource preferences among the general public, and generate new ideas (hence crowdsourcing of the Type 4 variety). The Dialogue app was the basis of 'The Spending Challenge' initiative led by George Osborne in the run-up to his first spending review. More than 100,000 responses were received with 25 ideas making it into the Coalition's first Budget, although the validity and added value of the exercise has been questioned by some observers (see e.g. Rutter 2013).

The Dialogue App was also deployed in the 'Your Freedom' initiative by the Coalition Government. The initiative was launched by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg as a crusade against unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy, asking the public how they wanted the Government to redress the balance between the citizen and the state. Over 40,000 citizens used the app, and over 50,000 visits were made to the accompanying website.

It was reported by participants in the working debrief for this Review that Defra have committed to a trial of Delib's Dialogue app, starting in February 2014 (it will be recalled that Defra have already decided to make the CitizenSpace platform their default for formal consultations – see the section above). During this trial Defra will explore how best to make use of the Dialogue app, and at which stages in different policy processes. Existing uses of the app (such as that by HMT) suggest that it can be used effectively to generate ideas early in the policy process, and then slightly later for idea prioritisation. There is also the possibility that the app could form part of innovative methods for policy evaluation, for instance, at the 'beginning of the end' of the policy lifecycle, to gather views on the extent and kinds of evaluation required on a particular policy or engagement exercise. In this way, crowdsourcing as an open method could act as a filter before traditional research and evaluation methods.

## 1.5 Citizen Science

### • Background & Definitions

Citizen Science projects can be considered as examples of crowdsourcing approaches applied to particular contexts: usually biodiversity or conservation projects (although increasingly also 'big data'-related tasks in the natural sciences). However, citizen science is not mentioned among the OPM methods in the Civil Service Reform Plan; nor does it feature in attempts to define and formalise crowdsourcing (e.g. Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara 2012). It is given a separate space in this Review on account of its adoption by Defra and related agencies – it provides their most obvious examples of crowdsourcing approaches. Citizen science is also highlighted because its unique combination of open and digital elements can help to build a more complete survey of what open policy making is and can be.

Citizen science is a broad concept. As a starting point, it involves scientific research conducted in whole, or in part, by amateur or non-professional scientists drawn mainly drawn from public groups. As such, citizen science has a long heritage in the UK, stretching back across all kinds of amateur naturalism, most obviously including the long-term records of birdwatchers. In a note on a rapid review for Defra, Liz O'Brien of Forest Research (the research agency of the Forestry Commission) defines citizen science as "*the involvement of volunteers in scientific data collection and analysis in collaborations between scientists and volunteers. In terms of the natural environment this is primarily related to biodiversity and environmental information which contributes to our understanding of the natural world.*" (O'Brien 2013).

Notably, O'Brien's definition does not incorporate a reference to digital (or any other) media. However, for the purposes of this Review into open methods, the focus should be on those citizen science activities that involve an online component. In this way the links between crowdsourcing and citizen science become more obvious. Citizen science has always involved "*data collection and analysis*" as O'Brien states, so it is an obvious candidate for combining with IT solutions. (It is worth reiterating that technically crowdsourcing projects only relate to online tasks.) However, it is only in the more recent sources on citizen science that it is connected with crowdsourcing and co-production methods (see e.g. the UK Environmental Observation Framework's Guide to Citizen Science – Tweddle et al 2012). Most of the digital examples of citizen science projects involve applying computer processing power (or app-based programs) to observational experiments in the natural world. However there is also an interesting reciprocal strand in the literature relating to 'big' data analysis exercises which talks about applying the power of human reasoning and intuition to computer-driven analyses (see e.g. Hand 2010 – 'People Power').

Given the customary slipperiness in use of terms relating to public participation activities, it is helpful that the UK EOF's Guide contains a typology of citizen science projects:

- *Contributory projects* are those designed by scientists in which participants collect or analyse data.
- *Collaborative projects* are also designed by scientists but participants have some involvement in the process.

- *Co-created projects* are collaborations between scientists and participants in partnership.

The full report on UK EOF's Understanding Citizen Science project goes on to add a fourth approach in which citizens work together on all stages of a project without the involvement of professional scientists (Roy et al 2012).

It should be apparent from this classification that citizen science projects span a range of activities and purposes. When set against Denis Brabham's typology of crowdsourcing activities, it can be inferred that most of the digital citizen science projects are Type 1: that is Information Gathering (in which citizens provide new data items to populate a pre-set field - see section above, and Brabham 2013). An example of this could be the New Forest Cicada project, which equips citizens with a smartphone app which can pick up the high frequencies of the cicada's call; they in turn comb the Forest and report any encounters with the cicada (Britain's only native cicada, last sighted in the Forest in 2000 – see [www.newforestcicada.info](http://www.newforestcicada.info)). However, other citizen science projects are in the Type 3 category: Idea Generation (Broadcast Search) – citizens offer innovative solutions to existing data problems. The People Power paper in Nature (Hand 2010) includes numerous examples of this category of project, including Foldit, an online game in which citizen-players get points for folding complex proteins (a task requiring spatial skills which computers cannot perform to the same level as humans).

The citizen science approach to crowdsourcing tends to breach the power gradient in crowdsourcing projects, in which the citizen fulfils the role of worker (or 'Turker') – for instance, the UK-EOF categories show different permutations of expert and citizen-researcher, with some being more akin to the equal relationships posited in co-production approaches. However, citizen science projects do fit the criteria of crowdsourcing as defined, by ensuring that benefits accrue to the citizen scientist, as well as to the organising institute. In most instances, the citizen scientist acquires new knowledge and expertise, a sense of agency, and often some health-giving experiences in the outdoor world. However this is a more subtle dynamic of exchange than the upfront transactions which persuade crowdsourced 'Turkers' to undertake tasks. That said, the People Power article in Nature concludes by warning research organisations that the days of persuading citizens to participate in science projects for free may be numbered (ibid.).

### • **Strengths & Weaknesses**

The most widely recognised benefit of applying digital media to citizen science projects is that it enables collection of "*large quantities of data across an array of habitats and locations over long spans of time*" (Bonney et al 2009). It is powerful in that large networks of volunteers enable researchers to accomplish their aims swiftly and efficiently, where achieving those aims by other means would be extremely expensive or time-consuming. This is especially salient in the context of environmental research. For example, natural cyclic events, impacts of climate change or species distribution can be monitored in ways that other forms of natural resource management cannot match.

In the meantime, citizen scientists can accrue benefits which approximate to those aimed at in the earliest coproduction projects designed to build social capital and 'collective efficacy' in a neighbourhood (see e.g. Sampson 2012). Many projects' first step is to define the task to be performed by the citizen scientist very tightly; as such they are training the citizen to become a systematic researcher who can, for instance, recognise

the main types of British house spider (see the Society of Biology's current project: <https://www.societyofbiology.org/get-involved/biologyweek/house-spider-survey> ). Such examples could equally well be defined as informal or adult learning projects.

However in this educational dimension lies the flaw in the citizen science methodology. If the task is not sufficiently tightly bounded, or the citizen scientist strays from the instructions, then questions concerning the validity of data generated by citizen-scientists will arise. In these cases, citizens may not be well equipped or sufficiently trained to tackle certain tasks, or may introduce bias into the data.

Finally, while digital citizen science projects can arrive at solutions to tasks with speed and ease, it is not always the case that they are lower cost than alternative methods. The public engagement aspect requires significant funding as a minimum, and software development can further add to potential costs. Given it is often unclear how these projects influence further practical scientific developments or 'policy', it will be hard to calculate the 'rate of return' on investments in citizen science.

### • Applications in Defra

There are numerous citizen science projects currently underway in the UK; the following selection are connected to Defra and related agencies. Two of the projects relate to ash tree die-back, a policy priority for Defra in relation to plant welfare, and forestry management. The third is a project with and for fishermen, one of Defra's key producer groups.

- The **AshTag** app was developed in October 2012 with support from Defra and the Forestry Commission. The app first teaches citizen-users how to recognise the symptoms of Ash Dieback disease. They are then encouraged to make observations in particular woodlands, and submit photos and locations of sightings of Ash Dieback to a team who will refer them on to the Forestry Commission, with the aim of stopping the spread of the disease.
- Also from the Forestry Commission is the **ObservaTree** project, which was seed-funded by Defra up to the point where it recently won full funding from the EU's LIFE+ environmental fund. The ObservaTree project aims to set up a network of citizen scientists as an early warning system to identify various tree disease incidents, before they then upload that information to Forest Research's tree health database. A pilot was undertaken in early 2013, focusing on ash trees, and work continues to develop the IT infrastructure of the project, and supporting resources for volunteers. As well as Defra, partners include the Woodland Trust, the National Trust, and the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA).
- The **Fraxinus** game was developed by researchers from the Sainsbury Laboratory, University of Cambridge in association with Forest Research. The game, called after the Latin for the ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), works as a puzzle, inviting players to score points by matching coloured sequences of leaves on the screen. The best matches score the highest points, and players will be invited to compete to identify the most matches. Behind the gameplay surface is a program to match tens of thousands of genes from 100 trees in Denmark which appear to be resistant to Ash Dieback to those from trees in the UK to identify the genes most likely to encode for resistance to the disease. If they can isolate the genes responsible for conferring these qualities, they

might be able to cross-breed UK ash trees with resistant or tolerant strains, and so save the widespread populations of ash.

- Defra are currently running a scoping project to encourage fishermen to use their vessels in **collecting catch data** for UK fisheries. In turn these data will be used to calculate available stocks and develop guidance on sustainable fishing practices. The project will also have the benefit of educating and raising awareness among fishermen of the value of long-term sustainability practices to their profession.
- Also in the marine area, it is reported that Defra are developing plans for an initiative to encourage divers to pool their knowledge of underwater conditions in order to compile a **survey of the British inshore seabed**. Mobilising this informal body of citizen researchers is anticipated to deliver far more cost effective results than undertaking a bespoke survey through direct commissions.

## 1.6 Social Media

### • Background & Definitions

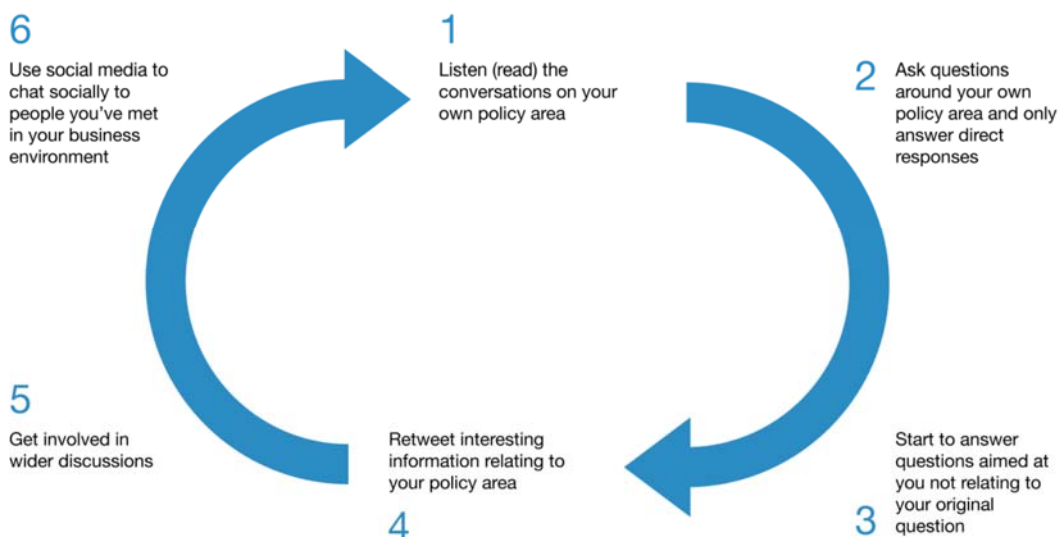
Digital media is one of two strands of open policy making, along with public (and expert) participation in policy. Francis Maude's Foreword to the Civil Service Reform Plan calls on central Government to become, wherever possible, "a *digital organisation*" (the equivalent to a 'learning organisation' on the participative democracy front, as has been suggested in the section on open policy making above). Indeed the Minister for the Cabinet Office is clear this is an urgent task: "Government has lagged far behind" and now needs to play "catch up" (HMG 2012).

In the proposals on improving policy making, the Civil Service Reform Plan includes digital media as one of the methods for achieving open policy making: "Using web-based tools, platforms, and new media to widen access to policy debates to individuals and organisations not normally involved". In providing an overview of open policy making and its methods, this Review has already looked at tools and platforms, largely under the headings of consultation and crowdsourcing. Accordingly this section focuses on social media, and how they may be used to open up policy making to a wider public.

The Government issued Guidance for Civil Servants on the use of Social Media in June 2012, just before the Civil Service Reform Plan (and the Consultation Principles) in July 2012. The Social Media Guidance was joint authored by the Government Digital Service (GDS) in association with the Home Office: as such it covers technical aspects of the necessary digital architecture to support social media use, as much as exploring appropriate conduct and protocols for civil servants (GDS 2012). In the Foreword, Sir Bob Kerslake, Head of the Civil Service, writes of (approved) use of social media by civil servants as "a new way of working" – and the logistics and implications of that are still emerging. In order to help civil servants to understand how to use social media in their work, the GDS Guidance includes a figure of the engagement process, which is clearly intended for a civil service audience who are seen as relatively inexperienced in these ways of working.

Figure 5: The Engagement Cycle - Social Media (GDS 2012)

### The engagement cycle – social media



One look at this figure in the context of this Review will remind readers of early discussions around identifying an appropriate policy process model for open policy making. The engagement cycle above deliberately echoes the traditional 'ROAMEF' policy cycle; in presenting the figure the GDS authors say that understanding the engagement cycle "*can help unravel where online engagement can be useful in the policy cycle*" (GDS 2012:1). Unfortunately, given the idealistic quality of the ROAMEF cycle, laying the social media cycle on top of it is unlikely to unravel anything substantive. The cycle above – laudably, from the point of view of an 'open', learning-driven, approach – begins and ends with 'listening'. However it is not explicit where or how the conversations being listened to feed into policy making processes. As one internal interviewee said (not specifically in relation to this figure, or the GDS Guidance): "*Twitter is good for public engagement – but does it ever impact on policy?*". The end point of the above engagement cycle is presumably a more adept civil servant-social media user, not better policy.

The GDS Guidance, and engagement cycle, both focus on the civil servant, and the use of social media to "*be part of the conversation and all the benefits that brings*" (ibid.:2). Notably the flow of engagement is from civil servant to public conversation; it is interesting that in the Reform Plan the flow of engagement is in precisely the opposite direction: social media being used to "*widen access to policy debates*". These two key documents offer different conceptions of what social media can do in the policy process; both are equally valid, and they can be summed up as follows:

### **i) Online Listening**

This is the emphasis of the GDS Guidance, and Step 1 in their engagement cycle. This approach recognises there is already a conversation going on among the wider public, and the Government needs to at least keep track of it. The Guidance, and cycle, suggest they may subsequently have a voice in it, but it remains someone else's conversation. This marks out social media as the exception across all forms of policy making, where Government's traditional approach is 'command and control'. The difference in approach is one reason why it is unclear how social media could feed into policy making, which is a Government-led endeavour.

In terms of doing online listening, Defra is a prime example of how Government departments are increasingly buying in software packages which enable them to 'listen to' or analyse the content of social media traffic on a rolling basis. Partly this involves following the most popular conversations, and partly it involves tracking the daily traffic of departments' key stakeholders, to see what is on their agenda (and where they are relative to Government).

This activity happens alongside one to one stakeholder engagement, which may be done through the email but is reported to be mostly face to face (according to stakeholders' preferences). As one Defra interviewee explained, the strategy is one of 'No Surprises': by keeping talking to stakeholders, and monitoring their social media conversations, the Department aim not to be blind-sided by stakeholders taking up positions on new areas of policy.

The other practice associated with listening and monitoring is responding. When relevant social media conversations arise, Departments will be well placed to respond to them. As one Defra interviewee commented: "*Twitter tends to be used reactively, and only when there's public concern. If we proactively use it, it's to try and forestall the conversation.*" These comments echo advice in the GDS Guidance, which talks of using social media "*in an emergency*" (hence one interviewee's comments about "*only using it for badgers and*

*buzzards*”). A third interviewee spoke on the main purpose of stakeholder monitoring as trying to head off revolts: “*to keep the farmers from marching down the Mall*”.

The picture that emerges to date is of Government using social media as much to undertake advanced listening or horizon scanning as a part of reactive or defensive communications strategies, as it is of attempts to co-produce policy or open up to innovative suggestions from beyond the usual suspects.

## ii) Opening Up Policy

The call in the Reform Plan to widen access to policy debates most obviously applies to contexts where Government has policy and wishes to invite input to it. This Review has documented how digital platforms and apps have been used to this effect, in online consultations and in crowdsourcing apps. However, from the above discussion, it is not yet clear how Government can lead social media debates on their own territory, that of policy development.

According to interviewees, what tends to happen when incoming flak is picked up on the monitoring systems is that Departments “*reach for their communications teams*”. One interviewee commented that in such situations “*I can then alert comms to develop a counter narrative, or to work with them*”. In these instances, the aim is effectively to stop the conversation, or take it offline into a process of stakeholder engagement or ‘informal consultation’.

It certainly seems Departments are yet to work out ways to have policy debates on social media. The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills are often identified as one of the leading Departments in terms of their digital strategy. They use the memorable adage that online engagement is “*more than glitter and Twitter*” (see e.g. Rutter 2013). But according to some external experts interviewed for this Review it is not yet clear what the ‘more than’ might include: one interviewee said “*They just don’t get it. They think digital engagement is all about comms*”. One of the early measures taken by the incoming Coalition Government was to impose a freeze on all government communications; it appears as a consequence some communications activities that were previously carried out through other channels have simply gone digital, and in the process missed out on the possibilities for social conversations which the digital world has to offer.

In conclusion, it appears that Government is playing “*catch up*” in how to use social media. However just listening to, and sometimes joining in with, the pre-existing conversations on social media will not enable Government to open up policy debates as it would wish if it is to become a ‘digital Government’.

### • Strengths & Weaknesses

The GDS Guidance on Social Media describes the benefits for public engagement as additional to other communications: “*You will get far greater traction with your audience if you add social media as a layer to your communications*”. The implication for this Review is clear: that open policy making methods such as social media are likely to be most effective if supplementary to traditional approaches to engagement. The reported benefits are then very similar to those identified in relation to online consultation: a wider spread of



input (not just the usual suspects), plus quicker feedback, and better targeting of communications. The last point is consistent with traditional marketing advice of 'know your audience', here repurposed by the GDS as "*Know who is using different channels and what for*". This advice also assumes that Government is driving the debate, rather than just responding to conversations that are already going on out there.

In terms of weaknesses, the Social Media Guidance is explicit that things have changed, and not just in terms of Civil Service Reform. Taking a technological perspective, the Guidance comments that "*When social media first came to prominence, the risks (in terms, for example, of security, departmental reputation and staff productivity) far outweighed any perceived business benefits. As a result, many departments placed technical restrictions on accessing certain types of websites, including social media sites. However, whilst many of the risks remain, there are now significant benefits to be had by departments from using the internet and social media.*" The risks then remain the same, but GDS is leading in counteracting them, in order to access the potential benefits.

From a public engagement point of view however, the risks may still be deemed to outweigh the benefits – and the risks are certainly seen to increase the more open an approach is taken. As one external interviewee commented: "*If they actually bring people into the policy process earlier it will be great. But they won't: it's too risky to open up a public forum for debate. The mindset - and the resource – is not there.*" Such comments certainly ring true in the context of a department like Defra, who have been habituated over a long time to be wary of "*the vocal minority*" among their principal constituents (e.g. farmers). In such policy contexts, opening up could fairly be construed as laying oneself open.

The risks of joining in unbounded online conversations do not just spring from the public side, but also from the professionals'. A number of Defra interviewees in this Review were concerned – as the GDS Guidance is – about potential reputational damage to a Department from people speaking out of turn. The picture that emerged is one of very little co-ordination, and no control, over what individual civil servants tweet or write on social media. "*Tweeting has been done ad hoc by a number of teams*" said one interviewee, while another commented "*The risk is that anyone could bung something up on the Defra website and make merry with it, without anyone QA'ing it properly*". The ten tips for civil servants on using social media which are included at the end of the GDS Guidance are informed by similar concerns; for instance, they discuss when a civil servant should use their personal online accounts – and personal devices - and for what purposes.

At the root of these concerns are questions of voice and identity: who is talking on behalf of whom, and these ambiguities apply to both civil servant and citizen alike. A final set of concerns expressed by Defra staff in this Review relate to the validity of feedback received on social media. Again, if it is supplementary to traditional methods of engagement and insight (here, social research) that is all to the good. However, it was strongly felt that social media responses cannot take the place of research findings. As one interviewee commented: "*Twitter is not a representative audience*". Another spelt out "*Social networking requires people to sign up, and these are mostly interested parties, stakeholders*". That final comment leads full circle, and raises questions about the added value for policy development and delivery of engaging with a wider public in the first place. Building on the point that the wider (i.e. non-expert) public was unlikely to be found following Government Twitter feeds, another interviewee raised the question whether, by using social media for policy debates, "*open policy making would result in narrower engagement*".

- **Applications in Defra**

Following the lead of the GDS, each Department has produced its own digital strategy. Defra's is in line with the GDS Guidance in treating social media as additional to existing engagement and insight methods: "*Digital tools (and social media)... will enhance but not replace more traditional non-digital methods of engagement*" (Defra 2012:18).

Most interestingly, the Defra Strategy also identifies traditional models of policy making among the 'challenges' to the adoption of digital methods across Defra. "*Policy making is often designed top-down, with the focus on the policy itself, rather than the delivery and impact on customers*" (ibid.:7). Once again in this Review, open policy making methods throw into sharp relief the need for a new model (or models) of the policy process.

In terms of Defra's social media activity, it can be classified using the two headings above.

- i) Online Listening**

As discussed by participants in the workshop for this Review, Defra has in the past been wary of some of its key customer groups (a tradition going back to foot and mouth disease, or further). Currently, one of the major engagement tasks of the Department is 'stakeholder monitoring', which is done via one to one engagement, and more recently by monitoring stakeholders' social media traffic. As one internal interviewee commented: "*We've been tarnished by the Forestry brush [i.e. the mooted selling off of national woodland in 2010] ... Defra are very afraid of getting it wrong*".

Defra has an overarching monitoring strategy covering its Top 50 stakeholders, of whom the Top 25 are corresponded with one to one on a weekly basis. There is also thorough social media monitoring of the Top 5 in particular.

'Horizon scanning' is undertaken to monitor responses to issues such as badger culling and dairy farmer protests in order to gain early warnings of impending action. Defra uses software developed by a commercial partner (Gorkana's 'Radar System') to engage with key topics on social media with stakeholders, industry bodies and citizens.

- ii) Opening Up Policy**

In terms of opening up policy debates using social media, Defra tends to prefer Twitter to Facebook (despite the GDS Guidance observing that 50% of the UK population now uses Facebook – GDS 2012). Based on research undertaken for this Review, it appears that in addition to an overarching '@DefraGovUK' address, Defra now has at least seven Twitter accounts: 'Rural', 'Nature', 'Biodiversity', 'Better Regulation /Smarter Guidance', 'Food', 'Water', and 'Waste'. It was recently reported on the Waste feed that it now has 1,000 followers (as of 9/9/2013).

It is interesting to note that this Review was unable to find a register or inventory of Defra's outgoing Twitter activity over recent months. Accordingly, during this Review we followed the various Defra accounts, then constructed a loose set of headings to classify the kinds of communications that went out from the Department on Twitter. When this was shared with Defra staff at the Review workshop, it met with a great deal of interest, and some surprise, from staff who were otherwise unaware of the extent or range of the activity.

There would be value in repeating the exercise on a more systematic, and regular, basis. Even based on this rapid analysis, it is interesting to note that there is a lot of what look like one-way communications messages, and very little ongoing or two way conversations. Meanwhile there was considerable alarm among interviewees at Twitter activities that appeared to be substituting for formal social research studies. Finally, it was not clear to any workshop participant how any of these activities would be impacting on policy any time soon.

- *News Releases:*

To announce launches, events and key policy moments, e.g. Flood Pathfinder progress, National Recycle Week, the Soft Drinks Roadmap launch, deadline for responses to the Flood Insurance Clauses consultation, Commons statements by Defra Ministers.

- *Open Conversations:*

To respond to points made in conversations already going on (Stage 2 of the GDS engagement cycle – see above); e.g. to Greenpeace/IFAW re. Icelandic whaling, or on the badger cull. The majority of conversations on badger culling take place on Twitter – and interviewees spoke of unprecedented volumes of traffic. A specimen tweet from Defra (on 23/9/2013) reads

"@DefraGovUK: Good morning @penguin629, we are not shooting owls. This is illegal.").

Defra also holds 'Tweetathons' in response to substantial areas of public debate; these tend to involve senior staff and ministers in moderated live debate. It can be suggested that in open policy making terms these appear as bounded spaces within open social media conversations. Recent topics include the badger cull, and a Forestry tweetathon – of which one internal interviewee pointedly commented: "*It was really good, we were very well prepared... but it didn't drive policy on*".

- *Polls:*

To gain quick feedback on policy-related questions e.g. a Tweet asked whether people used pesticides in their gardens, and if so, directed them to a Snap Survey hosted online where they could answer some questions on their practices. When this example was raised with Defra workshop participants there was general alarm, with one saying it seemed "*rather ad hoc*", and "*I'd be quite concerned if there are decisions based on responses to that*".

- *User-Generated Content:*

To encourage people to engage with Defra e.g. take a photo of your river (which was then uploaded to Tumblr); take a photo of your pet (linked to a message to encourage people to micro-chip their pets).

- *Behaviour Change:*

To encourage or exhort people to undertake particular behaviours, such as getting out into the natural environment e.g. take your dad fishing for Fathers' Day, or the 'Use Your Forests' Tweetathon.

## 1.7 Policy Labs

- **Background & Definitions**

Policy labs are mentioned in the Civil Service Reform Plan as one of the four named approaches to open policy making. The reference is extremely brief and is thus worth quoting in its entirety:

*“Using ‘Policy Labs’ which draw in expertise from a range of people and organisations and provide a unique environment to test new policies before they are implemented. These have been used successfully in Denmark.” (HMG 2012: 14)*

As with the thinking on open policy making itself (see the first section of this Review), the supporting material for the policy labs proposal can be found in the IFG report on ‘Opening Up Policy Making’ (Rutter 2012), which was published in the same month as the Reform Plan. In that report Jill Rutter sets out the basics of the experience from Denmark, referred to in the Reform Plan. This is the Mindlab project, which was set up in 2002 as part of the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs; it was conceived as a safe space in which policy makers could engage brainstorming and problem-solving. It has since evolved to bring the citizen or customer into this process, by means of feeding in findings from deliberative and ethnographic research (it is not clear if actual citizens themselves are included). MindLab’s projects include looking at why young people in Denmark engaged so little with the online tax filing system.

The IFG report also outlines another policy lab model, that of Sitra in Finland. It was set up in the 1950s with an independent endowment, and focused on economic issues. In the 1980s it created the Finnish venture capital market, but in the 2000s it has moved on to address systemic societal challenges such as defining wellbeing, and advancing Sustainable Development. Its methods include offering senior civil servants a week-long residential and exposing them to world-leading experts who together work through the issues and evidence in context, with support from specialist facilitators. The IFG report states that to have been on a Sitra residential is regarded as a ‘badge of honour’ in the Finnish civil service.

The IFG report notes that both models operate a different understanding of the policy development process, based on reflective practice, undertaken in a ‘safe space’ where ‘fast failure’ is encouraged. It is not clear how ‘open’ the models are to wider publics, but they both appear to conform to the notion of a learning organisation as cited by those coming at open policy making from a participatory democracy perspective.

Little more detail has emerged on the policy lab proposals since the Reform Plan was published. However, external interviews undertaken for this Review suggest that plans to develop the Lab are still going ahead. It appears to be envisaged as a shared resource for all Departments, and a facilitated space in which they can come together to reflect on their current practices, and work out what open policy making would mean for them.

- **Strengths & Weaknesses**

It is hard to assess the relative strengths of the precise policy lab model being advocated in the Reform Plan. However, in addition to the comments above about iterative and looped models of policy making, it can be observed that participants in the workshop for this Review were somewhat uninspired by the general tenor of the proposals, and what they inferred from them.

Criticism tended to focus on the space itself: *“Ikea plus”* or *“offices done up like primary schools”*, while the same impressions could produce support for *“new rooms, new perspectives”* among others.

Some participants commented that special spaces are not necessary to generate innovation in policy making. This observation puts a spotlight on the Reform Plan’s proposals, and their shortness of detail. It can be remarked that while the Policy Lab as space for open policy making has been identified by the Reform Plan, the content (participants, processes, inputs and outcomes) critically remains to be filled in.

- **Applications in Defra**

Most interestingly, discussion of MindLab in the Defra workshop triggered the recognition that *“we do this – or rather, we did!”*. One respondent cited the Innovation Centre in Reading, which still houses Defra and associated agencies’ staff, although is no longer laid out in policy lab format. It was recalled that the Innovation Centre’s ethos was ‘free-thinking’, with a ‘Chatham House’ style of debate.

Similar experiences were also reported from those who had worked on the product design team at Defra, which had a dedicated office space including narrow workspaces for PCs, breakout zones and post it areas on walls. Notably there were no desks, which was said to go against civil service policy. These areas were described as *“thinking spaces”* and *“flexible spaces”*. *“It doesn’t look quite like Google, but feels very different from a Government office.”*

Finally, one Defra interviewee recalled working in a previous post at the then DTI, which had had an ‘Innovation Lab’ within its offices on Victoria Street. This was described in similar terms to the Defra spaces, including lots of technology (e.g. interactive whiteboards) and unorthodox furniture. It was noted that this had been a relatively new idea ten years ago, and that the wheel was felt to have come round again.

## 2. Conclusions and Implications

This final section draws out conclusions and practical implications from the evidence presented in this Review. The Conclusions respond to the central question for this Review, about the relationship between Defra and the public, and the new methods and capabilities needed to advance this relationship. The Conclusions are structured around what is definitively known about the Government's approach to open policy making, and what has been deliberately left open. The Implications derive from the evidence gathered for this Review; they identify the priority tasks that need to be undertaken to advance open policy making, by Defra specifically, but also across Government.

### 2.1 Conclusions

The Civil Service Reform Plan (2012) unequivocally identified open policy making (OPM) as the way forward for civil servants. However, beyond that pronouncement, the Reform Plan was very short on detail relating to OPM, its principles and processes. As a result the Reform Plan triggered a debate about open policy making – to which this Review represents an early contribution, seen from Defra's perspective.

In order to support Defra in the task of exploring open policy making approaches and their applicability to Defra's policy contexts, this set of Conclusions summarises the findings from the Review on OPM, as defined by the Reform Plan, and the Cabinet Office. First, the section identifies the dimensions of OPM which are clearly set out for civil servants – the 'Knowns'; then it moves on to the dimensions which are less clear, and in many cases have deliberately been left 'open' – the 'Not Knowns'.

#### **Knowns**

- The Reform Plan introduces two new ways of working for the civil service, and they are to run in parallel. Policy and service delivery should become 'digital by default' by 2015, and "*Open policy making will become the default*" for policy development. Each way of working should infuse the other, and there are obvious overlaps between them. However, based on actual timing, and the responses of interviewees, there is the sense that 'digital by default' came first. To an extent, the content of open policy making is being developed to capitalise on the possibilities of digital channels.
- Effectively there are two strands to open policy making, both enabled by digital delivery: a transparency strand (as in 'open government') and a participation strand (as in 'opening up policy making'). Notably both these are present in the US Plan for Open Government, which antedates the Civil Service Reform Plan. In a paper responding to the Reform Plan, Sciencewise refers to these two strands respectively as 'windows' (which citizens may see the policy process through) and 'doors' (which citizens may walk through, into the policy process) (Burall et al 2013). To deliver open government, both are clearly required, although the primary challenge for OPM relates to the doors: the participatory democracy strand.
- Opening up access to policy processes to wider audiences can also be construed as a breaking down of barriers to their access, what the Reform Plan refers to as breaking Whitehall's "*monopoly on policy making*". Two main phases are identified

for seeking wider inputs, namely generating ideas to map out the territory at an early stage of the policy process, then putting policy options out for prioritisation and comment slightly later in the process. Aside from these moments, there is also a call for ongoing dialogue with online publics via social media – although this is framed both as participating in their ‘online conversations’, as well as wider audiences being invited into ‘policy debates’.

- While open policy making is not defined in the Reform Plan, it is associated with a range of ‘components’, thus suggesting there are multiple dimensions to OPM. In each dimension, policy processes can be ‘more’ or ‘less collaborative’, suggesting that openness is a sliding scale. It will not be possible to say when a process is ‘open’, or when ‘openness’ has been achieved, but rather it appears as a direction of travel, towards more collaborative processes. In this reading, open policy making resembles co-production, which involves many activities, and with varying levels of openness. Co-production is at the conceptual heart of open policy making, but it has its roots in radical community regeneration work, and it is not clear to what extent the Government can or should aim for such radical ‘unbounded’ approaches in its policy making approaches.
- The Open Policy Making team in the Cabinet Office have been charged with taking forward work on the OPM agenda. Based on interviews for this Review, it would be truer to say that the team is in charge of ensuring that each Department works out what OPM means for them, as a set of methods and processes to be developed and applied in keeping with the Department’s policy contexts. Given the realisation that there is no one right approach to OPM, but that it is a range of methods and processes, each to be drawn on according to circumstances, this non-prescriptive stance appears well founded (as well as being in the spirit of co-production). However, this stance does result in some gaps in current knowledge about what the Cabinet Office thinks OPM can and should be – these are listed below, as ‘Not Knowns’.

### **Not Knowns**

- While the Reform Plan does not define open policy making, it does list a number of methods which contribute to opening up policy processes: *Co-production; Crowdsourcing; Policy labs; Web-based tools, platforms and new media*. However the Reform Plan is not explicit that these are the full range of methods (and the OPM team would probably applaud that non-prescriptiveness). It is entirely in line with the OPM team’s objectives that in this Review, the Defra Steering Group should have identified two more methods as being specific to their remit, and also of potential value in opening up policy processes. This Review has argued for the value of all Departments including these two methods among their suite of potential approaches to OPM, as follows:

*Consultation* is particularly relevant to OPM methods, as is evidenced by its overlaps with other ‘digital by default’ methods, and with co-production in particular. An equivalence has already been set up between consultation and stakeholder engagement (in this Review also called ‘co-production by proxy’) through Cabinet Office Guidance on consultations which states that increasing early engagement with stakeholders can rule out the need for formal consultation later in the policy process. For this reason, Defra consultation staff are now taking an interest in

stakeholder engagement methods, and co-production. This Review has highlighted how both sets of methods have much to learn from one another.

*Citizen Science* is already a de facto inclusion among OPM methods, given it is a specialist form of crowdsourcing activity. To date it has mainly been applied by Government in relation to natural environment tasks – hence Defra’s considerable expertise in these methods. However, given the mutual benefits to the commissioning organisation (not least cost efficiencies) and the citizen scientists (through increased knowledge and impacts), there would be value in other Departments exploring applications in their own policy contexts (ideas for which will be numerous).

- The question has already been raised of how ‘open’ it is appropriate – or desirable – for Government Departments to be in their policy making processes. The Reform Plan is sensibly quiet on this complex question, although it implies a direction of travel in which the ‘most collaborative’ approaches are the best. This may not always be true: for instance, because of risk of exposure (as in the example of open conversations on social media), or because quality rather than quantity inputs are required (as in the example of coproduction or crowdsourcing activities). The question of openness can also be put in terms of how wide open the processes should be, i.e. which audiences are invited to participate. This Review has reported strong views from Defra staff that, in many policy contexts, expert not lay views are required. Finally there is the question of process: how long can it remain open when ultimately policy makers will need to close it down and enact policy? These are complicated questions, properly to be settled only in context; suffice to say here that more open processes will not always mean better policy. As the overview of applications in Defra has shown, different degrees of openness are appropriate according to context, and ultimately it is what happens to the ‘open’ inputs which will determine the effectiveness of the resulting policy.
- Throughout these debates there is the central concept – or problem – of the ‘policy process’: what is it, and how can open methods improve it? Recognising the central position of this question in the drive to deliver better policy making, the Reform Plan promised “*a clear model of open policy making*”; however, the OPM team have preferred not to prescribe such a model. Given interviewees’ uncertainty over how (and when) to put OPM principles into practice, this Review has argued that such a model – or more likely, models, given the multiple policy contexts to be provided for - will be needed, to support civil servants and co-productive stakeholders alike as they attempt to navigate the open policy landscape, and gauge their inputs to maximum effect. Notwithstanding actual models, some clarity over the policy process is required in order to define the role of open policy making: while it is clearly to be the “default”, does that mean it is additional or alternative to current methods (also notably poorly defined and modelled)? If it is additional, in what ways will it enable civil servants to ‘work smarter’ and more cost-effectively? And if it is an alternative, what will be lost from the current process? Interviewees for this Review reported misgivings that traditional forms of evidence might be sacrificed – and pointed to cutbacks in the amount of social research undertaken in Defra already. Given parallel concerns that open policy methods (such as crowdsourcing, online consultation and social media debates) lack robustness, it is important that the relationship between current evidence-based processes, and new open processes as the default, are clarified forthwith.



- Also hinged to that ambiguity over current and future models of policy making is the ultimate question of what processes result in better policy. The Reform Plan does not enter this debate; when it was raised with interviewees during this Review, some took it as a matter of faith that open methods would result in better policy simply because they would be the product of more and wider inputs. However, other interviewees were more circumspect, including some engagement practitioners who argued that the quality of inputs to the policy process (whether from traditional social research evidence, or more innovative open methods) is less important than whether they are acted upon in the final act of making policy. Beyond this process-based evaluation of better policy, outcome evaluations are also required. New policy evaluation methodologies which incorporate new open policy making processes will need to be developed in order ultimately to answer the question about which approaches make better policy.

## 2.2 Implications

The Reform Plan has sparked a debate about open policy making methods and their uses in different contexts. The priority task is now for Departments to follow the lead set by the Cabinet Office and explore what OPM means for them and their processes, as a priority: this Review can be understood as an early contribution by Defra to that process.

This final section outlines some aspects of the exploration which Defra could continue to undertake – broken down under each of the open methods in this Review. The Review was designed to address the question of the role of audience insight and engagement in open policy making, and to identify opportunities and challenges for Defra in advancing ‘open’ approaches. Given the deliberate fluidity in the OPM concept as advocated by the Cabinet Office, it is hard to be definitive about Defra’s relative strengths in this area. However, it is clear that Defra has been using methods which can be associated with open policy making for some years. In particular, the Department has longstanding expertise in consultation, and it continues to innovate in this area (eg. in its adoption of online consultation tools). Equally, Defra has considerable experience of running working groups with stakeholder organisations, and co-delivering policies with sector partners; there were calls from interviewees to bring together best practice guidance on such activities from across Defra. Finally, the Department’s involvement to date in citizen science projects is extensive, and new applications are being developed all the time.

However, the extent to which these activities add up to OPM being the ‘default’ approach to policy making in Defra is debatable. It is certainly clear that there are opportunities for Defra to go further in its adoption of open methods such as use of social media, and more unbounded models of co-production with citizen users. These observations also highlight the extent to which the open policy making agenda as it is being adopted in Defra is associated with an increasing emphasis on engaging stakeholder groups, while audience insight into wider publics seems to be of decreasing importance. In recognition of this, it could be timely for Defra to bring together what is known about stakeholder organisations and how best to engage them and meet their needs, and then to disseminate this knowledge throughout the Department. However, it is less clear how much audience insight work with wider publics needs to be safeguarded; interviewees’ concerns that more open methods of engagement may lack the robustness of more traditional insight methods should certainly be heeded.

In order for Defra to reach a point at which open approaches become the default for policy making, there are also some cross-cutting tasks that need to be undertaken for the benefit of all Departments and their stakeholder organisations. It is not entirely clear who is best placed to take them forward: whether The Cabinet Office, its GDS and OPM teams, other cross-government entities like the Government Social Research Unit (GSR), particular Departments in collaboration, or some of the external and partner organisations in this new landscape (including the IFG, Involve and Dem Soc) – or perhaps as co-production activities by different combinations of these bodies. However, given that the One Year On report on the Reform Plan observed that the Government's "*starting point is less advanced than we thought*", it could be argued that these tasks should be approached as a matter of urgency. For simplicity, these cross-cutting tasks take the form of seven areas of work for advancing open policy making

## **a) Crosscutting**

### *i) New model(s) for the (open) policy process*

In order to enable civil servants and stakeholders alike to orientate themselves in the new policy landscape, and thus maximise the impact of their contributions, there is a need to define and diagram a new model (or models) of the 'open' policy process. Make these true to life, such that the 'impact gap' between policy inputs and policy outputs is credibly filled in. Identify where in these processes particular 'open' methods can and should feed in – including defining the ideal sequencing of inputs and from whom. As a starting point, a possible overarching model could observe the following sequence (but noting that this is already idealised – many policy problems will start halfway through, or skip particular stages):

*open crowdsourcing → desk research → early engagement as informal consultation  
→ formal consultation → analysis and evidencing → co-delivered pilots  
→ evaluation → rollout*

### *ii) New methods for evaluating (open) policy processes and impacts*

The designing of new models of the policy process, incorporating new open methods as a range of inputs, will require new evaluation methods. These are required in order to answer questions about what processes work best, and ultimately what makes better policy. New methods should incorporate both traditional social research and newer digital and open methods.

### *iii) Breaking the monopoly: how 'open' can central government policy making be?*

While co-production provides the conceptual underpinning for open policy making, it has its origins in community action at local neighbourhood level. Work is required to substantiate how open central Government can and should be in each of the new policy processes it adopts. Without this, the implicit assumption of 'the more open, the better' may put Government in uncomfortable positions, with negative results in terms of both participatory democracy and policy outcomes.

### *iv) Defining stakeholders, understanding their needs and wants*

Different Departments adopt different definitions of stakeholders, priority audiences, and delivery partners, among other groups. In the context of open policy making these distinctions matter if the right groups are going to be invited to make co-

productive contributions at particular points in the policy process. Once identified, the needs of each group should be explored, such that their continuing involvement in open processes can be facilitated.

v) *Bringing together best practice guidance for co-ordinating stakeholder groups*

With the rise in importance of stakeholders comes the rise in importance of stakeholder groups, and other co-productive fora. There is currently no guidance on how to convene, co-ordinate or resource such groups, and both Reports from this Study have attested to the challenges of these ways of working. Developing best practice in this area will be essential to ensure 'co-production by proxy' becomes a viable approach for Departments, and that their progress on key policy areas is not frustrated by a lack of consensus or shared resource to push on with areas of work identified as a priority by key stakeholders, and civil servants themselves.

vi) *Developing 'open' consultation methods, with social research expertise built in*

Consultation methods are currently in flux – as reflected in the process of reforming consultation guidance. Digital technologies, and other open methods for stakeholder engagement, offer great potential for improving consultation outcomes, but at present they can add to the sense of turbulence. Work on modernising consultation methods should continue, seeing consultation as one of a suite of methods for opening up policy making. Priority tasks here include ensuring that social research rigour is built into new consultation processes, and that the ultimate goal of ensuring that consultation outcomes impact on policy outputs is kept front and centre at all times.

vii) *A self monitoring service: Departments seeing themselves as others see them, digitally*

Guidance on social media enables, and encourages, civil servants to join in social media conversations, and to harness the benefits of these new channels for their work. In the meantime increased effort is being expended on monitoring the conversations of key stakeholder organisations and priority audience groups online. However, as this Review has demonstrated, the view of a Department from the public's online perspective is not something the Department tends to be aware of – or currently has systems in place to monitor or modify on a consistent basis. Departments' digital profiles are likely to impact on the extent to which they can join in existing online conversations, or succeed in inviting online publics to contribute to their policy debates.

**b) for Defra**

These implications are specific to Defra's context and current practices. However, in addressing the full sweep of policy methods and tools covered in this Review, they will have resonance for other Departments and bodies keen to use these methods. Note that as ever there is considerable overlap and blurring between some of the open methods here.

i) *Co-Production*

- There is plenty of latitude to explore opportunities for more unbounded approaches to co-production: those which involve different 'lay' publics as equal partners in policy development processes. Some of these opportunities may follow the model of some of the action-based research projects which involve citizen-beneficiaries from the outset (e.g. the fish box scheme). During these processes, it would be beneficial to understand more about where best to bound Government-public collaborations, in turn learning how 'open' an approach to co-production is possible: especially in the context of Defra's policy areas and audiences.
- In less open forms of co-production that involve stakeholders only ('co-production by proxy'), there is a need to define consistent processes which put the stakeholder first. Meeting their needs through providing roadmaps and timetables (based on credible policy process models – see above) would enable them to locate themselves in the process and to determine where and when best to focus their efforts.
- It would be helpful to undertake an audit of Defra stakeholder fora and working groups, their remits, and their members. Consulting with stakeholders and internally would help to determine whether there is any duplication of purpose, such that some groups could be merged or wound up. Reciprocally, it would also help to identify policy areas where Defra should take the lead by setting up new groups.
- Based on the expressed needs of Defra staff, there is a clear opportunity to develop best practice guidance on convening working groups. This could include, for instance, how much resource is necessary to run these groups, in terms of secretariat support, and covering the expenses of stakeholder participants. Facilitation methodologies should also be considered; having an independent facilitator to run key sessions is likely to enable more unbounded contributions from participants, while the inside/outside role of such a person is likely to enable more innovative outcomes. Ideally some budget should be provided to seed fund early stage ideas in each group, to give them momentum and shared purpose, and establish Defra in the role of convenor. Lastly a set of tools could be developed to help groups pursue co-production approaches; these may include segmentation models, planning and evaluation methods, and behavioural insight tools, to help them overcome stalemates and move forward on shared agendas.
- Defra can continue to adopt a central convenor role with stakeholders on particular policy agendas. Bringing collateral to these working groups in the shape of segmentation models (among other tools) would help to co-develop a shared understanding of priority audiences. The Department might need to be prepared to seed-fund the co-development of such models.

ii) *Consultation*

- Defra should retain a specific focus on consultation, distinct from crowdsourcing, when formalising open policy making methods. It is too central to the working of government, and there is too much expertise in the Department, to risk throwing it away by pushing it into the realm of online communities and software developers, in a move that could be deemed detrimental to democratic processes.
- There is a need to define better the stages of early engagement, informal and formal consultation, and make those stages transparent to participants. Explaining how the results from consultation can feed into policy outputs would also help, as would

considering how each kind of engagement is evaluated in terms of effectiveness; this is especially challenging for the sorts of ongoing conversation which occur in early engagement and informal consultation.

- Looking for points at which traditional social research experience can build rigour into new consultation processes (most obviously in question design, and analysis of responses) would help to ensure that rich and complex responses can be collected and processed, as well as responses to closed questions.

### *iii) Crowdsourcing*

- (Treating crowdsourcing as distinct from informal consultation on the one hand, and citizen science activities on the other), it would be helpful to explore the possibilities to develop more 'Type 4' crowdsourcing activities (in which citizens choose between rival options), particularly those involving policy idea generation. It would help to consider when dialogue apps can be used and with whom, and when other methods may be more appropriate – including formalising a process for using social media as a means of generating early stage policy ideas.

### *iv) Citizen Science*

- There are many potential citizen science activities in Defra's policy areas; exploring these opportunities with research and technology partners would help ensure Defra is included from the outset (to obtain benefits including collateral with stakeholders, specific insights relevant to policy, and closer engagement with wider publics).
- Undertaking a project to quantify the benefits would help to understand the potential impacts of citizen science projects better, and to maximise them. On the public engagement front, it would be useful to explore whether such projects can reach a wider audience and generate more supportive attitudes than e.g. engaging in conversations on Twitter.

### *v) Social Media*

- There is a need to understand the limits to Defra entering into open fora for debate with general publics, and identify ways to manage this whilst still benefitting from wider engagement beyond the usual policy circles. Bounded Tweetathons may be one means; or crowdsourcing ideas by means of facilitation by third party partners and other stakeholders (e.g. think tanks and other interested parties). In this last case, it is worth learning lessons from innovative online research methodologies.
- It is important to ensure that social media activity is undertaken as an "extra layer" on top of traditional audience insight and stakeholder engagement activities. This may involve exploring how social research can be drawn into social media approaches to understand better who is contributing, and what parts of the wider public their views might represent. Profiling respondents by segment may be one specific way to carry this forward.
- There is a need to introduce a degree of co-ordination and control over what messages staff are sending out. As well as stakeholder monitoring, it would help to develop strategies for self-monitoring: what is the collective face of the Department from the perspective of the online public? At the very least, there is a need to keep a register of all outgoing messages; as a step up, the Department could consider training staff in the

most effective ways to use social media, distinct from other engagement or insight approaches.

## Appendices

### i) Interviewees & Attendees

Defra Staff (n = 21)

[name]	[title]
Charlotte Allen	Social Researcher, Better Regulation
Rebecca Barrett	Head of Stakeholder Engagement
Carlotta Berti	Balance of Competencies Review Team
Mohua Bhattacharya	Customer and Stakeholder Relationships team
Hugh Craddock	Head of Commons and Access Implementation Team
Andy Crawford	Domestic Forestry Policy
Alan D'Arcy	Virtual Centre for Expertise on Influencing Behaviour; CAP Reform team
Steve Darling	Strategy & Private Office Directorate (SPOD) Head of Policy Management & Scrutiny, Better Regulation
Lee Davies	Food and Sustainable Economy Research Lead
Daniel De Cruz	Head of E-comms
Zoe Donkin	Farming and Food Science
Steven Gleave	Better Regulation - Head
Gemma Harper	Head of Social Science /Animal Health and Welfare evidence
Emma Hennessey	Head of CSA's Team Strategic Evidence & Analysis
Fiona Harrison	Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser; Evidence Deputy Director on Marine and Water and Flood Risk Management
Ruth Little	Policy and Social Science Evidence
Simon Maxwell	Social Research Adviser, Biodiversity and Ecosystems Evidence
Caroline O'Flaherty	Better Regulation - Consultation Review Co-ordinator
Colin Parker	Fisheries reform team
Caroline Shanklyn	CAP delivery programme stakeholder lead (RPA)
Caryl Williams	GM, Chemicals and emerging technologies

External Experts (n = 5)

[name]	[organisation]	[title]
Ben Fowkes	Delib	Senior Consultant
Barbara McLean	Welsh Government	Senior Research Officer
Maria Nyberg	Cabinet Office	Head of Open Policy Making
Andy Williamson	FutureDigital	Founder, CEO
Anthony Zacherwevski	The Democratic Society	Director



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