

Written evidence from Climate Outreach (CCE0111)

About Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is a team of social scientists and communication specialists passionate about building a social mandate for climate action. Through our research, practical guides and consultancy services, we help organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences. We have over 15 years of experience widening and deepening public engagement with climate change, working with a wide range of international partners including government, international bodies, academic institutions, charities, businesses, faith organisations and youth groups.

Summary of Evidence

In order to generate a social mandate for climate action and mobilise behaviour change, the Government needs to actively adopt public engagement and participatory policy-making that is evidence-based and rooted in the growing social science research around effective public engagement. Behaviour change and system change interact dynamically and are two sides of the same coin. The Government must have a proper understanding of the British public, and action must be meaningful, two-way, and values-driven.

A. What are the areas where lifestyle changes may be most needed to reach the Government's long-term climate change and environment goals and commitments?
J. How should the Government consider the balance between, or sequencing of, approaches to behaviour change focused on:

- **encouraging changes to individual behaviour;**
- **regulatory approaches focused on individuals and/or businesses which restrict or eliminate choices; and**
- **fiscal measures (including taxation)?**

Societal transformation is needed to tackle climate change (IPCC, 2018): this means reconfiguration of urban environments, food and transport systems, energy technologies, and provision of goods and services - all of which are disruptive to lifestyles and may require changes in values and norms. Even measures which don't disrupt lifestyles (supply-side and negative emissions technologies) impose risks/costs so also require public buy-in (RCUK 2010). In short, we can't have a net-zero transition without the public 'noticing' (i.e., through supply-side change and some consumer nudges).

So, a key element of engaging the public is to be upfront about the **scale of change required**, across society and personally, to tackle climate change. This includes more active travel, more plant-based

diets, more sharing and repairing, new heating systems, and so on. Communicating this transformation, and the role the public will need to play in it, is an essential starting point. Also, providing information on **which choices are the most impactful** is important, since most people still don't realise the impact of embedded emissions or dietary choices in causing climate change.¹

Elements of the net zero transition can be implemented with little disruption to households, such as phasing out fossil fuels and deploying negative emission technologies - although even these are likely to involve some cost to householders (e.g., via energy bills). Nudges can be used in some cases to change behaviour without too much disruption - for example, using renewable tariffs as 'defaults' (with fossil tariffs available on an 'opt-out' basis) exploiting the tendency for people to stick with the status quo. Where this has been used in other countries, it has increased green tariff adoption from about 3% to almost 90% even though this tariff was somewhat more expensive than the fossil fuels alternative².

However, most of the changes required for net zero will require some disruption and conscious engagement with the public. **Mandatory measures will certainly be required**, as voluntary behaviour change is ineffective for collective problems like climate change where only the most committed individuals will be motivated to change their behaviour without policy support. System change and individual change are two sides of the same coin. But where these mandatory measures are implemented, householders will be more receptive if they are framed around co-benefits (e.g., saving money, improved health, convenience) aligned with people's values.

B. What is the UK public's level of concern regarding climate change and environment issues, and how does this vary across the population?

See below under Section F for our work ***Britain Talks Climate*** which explores the attitudes of the British population to climate change in detail.

¹ <https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CAST-Briefing-08.pdf>

² <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01070-3>

E. What can be learnt from successful and unsuccessful behaviour change interventions by the UK Government and other government actors (including in other policy or geographical contexts)?

M. What can be learnt from change delivered by civil society including community groups, and businesses (including from actors based outside the UK)?

There is a vast literature on how to change behaviour, and much can be learnt from historical and international examples of transformation (e.g., tobacco control, urban sustainable transport). Key findings from this evidence base³ include:

- A. Change is required across *multiple levels* and *using various levers* (information and incentives alone will not be sufficient; broader social, infrastructural, technical, and regulatory interventions are also required);
- B. Interventions should exploit and be framed around *co-benefits* or *win-wins* (e.g., wellbeing/health, equity, cost-saving/profit);
- C. Interventions should be *timely* - (a) at the point of decision-making (e.g., buying a car or appliance; renovating a house) and (b) when habits are weaker/malleable, notably following a life-event (e.g., moving house, retirement, starting a new job) or wider societal disruption (e.g., COVID-19, infrastructure breakdown, extreme weather events);
- D. Changing social norms through *leadership*, exemplifying/disseminating innovations and *good practice* through networks, and using *trusted messengers* to communicate, are important; and
- E. Building *public support* is key to leveraging government action for behavioural interventions (particularly if there is industry resistance).

Please see our 'Stories of Change' series, in partnership with The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, which offers Lessons from innovative and imaginative low carbon transformation. ⁴

Examples of good practice

Citizen's assemblies have proven to be an effective approach to facilitate publics to engage with climate action and the net zero transition. A citizens' assembly (CA) is a model of decision-making in which a group of non-expert citizens (typically around 50-150 people) work to arrive at practical and policy-relevant

recommendations, in response to complex social issues. The format entails learning about issues in detail through expert presentations, with deliberations and exercises designed to help participants share, discuss and debate ideas.⁵

The approach - and the questions asked to a CA - is important. As the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies' (KNOCA) summarises:

*"Within the short history of national-level CAs, the tendency has been to adopt broader objectives. For example, Citizens' Assembly UK (CAUK) asked the question, 'How can the UK reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050?'. The French CA broadened this remit further, adding in considerations of justice: 'How to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030, in a spirit of social justice?'. The Jersey Climate Conversation was broader still, with the date for action left open: 'How should we work together to become carbon neutral?'. A well defined policy remit, such as "how can the electricity supply be decarbonised by a particular date", is arguably likely to lead to more detailed and actionable outcomes aligned with existing climate action goals and a process that is easier to navigate for participants. Research shows that deliberation processes are most successful when there are distinct policy questions that need to be answered, and these questions need to be specific enough to allow for in-depth conversation around tangible implications and processes (Devaney et al., 2020)."*⁶

³ For example:

<https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CAST-briefing-01-Engaging-the-public-on-low-carbon-lifestyle-change-min.pdf> ;

<https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CAST-Briefing06.pdf> ;

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352154621000425?via%3DiHub> ;

House of Lords. Behaviour Change. (House of Lords Select Committee on Science & Technology, London, 2011).

⁴ <https://cast.ac.uk/storiesofchange/>

The recent **film on the UK Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change** - ['The People Versus Climate Change'](#) was an extremely powerful and pioneering net zero public engagement tool. The film centred around the people involved, and they narrated their personal journeys as they navigated through them. It has helped take the Assembly, and the issues discussed within it, to a wider audience than the 108 assembly members, and provides an important illustration of the principles of people-first/human story-led engagement on what net zero means. It is a strong learning opportunity for policy makers who want to design communications and comms infrastructure in a way that takes net zero out of the technocratic space and into people's lives.

The growing use of diverse and deliberative approaches is welcome. It is important to ensure that the same philosophy of participative public engagement is applied to adaptation policy as well as mitigation policy, where trade-offs and values are just as critical (and the principle of a 'just' transition also applies), as noted recently by the [Climate Change Committee](#).

A key challenge remains to ensure that 'invited' forms of public engagement (e.g., citizens' assemblies) are **not one-off events, but more continuous and linked to 'emergent' forms of engagement** (e.g., community action, education, low-carbon living), as discussed [here](#). Supporting everyday 'climate conversations' is a positive step towards achieving this embedding of ongoing dialogue across society. See our 'Talking Climate' handbook for guidance on how to facilitate these everyday conversations.⁷

⁵ Capstick, S., Demski, C., Cherry, C., Verfuert, C. and Steentjes, K. (2020). [Climate Change Citizens' Assemblies](#). CAST Briefing Paper 03.

⁶ Shaw, C., Wang, S. and Latter, B. (2021) [How does the framing of climate change affect the conclusions reached in climate assemblies?](#) KNOCA Research Briefing, 1 Jun.

⁷ Webster, R. & Marshall, G. (2019) [The #TalkingClimate Handbook. How to have conversations about climate change in your daily life.](#) Oxford: Climate Outreach

The Count Us In campaign is a good example of highlighting 'ordinary' people taking positive, practical action - changing norms and raising self-efficacy amongst the public.⁸ It is critical that campaigning organisations - whether government or civil society based - do not continue to speak to an echo chamber consisting only of stakeholders who are already invested in climate action. The Britain Talks Climate Toolkit offers evidence on how to bring in and engage with those who have been disengaged. This can be used in the process of developing and testing messages for new campaigns.

There are many other resources on how to effectively communicate climate change, such as Climate Outreach's guides⁹ and Sell the Sizzle.¹⁰

F. What are the pros/cons and limitations of different frameworks and methods for promoting behaviour change?

As noted, providing the public with information on which choices are the most impactful is important, since most people still don't realise the impact of embedded emissions or dietary choices in causing climate change.¹¹ But while information can help inform decision-making, engaging people on climate change is less about knowledge and more about **values, identity and language** - and there is a strong evidence base to prove it.

Brexit was about values, identity, language. Trump was about values, identity, language. Engaging people on climate change is about values, identity and language too. This means being explicit about what we need to do to tackle climate change - not just making changes under the radar, using behavioural insight 'nudges'. Nudges have a place but they're not enough to deliver the transformation required. We can't 'nudge' people on to public transport if there's no bus service in their area. We can't nudge people to replace their heating systems.

⁸ <https://www.count-us-in.org/en-gb/>

⁹ See: <https://climateoutreach.org/reports/>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.wearefuterra.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Sellthesizzle.pdf>

¹¹ <https://cast.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CAST-Briefing-08.pdf>

It is also important to point out that an economic rationale is not enough to convince people to get on board. Policies that are widely viewed as costing ordinary people money are unlikely to be popular but there is a major difference between affordability (which matters) and 'cheapest possible' (which is not what people always go for).¹² Affordability is about fairness. There are any number of examples of people voting for policies that do not favour them economically (again see Brexit in certain parts of the UK). So getting the finance side right is important, but not enough on its own. Making a persuasive case means connecting with people's values and wider social concerns.

Our research and engagement work demonstrates that there are several existing and emerging approaches and tools that can be used to foster support for and action on decarbonisation and net zero strategies. These include:

1. **A clear understanding of who the different audiences are at the level of values/identity.** Please see 'Britain Talks Climate', which is a toolkit based on research which segmented the British population into seven key groups.¹³ This process built on the seven 'segments' of the British population identified through a Core Beliefs model.¹⁴ This uses a range of psychological and ideological factors, including threat perceptions, social identity and belief in meritocracy, to go beyond analyses that position public opinion along a single dimension such as 'left-right' or 'leave-remain'. The better we understand the British public - the tensions among different segments, and the beliefs and values that unite us - the better equipped campaigners and communicators will be to engage people in a way that ensures the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Drawing on a shared, strategic understanding of the British public on climate change will enable advocates to campaign sensitively and in 'surround sound', responding to different segments' hopes and needs as we enter a critical decade for climate action.

Britain Talks Climate reveals a public that is fractured but not deeply polarised, with climate change emerging as an issue that has the potential to unite us. There are certain issues where the segments are not at all compatible: Loyal Nationals and Progressive Activists are in stark opposition on immigration. But these same two segments share a high concern about climate change and the need to hold businesses to account for their carbon footprints. Certain values and ideas - **protecting future generations, creating a healthier society, and preserving the countryside in ways that end our throwaway culture - have almost universal resonance** across Britain.

Therefore, we ask that the government, and other key stakeholders aiming to foster public support for net zero and encourage behavioural change, use the key findings that emerged from this study to build both tailored and unifying narratives to ensure a whole of society approach to climate action in future. These values-based narratives can be tested and adapted to ensure the strongest impact.

2. Building on the segmentation in the Britain Talks Climate (BTC) Research, **it is important to reach historically disengaged audiences in particular.** There continue to be groups that feel socially and economically excluded from the wider conversations about the country's progress in general areas, but particularly in decarbonisation and wider climate action. Post-industrial areas, 'red wall' constituencies, and others, need to feel that there are genuine and meaningful efforts to understand their needs and to engage with them on the path forward. Engaging them (as well as the typically more engaged segments of the population) will be a real opportunity for transformation. Some of these include: 'Loyal Nationals', 'Disengaged Battlers' and 'Civic Pragmatists'.
3. **Focus on both systemic action and individual action.** Behaviour change and system change interact dynamically and are two sides of the same coin. Lifestyle change is essential to achieve deep and near-term cuts in emissions in line with international obligations on climate change. In some cases, the avoidance of certain activities can enable emissions reduction; at other times, a shift towards lower-carbon alternatives may be more appropriate, or there may be the opportunity to improve the carbon efficiency of an activity or service. For the transport sector, substantial reductions can be achieved through reducing and avoiding the use of private cars, as well as by shifting to active travel and/or electric vehicles. In some cities in China, restrictions on the use of petrol cars, combined with incentives and subsidies for the purchase and use of electric vehicles, have led to greater uptake and diffusion of low-carbon vehicles. Citizen activism and advocacy has played a key role in enabling the growth of cycling in both Latin America and Northern Europe and in pushing for improved access for non-motorised vehicles in Kolkata, India. There have been growing calls for constraints on the advertising of large, inefficient cars, as well as for health warnings on fuel pumps. See CAST centre's brief on 'achieving low carbon and equitable lifestyle change' for more information. ¹⁵

¹² <https://ukerc.ac.uk/publications/paying-for-energy-transitions/>

¹³ Wang, S., Corner, S. and Nicholls, J. (2020) [Britain Talks Climate: A toolkit for engaging the British public on climate change](#)

¹⁴ See: <https://hiddentribes.us/>

Climate engagement in the post Covid-19 context. CAST and Climate Outreach have conducted new research since Covid-19, to bring in an understanding of how the global crisis has affected people's thoughts about and response to climate change and decarbonisation.¹⁶ We conducted a nationally representative survey of 1,500 UK residents to explore these questions. We found that - although it may be tempting to draw parallels between Covid-19 and climate change, however, these two issues are not naturally connected in people's minds (e.g. indirect impact of climate change on the Covid-19 response). Making the connection between climate and Covid-19 in terms of policies may not help the climate cause. Therefore, great care should be taken in connecting the two issues, or there may be a risk that this appears to be exploiting the situation. For example - the expression 'climate emergency' was divisive, with some respondents feeling that it was not the top priority, and questioned the comparison being made between the risks posed by Covid-19 and climate change. Some people were highly dismissive of messages suggesting that Covid-19 has shown us that some things are more important than money. Communicators should be careful not to sugar-coat the impacts of Covid-19 and ignore the real hardships that people are facing. As one survey participant said, it's "easy to say for rich people that have sufficient enough money to live and care about such things as climate change".

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¹⁵ Capstick, S., Wang, S., Khosla, R. and Corner, A. (2020). [Achieving low-carbon and equitable lifestyle change](#). CAST briefing paper 06.

¹⁶ Shaw, C. and Wang, S. (2021) [After the lockdown? New lessons for building climate change engagement in the UK](#). Oxford: Climate Outreach; and : Whitmarsh, L., Hoolohan, C.,Larner, O., McLachlan, C. & Poortinga, W. (2020). [How has COVID-19 Impacted Low-Carbon Lifestyles and Attitudes towards Climate Action?](#) CAST Briefing Paper 04.

However there was some indication of **narratives that may unify and connect wide audiences**. Segments of the UK population that were identified in the Britain Talks Climate report as being least supportive of more typically environmentalist climate change messaging felt favourably towards messaging about **bringing the world back into balance**. Issues such as climate change, pollution and the degradation of the natural environment, alongside crises such as Covid-19, feed into anxieties about a world that is out of balance.

People responded positively to the claim that Covid-19 has shown that **ordinary people working together can make a difference**. It is possible that people may now be more receptive to opportunities to take local actions on climate change as part of a community. Using examples and case studies of where people working collectively has made a difference to people's impact on climate change and the environment offers the possibility of capitalising on the sense of 'us' being the ones who make a difference (e.g., Count on Us, discussed below).

Additionally, CAST research found that COVID-19 represents a critical moment of change that has disrupted many climate-relevant behaviours. This provides a '**window of opportunity**' during which behaviours are more malleable and interventions may be more effective. Given that new habits take 2-3 months to form, the lockdowns in most countries are long enough to establish new, enduring routines. Furthermore, interventions targeted to moments of change have been found in several cases to be significantly more effective than when applied during stable times when habits are more resistant to change. For example, information and incentives (free one-day bus passes) provided to those who recently moved house were shown to increase bus travel in both UK and German studies.¹⁷

Climate Outreach's recent report provides a set of eight recommendations which can help to frame arguments and align messaging in a way that is most likely to engage people in the UK on climate change in the (post-)COVID context. It is through understanding the narratives that unite and divide us that we can most effectively communicate with and engage people on climate change.¹⁸

¹⁷ Whitmarsh, L., Hoolohan, C.,Larner, O., McLachlan, C. & Poortinga, W. (2020). How has COVID-19 Impacted Low-Carbon Lifestyles and Attitudes towards Climate Action? CAST Briefing Paper 04.

¹⁸ Shaw, C. and Wang, S. (2021) After the lockdown? New lessons for building climate change engagement in the UK. Oxford: Climate Outreach

The importance of using trusted messengers

The Britain Talks Climate research has also found that 'traditional' messengers, such as environmental NGOs, do not work for everyone, and in fact sometimes put people off engaging as they feel they simply cannot relate to them due to different political ideologies and values. When the messages are uncomfortable and the messengers aren't perceived to be trusted, or part of a citizen's 'in group' there is a strong tendency to 'other' them and place them and their messages in the 'out group'. This phenomenon is repeatedly identified as a key factor in polarisation and one those opposed to climate action will often exploit. The importance of trusted messengers is a recurrent theme in social science research on climate change engagement.

Finding the right intermediaries is critical. Traditionally the public have been thought of as receivers of information, but evidence has consistently shown that the information deficit model (that people don't change because they have a 'deficit' of information) is not a good explanation for lack of engagement with climate change. Attitudes and actions are formed largely through social narratives that resonate with people's values and identities, propagated by trusted messengers and facilitated by the prevalent norms around them.

The Britain Talks Climate Research explored who are the trusted messengers for each segment. For example, the 'Loyal Nationals' - who are people that take broadly "populist" political views on a range of issues, leaning left economically (with anti-big business views, and favourability towards the redistribution of wealth), but right on social issues (taking more authoritarian perspectives on governance, crime and punishment) - trust Farmers, friends and family, and ordinary people affected by floods and fires. 'Disengaged Traditionalists' - people who are alienated, disillusioned and sceptical, who feel excluded and frustrated, unrepresented politically, have lower levels of trust in environmental charities than any other segment, and instead trust messengers, such as ordinary people and farmers who are wedded to the land and can speak from a position they respect and understand.

Trusted messengers, if carefully and strategically employed, can be a critical tool through which to engage the public on behavioural change.