

Written evidence submitted by The Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) (CAUK0015)

Led by Cardiff University and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, The Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) is a global hub for understanding the role of people in shaping a positive low-carbon future.

We work to understand and accelerate these systemic and society-wide changes needed to address climate change. We're interested in when and how social transformation happens at every scale; from the individual to the global, in communities, industries, and cities.

We are a partnership between Cardiff University, University of Manchester, University of York, University of East Anglia, University of Bath, and Oxford-based charity Climate Outreach.

We are submitting evidence to this inquiry as the process and outcomes of the Climate Assembly UK are relevant to the scope of our work, and as we attended during the process in the capacity of observers: As agreed with the Assembly organising team, a member of the CAST Research team attended each of the in-person Climate Assembly UK weekends to observe the evidence sessions, within the constraints of privacy accorded to the assembly members. These observations allowed for a detailed consideration of the framing and structure of the Assembly, as well as the futures, policies and voting options presented to assembly members.

Has Climate Assembly UK (both its process and recommendations) been helpful to your work (or the work of your organisation), and if so, how?

The Climate Assembly UK has been helpful to our work at The Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) in terms of understanding the range of methods and options available for engaging citizens in deliberation around climate change, and the strengths and weaknesses of different processes. It has also acted as a demonstration of the subsequent discussions ensuing from the participation of citizens in shaping conversations on climate change action. CAST team members regularly refer to the CAUK recommendations and use these as guides and reference for developing further understanding on climate change mitigation.

There has been feedback from one CAST researcher that, while the CAUK showed a strong desire and commitment from citizens to be involved in decision-making, many of the specific recommendations can nevertheless not be taken at face value because they are influenced to a large extent by the 'inputs' to the process in terms of the narrow and pre-selected range of options that were presented to citizens, the way the deliberation was framed, the top-down nature of the process, the tendency of citizens to agree with almost all policies presented to them, and the reliance on often slim margins in voting within smaller sub-groups.

However, the CAUK as a whole helped to raise the profile of citizen involvement in policy-making and should be seen as a valuable starting point - not final word - in public engagement with climate policy

What impact has Climate Assembly UK had across your sector, and more widely?

Stuart: The CAUK has had a major influence within social science research in raising the profile and value of citizen engagement with climate change and climate policy-making. It has generated widespread conversations and discussions about the democratisation of climate change decision making; the role, meaning and significance of such deliberative fora; how these fora relate to other ongoing discussions (in other areas, through other means) on climate change. It is leading to cross-European (including the UK) collaboration to understand how best to structure, evaluate and advance the impact of climate deliberation, and is likely to lead to a long-lasting impact in terms of interest in, and appreciation of, citizens' voices in shaping action on climate change. More widely, it has led to greater trust and appreciation of citizen involvement, and a sense that this approach to deliberative democracy can pay dividends in tackling climate change.

The CAUK has been pivotal in moving discussions about action on climate change forward, providing these a much needed boost, demonstrating the value of opening up conversations to include publics. A very important point of consideration has been the authority and buy-in of the recommendations, and how government has responded to these. Involve's summary (<https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/project-updates/climate-assembly-uk-final-report-top-ten-developments>) is insightful in this regard.

How do you perceive Climate Assembly UK to have affected the work of Government since the Assembly's report was published (10 September 2020)?

To what extent do the Government's actions since then reflect Climate Assembly UK's recommendations?

It is likely that the CAUK has affected the work of government since the report was published and there is regular reference to the Assembly's recommendations and process. However, it is very hard to know the extent and nature of this effect, or whether some of the measures in the pipeline would have happened anyway.

The commitment to net zero by 2050 and the impetus of COP26 have catalysed government to carefully consider the CAUK's recommendations, and demonstrate in part how these are considered and inform government policy and actions with regards to climate change mitigation. Some of the recommendations are reflected in government action; others clearly not.

What would a good response to Climate Assembly UK from the Government look like? What would a good response from Parliament look like?

Stuart: A good response from government would be to indicate directly how it is taking into account the recommendations, refer to these recommendations regularly in informing policy, publish yearly update of progress against each of the recommendations, and put resource and support for further climate deliberation to occur.

It would be a mistake to think that this exercise means citizen engagement with climate policy is now 'done'. A good response would also be to recognise the value of engagement by continuing to gauge the views of citizens in multiple fora, using a diversity of methods, refining the process over time, and focussing on a range of relevant issues.

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