

Evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly on the Inquiry of Long-Term Funding of Adult Social Care



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About the Report

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Executive Summary

Overview

- This report provides an evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly Social Care (CASC) that was commissioned by the Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee from the House of Commons, as part of their inquiry into the long-term funding of adult social care in England. The assembly took place in April and May 2018 and was organised by participation charity Involve.
- The evaluation focuses on the impact CASC had on the assembly participants and Parliament
- It is based on a survey with all 47 assembly participants and 7 interviews with members and staff from both committees and the Committee Office at the Houses of Parliament

Views of the Assembly Participants

- The participants confirmed that the process met key norms of deliberation
- They found the information provided to them from the other participants and the witnesses understandable and useful
- They thought the process was inclusive and respectful, with all having sufficient chance to have their say
- The process either changed or clarified the participants' view on adult social care funding
- They thought Parliament and Government should use more citizens' assemblies

Views of the Select Committees' Members and Staff

- They appreciated the diversity and representativeness of the participants recruited and that the process led to informed and considered public opinion on social care funding
- They thought that the process could enable Parliament to inform the public about what it does, but also increase the committees' influence over government
- CASC had a good deal of influence of the committees' recommendations, but primarily because it produced sound results
- They did not want to over-publicise that CASC was part of the inquiry as it could de-legitimise more routine committee inquiries
- Although there was concern about the cost, they favoured the use of more citizens' assemblies for appropriate inquiry topics

Recommendations

1. Parliament should sponsor more Citizens' Assemblies
2. Parliament should pilot other types of mini-public
3. As many members and staff of the commissioning select committee as possible should attend future mini-publics as observers
4. Parliament should establish a 'Mini-Public Review Committee' to manage a discretionary budget for running mini-publics and to determine which inquiry topics should be supported by this engagement process
5. Parliament should publicise any mini-publics they run in the future to a greater extent
6. There should be an evaluation to trace the influence of the inquiry and CASC on government policy. A budget should be set aside to fund evaluation of future mini-publics commissioned by the Houses of Parliament.

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1. Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of the impact on the participants and Parliament of the recent Citizens' Assembly on Social Care (CASC) that was commissioned by the Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee from the House of Commons and organised by Involve in May 2018. Full details of the process can be found [here](#) (Involve 2018).

The UK Parliament has been increasingly trying to engage the public in its activities in order to increase knowledge and understanding of parliament, diversify the knowledge available to policy-makers (Flinders et al. 2015), and to maintain and increase trust in parliament (Leston-Bandeira 2014). However, the approach adopted to engagement has been criticised for aiming to inform the public of parliament's activities rather than strengthening the ties between citizens and parliament by increasing opportunities for active citizen input into parliamentary processes (Leston-Bandeira 2012; Flinders et al. 2015; Hendriks & Kay 2017). Consequently, the Liaison Committee, which is tasked with championing public engagement, has suggested that 'a more vibrant and systematic approach to public engagement be adopted' (Flinders et al. 2015: 5).

An increasingly used mechanism to enhance citizen engagement is mini-publics. They assemble small groups of randomly selected citizens to engage with each other in facilitated deliberation, and make recommendations on a policy issue having been informed by a diverse range of witnesses. Their aim is to show what the public would think of a policy issue if they had time and resources to learn and deliberate about it in favourable conditions.

Citizens' Assemblies (CAs) are the newest (since 2004) and potentially the most radical and democratically robust of all the mini-public types developed to date (Elstub 2014). The Irish cases are some of the most recent and well publicised. This included the Convention on the Constitution in 2012, which was innovative because it included randomly selected citizens and parliamentarians discussing the issues together. This led to a referendum on marriage equality. This was followed by a Citizens' Assembly in 2016, with only members of the public participating, and led to a referendum on abortion.

Recently the case has been made that select committees (SCs) could make effective use of mini-publics to enhance the epistemic, representative, scrutiny and deliberative functions of their inquiries. The idea being that the recommendations from the mini-publics feed into the committee process (Hendriks & Kay 2017; Setala 2017; Beswick & Elstub 2019). There are other good reasons for focusing on SCs too. They are 'the principal mechanism through which the House of Commons holds the executive to account' (Brazier & Fox 2011: 354). Public trust in SCs is higher than for other Parliamentary bodies due to them being evidence-based and less partisan (Brazier & Fox 2011: 368). However, many are calling for SC reform. For example, greater transparency and accountability in the activities of select committees has been called for (Brazier & Fox 2011: 361). The Speaker's Digital Democracy Commission (2015) has also called for more mechanisms to enable



citizens to contribute to SCs. Currently, they tend to receive evidence from quite a narrow range of sources (Pedersen et al. 2015). Linking mini-publics with SCs would diversify the evidence base and facilitate public scrutiny of the inputs and outputs of the committees (Beswick & Elstub 2019).

Last year the Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee sponsored a Citizens' Assembly on Social Care, which addressed the highly topical, but controversial issue of social care funding. This seminal case study merits further evaluation; in particular, to assess the views of SC members and staff towards this mechanism of public engagement and to assess the impact it had on their views of social care funding. On the face of it CASC seemed to prove influential on the SC, with the majority of the recommendations appearing in the joint select committee report (Health and Social Care & the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committees, HC 768). However, we need to know more about whether this was to do with the format of the citizens' assembly, the nature of the recommendations on social care funding, or a combination of both.

To achieve this evaluation, we interviewed 7 members and staff from the two select committees directly involved with the Citizens' Assembly: Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, and the Committee Office. The Citizens' Assembly participants were also surveyed to discover more about their experience of the process. It is to a consideration of these survey results to which we now turn.



2. The Views of the Citizens' Assembly Participants

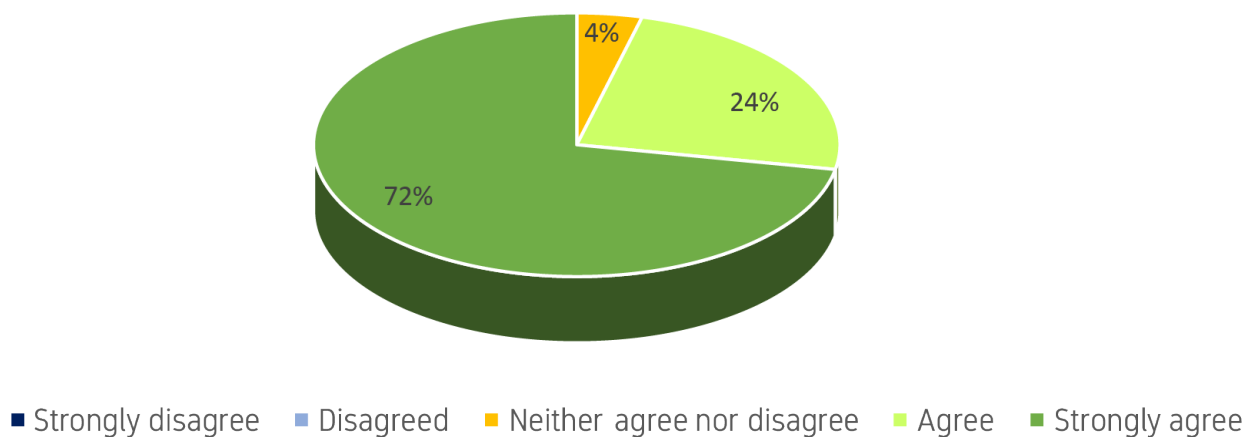
The 47 CASC participants were surveyed at the end of the process to gain insight into how they perceived the experience¹. They were asked questions about the information they received from fellow participants and the witnesses; their opportunities to express their own views; the extent their opinions of social care funding changed during the process; and overall whether they think CAs should be used more frequently. In this section we give an overview of these results.

Information in CASC

In a mini-public witnesses act as informers to the participants, providing evidence, information, views and answering questions. Research suggests that it is the provision of evidence and information that has the greatest influence on mini-public participants' opinions at the end of the process (Thompson et al. 2019). In CASC it was clear the information provided was useful to the participants with 98% agreeing that they learnt a lot and over 95% agreeing that they could understand all the witnesses' presentations. Moreover, as Figure 1. below indicates, over 95% thought they received sufficient information to participate effectively.

Mini-public participants should not just learn from the witnesses but from each other too and all agreed they were able to understand the contributions of the other participants.

Figure 1. Participants understood almost everything that was presented by the speakers

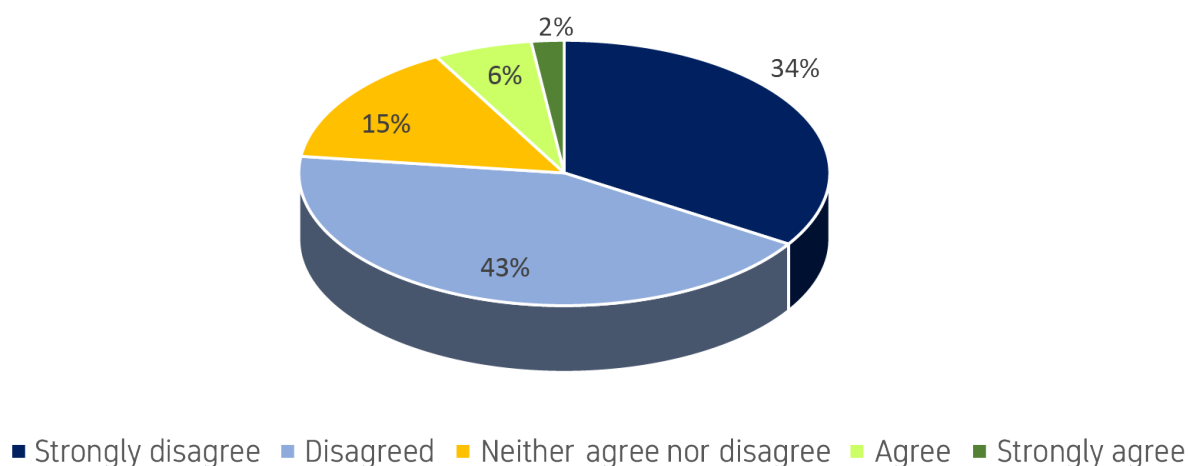


¹ The survey was designed and implemented by Involve, and not the evaluation team. However, they were given access to the data. There are limitations to the survey as it relies entirely on subjective assessment tests of learning and deliberative quality by the participants. Such assessments are useful but are not entirely reliable.

Inclusion in CASC

In good quality deliberation, it is important that all get to have their views heard and that other participants listen to these interventions respectfully. Those participating in CASC also thought the process was inclusive and 100% agreed they were able to express their views on the issue of social care funding. Moreover, when they did speak 100% felt that the other participants respected their views even if they disagreed with them. Nor did it seem that the group discussions were overridden by a few dominant voices with only 8.5% agreeing to this, as shown below in Figure 2². In sum, the participants' experience was that the group discussions in CASC were in accordance with key deliberative norms.

Figure 2. Extent participants agreed that people in their small group tended to dominate the discussions so that others found it difficult to contribute

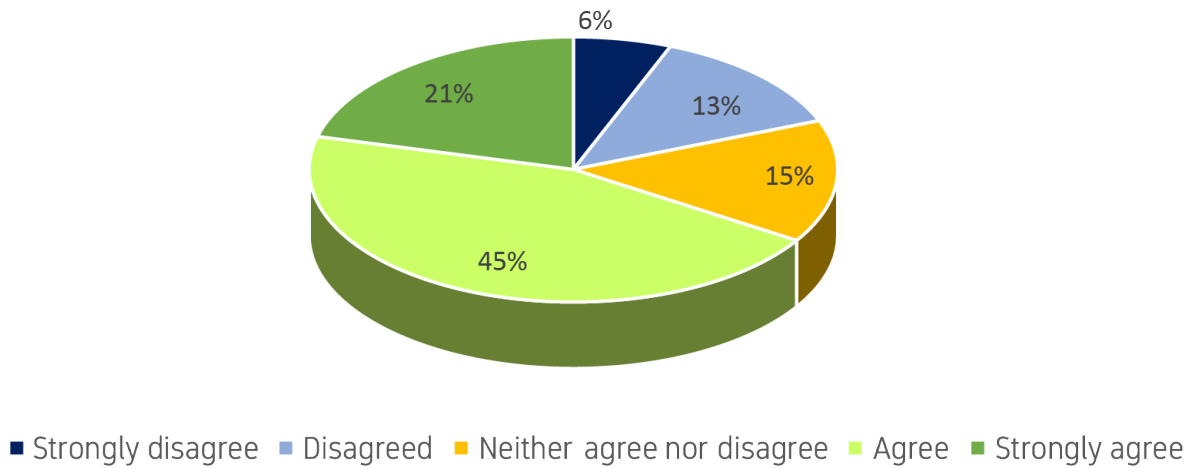


Opinion Change in CASC

Opinion change is not a deliberative norm as such, but listening with an open-mind is. If participants do this then there is a good chance they will hear information and ideas that they were previously unaware of which can lead them to change their mind (Thompson et al.). Certainly, opinion change in mini-publics is quite common (Elstub 2014). With respect to CASC the evidence we have on opinion change is self-reported from the participants in the survey, so it is not completely reliable as some may not remember exactly what their view was at the start of the process. Consequently, we see some mixed results here as shown in Figure 3. Nevertheless, 66% reported changing their views on adult social care funding through the CASC process and nearly 98% suggested the process had led to them having clearer views on the topic.

² It should be noted that this question was poorly phrased as agreeing with the statement confirmed a negative rather than a positive, unlike the other questionnaire statements. It is possible that this could have confused some participants while completing the survey. Nevertheless, the proportion who agreed with the statement were a small minority.

Figure 3. Extent participants agreed that their views about adult social care funding had changed as a result of the Assembly process



Future Use of Citizens' Assemblies in the British Political System

Very few people in the UK have participated in Citizens' Assemblies. Therefore, the CASC participants are in a unique position to reflect upon their experience of the process regarding the future use of Citizens' Assemblies in the policy process in the UK. At the end of the process, the participants were asked whether 'Assemblies like this should be used more often to inform government and parliament decision making.' 100% thought that they should. Clearly, this reflects a confidence and faith in the process and a desire for more citizens' assemblies in UK politics, from members of the public with first-hand experience of participating in one.

Conclusion

It is clear that the CASC participants saw a lot of value in the process. As shown above they thought the information they received from the witnesses and fellow participants was understandable and useful. They also thought they had sufficient opportunity to express their views and to be listened to respectfully even when there were disagreements. Most participants also thought they changed or clarified their views on adult social care funding through the process. Perhaps most impressively of all was that every single participant thought the government and parliament should make more use of CAs.

3. The Views of the Select Committees' Members and Staff

7 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed by the evaluation team to ascertain the views of the committee members and staff across the two committees that commissioned the CASC. This included committee Chairs and also representatives from the Committee Office. The interviews were conducted between October 2018 and January 2019 by one interviewer. They were asked questions on the benefits and limitations CASC brought to their inquiry; how CASC compared to other inputs into the inquiry; whether the inclusion of CASC led to changes in how the inquiry operated; and whether they think SCs should run more CAs in the future to support their inquiries. In the analysis we turn to each of these themes below demonstrating the similarities and differences in the interviewees' responses, which are cited anonymously.

The Benefits the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care Brought to the Inquiry

The interviewees were asked to consider what benefits CASC brought to the inquiry. The benefits identified ranged from those specific to the inquiry, to wider benefits of the work of the SCs and their relationship with Government and the public. Generally, the interviewees considered that the CA contributed positively to the inquiry, stating that it *"was a valuable process"* (Interviewee 2), which *"did genuinely have an influence"* (Interviewee 7) and that functioned as *"a kind of touchstone ... to keep coming back and referring to"* (Interviewee 4). Ultimately, it helped the committees reach agreement on issues they might otherwise have been divided on.

There was broad agreement on the benefits of the *"instrumental role in helping the committee form their conclusions"* (Interviewee 4). This was especially valuable to the inquiry on social care; *"a topic that had proved very difficult to solve in the past"* (Interviewee 3), which has been *"around the political system for quite a time without any consensus"* (Interviewee 4).

The interviewees emphasised the depth of deliberation and consideration of evidence as particular values that the CASC process facilitated e.g. *"a long period of deliberation, evidence and discussion"* (Interviewee 4) that *"involves them making the effort to understand the question, in a deeper, more complicated way"* (Interviewee 1); *"this specific type of information gathering, which was informed by education first, so people had actually had an opportunity to think about and be educated about an issue before discussing it"* (Interviewee 5). Consequently, CASC represented *"an opportunity to ensure that the people you're asking for their views had a real opportunity to get a very comprehensive and balanced briefing with different points of view put to them on which to form a judgement"* (Interviewee 4). This depth of discussion and the composition of *"genuinely a representative group"* (Interviewee 7) enabled interviewees to conclude that the *"assembly is pretty rigorous"* (Interviewee 2), and that they *"had great faith in the process and the independence of it and the way that it had been tackled"* (Interviewee 3). The thoroughness of the CA was attributed to the expertise of the CA facilitators *"that ensured that everybody was able to participate"*



in the discussion. There were no quiet voices left sitting in the corner who you didn't hear from. And the structured way in which everything fed upwards" (Interviewee 5).

These strengths of CASC and the legitimacy of the process therefore enhanced the perceived influence of the recommendations of the SC reports:

"the strength of a citizen's assembly is to find out whether an idea that can't gain easy traction in the political class, because of their fear of reaction, is actually more sellable than the political class believe it to be" (Interviewee 1)

The potential for CAs to add *"extra weight to our recommendations ... [so] that the government takes closer account of them"* (Interviewee 3) has wider implications where the SCs feel *"increasingly that the government [are] very dismissive ... They're not taking on board as much as they used to"* (Interviewee 7). Interviewees recognised that the extra influence was possible because *"you can show that they reflect what people think about a topic ... just gives them an essential authority"* (Interviewee 3); *"this seemed like a way of trying to make the government listen a bit more to what we were saying because it would be an added layer of public legitimacy to our work"* (Interviewee 7). Therefore, while predominantly highlighting the instrumental benefits of CASC the intrinsic value of the legitimacy of the process was also recognised: *"[It] gives legitimacy and relevance to what the committee does"* (Interviewee 5).

Many of the interviewees conceded that their positive views of CASC were also due to the resulting recommendations, as they were seen as *"the right answers ... acceptable solutions"* (Interviewee 1), so that *"it was easier [for the SCs] to go along with their recommendations because their recommendations were along the drift that we were thinking"* (Interviewee 4) and because the process had *"produced a consensus"* (Interviewee 1). The interviewees were *"reasonably confident that ... [the CASC participants] would agree"* (Interviewee 7) and that *"the results were accurate"* (Interviewee 3), once again emphasising faith in the CASC process. This is an important finding as Interviewee 7 recognised that *"some of the members and the Chairs were concerned about what do we do if we don't agree with what the assembly says"* and that *"if they completely disagreed with it, it would've been a challenge."* There is then evidence that CASC shifted the emphasis of specific issues. For example the SCs *"wouldn't have reflected the view about the ultimate desirability of free care if they hadn't made that point so strongly to us"* (Interviewee 4). The influence of the CASC recommendations on the select committees was most significant when the committee members disagreed. It helped them overcome these disagreements and move towards consensus: *'it was actually very helpful in bringing the committee together ... it played then quite an instrumental role in helping the committee form their conclusions and reach a consensus conclusion on this difficult issue'* (Interviewee 4).



Generally, however, the interviewees spoke more about the potential for CAs to educate participants, than how the participants affected their decision making. The interviewees linked participant learning to influencing them and the policy decision:

“getting people who are not in their day-to-day lives, much engaged in politics to understand that decisions are more difficult than they look and think a bit about the costs and benefits of choices that you make, you can’t have everything” (Interviewee 1), because “in order to reform social care, it needs to be accompanied by that process of learning and engaging people” (Interviewee 3).

The value of CASC in educating the public extended beyond the issue of social care funding to Parliamentary processes more generally *“so that people will get a clearer sense of what Parliament is for and what it’s trying to do”* (Interviewee 1), which is thought to be enhanced by engaging directly with *“people who wouldn’t necessarily normally be involved in the parliamentary process”* (Interviewee 6). An aspect which CASC promoted due to its random sample. The interviewees similarly felt that the CA *“opened up committees’ work to an even wider audience than that which just attended the citizens’ assembly”* (Interviewee 3) because it was a *“completely novel thing”* (Interviewee 3) and *“was quite newsworthy”* (Interviewee 6). However, other interviewees felt that *“the assembly in itself ... did not generate very much media interest”* (Interviewee 5) and *“could have been ... better publicised”* (Interviewee 1), which should be a recommendation for future CAs.

Although the high cost of the CA reflects the rigor of the process, the interviewees acknowledged that it represented value for money:

“[The CA represented] value for money because it was an investment in research and development for select committees. So certainly, as a pilot, to see whether it worked, it was worth spending the money to try and find that” (Interviewee 1).

In summary, all the interviewees identified benefits that CASC brought to the inquiry, particularly given the difficult nature of the issue of social care. The rigour and depth of the debate, as well as how representative the participants were of the public, are key factors in the faith the interviewees had in the process. There was evidence that these factors delivered instrumental benefits to the inquiry, aiding the SCs to develop their recommendations, for example, by shifting the emphasis on specific issues.

The faith in the CA process has wider potential implications than the inquiry, given perceived diminishing influence of the SCs on Government and negative public attitude towards Westminster. The use of the CA was believed to have added legitimacy to the inquiry and has the potential to improve public engagement via mutual informing, educating and learning. To improve the potential benefits of CAs to engage with those beyond the CA and SCs, better publicity is recommended which focuses on how the public were engaged.



The Limitations of the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care

The interviewees were also asked to consider what the limitations of CASC were. Some of the limitations identified represented initial concerns that were addressed during the CA process itself, whilst others represent broader issues that could limit the use of CAs in other inquiries.

Most of the interviewees admitted to having initial reservations about how representative the CA would be and the value of the evidence gathered. Most voiced concerns about the number of participants e.g. "50 people doesn't sound like a lot" (Interviewee 7), *"is it really reflective?"* (Interviewee 4), *"random group of however many people"* (Interviewee 2).

As well as sample size, the interviewees were also concerned about who the participants were e.g. *"just a bunch of members of the public"* (Interviewee 2), *"we ought to be hearing from experts"* (Interviewee 2), because *"what they call evidence, which is more often opinion, rather than evidence"* (Interviewee 1).

The interviewees considered that the *"process has real strengths which could be adapted and exported"* (Interviewee 5). However, to realise the benefits of a rigorous process facilitated by specialists *"that ensured that everybody was able to participate in the discussion"* (Interviewee 5) creates *"practical difficulties"* (Interviewee 5) that limit the adaptability of CAs. Most interviewees identified that *"it's incredibly expensive"* (Interviewee 2) to have a process lasting *"four days"* (Interviewee 4) with *"expertise ... brought in"* (Interviewee 5) to run the CA. That it required a *"giant effort"* (Interviewee 5) compared to doing their usual approach to public engagement which can be done *"very cheaply, and all it costs is 50 teas and coffees and biscuits and some travel expenses"* (Interviewee 3). The perception that the process is *"hugely resource-intensive"* (Interviewee 7) has two consequences that limits their use. First, *"the punitive cost"* (Interviewee 7) stretches limited budgets. Consequently, *"at the moment, there isn't a lot of money"* (Interviewee 1) to undertake more CAs. Second, how the high costs would be perceived by others could be damaging: *"if we were regularly spending that much money, there might be reputational issues"* (Interviewee 7).

The limitation of high costs was emphasised by the potential for the CA to generate recommendations that the SCs were unable to accept:

"If they genuinely haven't agreed with the findings of the assembly, and they had good reasons for that, then they shouldn't just go with the assembly because we've spent 150 grand on it, regardless that we've spent all this money on it. It would've been a challenge, it would've been a decision for the members, and it would've been difficult" (Interviewee 7).

However, despite the concerns over cost and that CASC was *"very difficult to do it, even in the time"* (Interviewee 5), none of the interviewees thought it was prohibitive. Some reflected on how the high costs could be overcome, for example, *"if ... the match funding wasn't available ... you would be looking at doing something much smaller-scale"* (Interviewee 5). Ultimately, the process was still seen as representing



“value for money” (Interviewee 2 & Interviewee 5) especially when compared to committee visits abroad (Interviewee 1 & Interviewee 5). It should also be noted that this CA was organised very rapidly in a far shorter space of time than is usually the case. The first CASC meeting occurred just three weeks after the contract was agreed with the Houses of Parliament.

In summary, many of the initial concerns raised about how representative and who the participants were were addressed during CASC. However, there are persistent concerns about how to justify the high costs and resources required to obtain what could be perceived as non-expert opinion. It is recommended that more work should be done on the publicity of CAs to raise awareness and confidence in the process to encourage their use on other inquiries.



How the Input of the Citizens' Assembly Compared to Other Sources in the Inquiry

The interviewees were asked to consider how the input of CASC compared to other inputs into the inquiry. Conventional inputs into SC inquiries include generic calls for evidence, where specifically relevant groups are targeted and invited to give written and oral evidence.

Despite initial reservations about how representative the CA would be (see above), all the interviewees thought that having been through the process, the CAs offered a better way for the SCs to obtain evidence from a *“broader population”* (Interviewee 6) that represented a *“kind of a mock-up of the electorate”* (Interviewee 5) than the more routine evidence gathering techniques used in committee inquiries. Comparing CASC to other forms of public engagement, for example, at *“a Q & A, you’d get lots of vocal people coming along who would be semi-engaged already”* (Interviewee 6), whereas the CASC was considered a *“more scientific approach to capturing public opinion ... a breadth of public opinion, beyond the usual suspects ... people who have an axe to grind or just an expertise”* (Interviewee 1). Therefore, it is

ultimately recognised that hearing from a greater diversity of people adds value to the inquiry process as it enables one to *“hear from a variety of people, rather than just inviting one group of people”* (Interviewee 5). Some interviewees compared the CA approach to other examples of public engagement with SC inquiries. For example, an event that comprised *“a group almost exclusively self-funded ... the conversation was very skewed”* (Interviewee 2).

Although the interviewees recognised that the CA was representative, well managed and that they had faith in the process, they had different views on the extent CASC should be privileged in the inquiry compared to other inputs. Interviewee 2 stated that the SC *“wouldn’t privilege Citizens’ Assembly”* recommendations in an inquiry, because they should be judged on merit alongside the other pieces of evidence received. For Interviewee 2, there was a similarity between CASC and the SC members’ deliberations as they *“were hearing from similar people about similar things, and then getting similar messages, so ... they reached similar conclusions”* as the CASC participants. In contrast, Interviewee 5 considered that CASC was different because it provided *“a more positive contribution to actually developing a solution than one typically gets from public opinion research”*. Nevertheless, CASC still did not seem to have a privileged role in the inquiry: *“I don’t know if it had more of a sway, but it certainly had a big sway ... it definitely had a significant impact”* (Interviewee 5). This disagreement amongst the committee members and staff over the degree of influence CAs (and mini-publics in general) should have very much reflects the lack of consensus on this issue in academia and the democracy sector. On the one hand, mini-publics should not be tokenistic, but on the other, their level of influence should also be dependent on the rationale behind their recommendations.

Interviewees also disagreed on the effect and extent on the way that CAs offered a different range of answers compared to other inputs. Interviewee 1 considered that CASC produced a narrower range of answers than web forums which *“don’t necessarily produce a clear answer ... you get the 150,000 answers to the question but ... you would be lucky if a clear consensus because it’s just so various”*. In contrast, Interviewee 4 compared CASC to another inquiry that has received *“700 pieces of evidence ... a much wider range of contributions”*. There is clearly a balance between gathering the range of opinion in a manageable way and moving towards a decision. For one of the interviewees, the difference between CASC and other inputs was more significant than the range of answers. Interviewee 3 considered that while the CA *“was a good format for there to be a range”*, the specific difference was that CAs *“went further ... we were just taking the options and going one step further”*. This indicates that to optimise the specific benefits of a CA, when and how they are used within the inquiry is important, but that in narrowing down the options through informed deliberation, they offer something very different to other forms of public engagement like web forums.

In summary, the interviewees generally agreed that CASC was different to other inquiry inputs and types of public engagement, particularly with respect to the composition of participants and the facilitation of their interaction. However, they did not agree on the extent this privileged CASC within the inquiry, which could limit their use on other inquiries. The differing opinions show that how the CA is incorporated into an



inquiry is key to the extent the specific benefits and values can be realised. In this respect the SC members and staff are in agreement with many engagement practitioners and academics; that mini-publics should only be used for complex and contested policy issues on which people are undecided.

Did the Citizens' Assembly Change How the Inquiry was Approached?

The interviewees were asked whether they approached the inquiry differently due to the inclusion of CASC. Their responses centred round the practical differences, particularly how they approached publicising the inquiry in the context of differing views on how the CA would be perceived by others.

Generally, interviewees agreed that the publicity of the inquiry had to be handled differently due to the inclusion of the CAs, as they *“were able to promote the report in a particular way because of the involvement of the Citizens' Assembly”* (Interviewee 2). However, the different approach to publicity had both positive and negative consequences. Some interviewees considered that *“there was the challenge of working with the Citizens' Assembly findings”* (Interviewee 5), partly because they *“didn't want to ... make it come across that this was the first time we'd ever engaged in any way at all ... We didn't want to make out that this was totally exceptional ... that we'd gone to ask the public things ... which was probably a bit of a risk if we played it up too much”* (Interviewee 6). As indicated earlier, some of the interviewees identified a risk of undermining other inquiries that had not used a CA by *“giving it too much prominence”* and *“putting too much emphasis on the Citizens' Assembly”* when reporting it (Interviewee 6).

This risk of undermining other inquiries was linked to the differing views on the privilege that CASC brought to the inquiry. Some thought that the CA gave the inquiry *“a higher status”* (Interviewee 4), so that the publicity should also give *“it the privilege that it deserved”* (Interviewee 5). In contrast, Interviewee 6 expressed concern about an approach that gave prominence to the involvement of CAs because of the way it could *“give the impression that we'd just held this Citizens' Assembly and then we'd just agreed with what they said, and it stuck out as our own recommendations”*. Instead, Interviewee 6 *“wanted to stress that it was part of the process, but it wasn't the whole process”*, and *“to stress the issue first”* when publicising the inquiry. Interviewee 6 further highlighted the specific ways CASC affected their approach to publicity. Recognising the expertise of the specialist staff that organised the CA: *“Involve ... were very much involved [with the publicity] from the start”*. The novelty of the CA required changes in the content of the publicity, and they *“decided we needed some FAQs as well for the press”*, and because there *“was a bit of interest around the process, so there was a bit of coverage around it as well”*.

In summary, the inclusion of the CA required the publicity of the inquiry to be approached differently. The view was though that the potential for the new approach to reach a wider audience needed to be balanced with the risks of overemphasising the novelty that could undermine other inquiries. Some of these concerns could be reduced if the CA process was more widely understood.



The Extent To Which More Citizens' Assemblies Should be Run in the Future

The interviewees were asked to what extent they thought that CAs should be run in conjunction with SC inquiries in the future. Unsurprisingly, the limitations associated with the scale and cost of running a CA, identified on p.14, affected attitudes to this.

The interviewees generally agreed that CAs should not be used for all inquiries but that they could be used providing there is the *“kind of subject that is suitable, [and therefore] warrants holding a citizens' assembly”* (Interviewee 3). The interviewees considered that *“the right issue”* (Interviewee 2), *“partly depends on the question you're asking”* (Interviewee 1) and suggest that *“it helps if it's contentious”* (Interviewee 3), like *“one of the big intractable political problems”* (Interviewee 2). Considering that the benefits of the CA identified earlier included tackling difficult issues, especially *“to which the government is not signed up to a particular solution”* (Interviewee 1), like funding for adult social care, the interviewees suggested similar topics:

“where there's been many attempts made to come to a solution that has failed. Maybe topics which have a social and ethical dimension to them and perhaps involve raising money through increasing taxes”
(Interviewee 3)

Accepting that suitable issues are identified, the interviewees disagreed about the extent to which the scale and cost would limit the use of CAs on future SC inquiries. Some interviewees suggested that decreasing the scale of the CA could increase the extent they could be used on future inquiries: if they could be *“smaller, takes up less time, maybe a day, more committees then could do it, that would be ideal”* (Interviewee 3); *“you could deliver something scaled-back for less money, and it would still be useful to committees”* (Interviewee 5). However, Interviewee 4 warned against reducing the scale, considering that CAs should be *“at least 50 [participants]”*, and that *“if you have a very small sample ... it might delegitimise the findings”*; whilst others suggested that cost would not limit the use of CAs in the future: *“If we wanted to go down this road in the future, we'd have to put more money that way. I think if the political will was there, then that's easy enough”* (Interviewee 1).

The extent to which CAs are used on other inquiries should also be linked to how they are different to other inputs. As identified above, for the potential benefits of CAs to be realised and their use to be justified, how a CA fits into the inquiry process should be considered. For example, Interviewee 1 stated that:

“I would see a citizen's assembly, for example, as being a very good starting point, rather than finishing point for an inquiry. We might have a citizen's assembly and then take an inquiry on from there”

In summary, to justify the cost and scale of undertaking a CA, the interviewees considered that their future use depends on the suitability of the inquiry subject and where and how in the inquiry process the CA is used. Some thought a mini-public process with a smaller sample would be just as useful for a committee, while others thought it essential to retain a larger sample, regardless of the cost.



4. Lessons and Recommendations

This report provided an evaluation of the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care that was held in April and May 2018. CASC was commissioned by the Health and Social Care Select Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee as part of their joint inquiry into the long term funding of adult social care in England. In particular, the evaluation focused on what the participants in the assembly and the select committees' members and staff thought about the process. We found that both groups were very positive about CASC.

The participants were surveyed at the end of the process. They thought that the process met key deliberative norms. For example, they clearly thought the process was informative and inclusive and had an impact on their views on adult social care funding.

The members and the staff of the SCs were also very positive about CASC. As they were the subject of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, we know more about why they valued the process. They highlighted the deliberative quality of the CA, and relatedly the diversity of the participants, the range of relevant information they were provided with, and the facilitation. These are defining features of mini-publics, which differentiate them from nearly all other types of public engagement process. CASC was seen by all to bring benefits to inquiries that the current public engagement processes used by SCs are unable to deliver.

Many interviewees focused on the instrumental benefits of CASC, such as providing a good opportunity to spread understanding of the activities of parliament, as well as the hope it will bolster SC influence over government. The Green Paper on adult social care has not yet been released, so it remains to be seen if this influence has been achieved. However, the intrinsic value of the legitimacy of the CA process was also recognised by some. While CASC did influence the joint committee report, this was primarily because the recommendations that came from the CA were seen to be sensible and supported by evidence received through other channels in the inquiry. There was some concern about how the SCs should have responded had the CASC participants opted for alternative options that the committees were more reluctant to support. However, in this instance the CASC recommendations were particularly useful when the SC members were in disagreement, as it helped them reach consensus.

The main concern was the cost of the process. Despite this CASC was seen as value for money, particularly in comparison to other committee activities such as visits. It was thought required funding could be found in the future to run more CAs, but this would be highly dependent on the right issue being on the committee agenda for an inquiry. It should be a contentious, intractable issue with obvious relevance to the public at large. While some thought a mini-public with a smaller sample could lower costs and still bring great value to a committee inquiry, others thought a larger sample a necessity for the robustness of the process.



Having CASC as a key part of the inquiry did lead to changes in how the inquiry was conducted, primarily with respect to reporting and publicising the inquiry and resulting report, but only to a degree. While they were keen to highlight the novelty of including a CA, they were reluctant to overemphasise in case it delegitimised more traditional committee inquiry processes.

Of particular importance was that both the CASC participants and the SCs' members and staff thought that parliament should use CAs and mini-publics again in the future. There was a strong feeling across both groups that CASC should not be a one-off pilot event. We now conclude with some final recommendations based on the findings of the evaluation:

- 1. Future Citizens' Assemblies linked with Select Committees:** Having a CA as part of a SC inquiry was seen as valuable and useful and brought benefits that other processes cannot. Parliament should therefore consider commissioning more in the future when there is an issue that lends itself to it.
- 2. Piloting other Types of Mini-Public:** Parliament should pilot the use of mini-publics with a smaller sample such as a Citizens' Jury or Consensus Conference, to see if this provides similar benefits to the larger and more expensive Citizens' Assembly. There could also be experimentation with holding the mini-public at different stages of an inquiry.
- 3. Observation of Mini-Publics:** it was the SC members and staff that had attended CASC to observe some of the sessions that were most enthusiastic about the process and that were ultimately most influenced by the recommendations. Seeing the CASC participants in action really brought home the differences between a mini-public and other public engagement processes. Consequently, if future mini-publics are commissioned by SCs, it is important that as many members and staff from the committee attend to observe some of the sessions.
- 4. Mini-Public Review Committee:** As not all committee inquiries will be suitable for a mini-public, and because there will inevitably be a limited budget in parliament to fund them, a Review Committee could be set up that holds and administers an annual budget for parliamentary mini-publics. The Review Committee could include members and parliamentary staff (not connected to any particular committee), academics with expertise on mini-publics, and/or practitioners with experience of organising them. Committees who would like to support their inquiries with a mini-public could then apply for funding. The requirement to apply would help ensure that there was the necessary commitment to considering the results of a mini-public as part of the inquiry and give the committee the opportunity to demonstrate cross party support for the forum. The Review Committee could then consider these applications to determine which issues have the greatest merit for the use of a mini-public given the budget available. This would give the process of topic selection a good degree of independence and make best use of available budgets for mini-publics.



5. Publicising Inquiries and Mini-Publics: if parliament does sponsor Citizens' Assemblies or other types of mini-public in the future, further consideration needs to be given to how the related inquiry should be publicised. If the benefits of spreading understanding of the role of parliament and putting more pressure on government departments to heed SC recommendations are to be delivered, people must know that the mini-public is being run and promoted by parliament. This must be balanced with communicating the importance of the inquiry issue. A balance that perhaps was not achieved with CASC, which merited further prominence and publicity.

6. Evaluation: as one of the motivations of the committees' for sponsoring CASC was that it might increase their influence over relevant ministerial departments, then once a Green Paper and subsequent legislation is produced on adult social care funding, an evaluation should be conducted to see if the SCs inquiry had any impact and if CASC contributed to this. If the House of Commons does commission future mini-publics, it should set aside funding for evaluation of the process, so that lessons can be learnt for parliament's public engagement strategy. This evaluation was compromised as it was commissioned after CASC had occurred. It could then only capture the views of participants and parliamentarians after the event.



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