

House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee

Call for Evidence: Behaviour Change

Deadline for submissions: Friday 8 October 2010

The House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee has appointed a sub-committee, chaired by Baroness Neuberger, to investigate the use of behaviour change interventions to achieve policy goals.

Introduction

To meet many of the societal challenges we are currently facing – such as achieving an 80 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 or reducing the burden on the health service as a result of smoking, drinking or the rise in obesity – individual and collective behaviour will need to change significantly. Governments, therefore, are becoming increasingly interested in understanding how they can influence the way we behave using a range of different types of behaviour change policy interventions that rely on measures other than prohibition or the elimination of choice. Recent reports, such as the Cabinet Office issue paper *Personal Responsibility and Behaviour Change* (2003), the Government Social Research Unit's *Behaviour Change Knowledge Review* (2008) and the Cabinet Office and Institute for Government report *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy* (2010), are indicative of this growing interest.

The subject is complex. Choosing a behaviour change intervention or a mix of interventions to achieve particular policy goals in particular contexts draws on understanding developed in a large variety of research disciplines, including health psychology, social psychology, behavioural economics, neuroscience and sociology. The insights provided by the development and application of social marketing techniques also make a valuable contribution.

Some behaviour change interventions are recognised as having been very successful. A recent review of more than 1,000 evaluations of health behaviour change interventions has shown that theory- and evidence-based behaviour change interventions can be effective across a range of behaviour change domains. In relation to smoking, for example, the simultaneous application of a number of different types of interventions, including a ban on smoking in public, marketing campaigns to highlight the dangers of smoking and improved and better advertised smoking cessation services within the National health Service is said to have led to a significant reduction in the number of smokers over the last few years. Other

interventions, such as efforts to reduce alcohol misuse, have been less successful. We shall be examining, amongst other things, what appears to make one intervention more effective than another.

Scope of the inquiry

The inquiry will examine our current state of knowledge about what interventions can effectively influence behaviour, how behaviour change interventions which have been designed on the basis of that knowledge can be used to achieve policy goals, and what factors should be taken into account by government in determining whether a particular behaviour change intervention is appropriate. It will look at the evidence base that supports current behaviour change interventions and at the effectiveness of those interventions.

In particular, the inquiry seeks to examine:

- the policy implications of recent developments in research on behaviour change;
- whether current government behaviour change interventions are evidence-based, whether such interventions are appropriately evaluated, and if lessons have been learnt from the process and then applied to further interventions;
- whether there is sufficient expertise within public services (for example, local authorities and the NHS) to ensure that interventions are evidence-based, and implemented and evaluated effectively;
- the extent to which behaviour change interventions require a mixture of different tools to succeed;
- how behaviour change interventions and activities are coordinated across government and beyond;
- the extent to which, and ways in which, government should be accountable to, or engage with, the wider public about the use of behaviour change policy interventions;
- the role of industry and the voluntary sector in shaping behaviour patterns;
- the relationship between government, industry and the voluntary sector in promoting behaviour change to achieve policy goals; finally,
- the social and ethical issues surrounding the use of behaviour change interventions by government.

Case study 1: tackling obesity

The Committee will conduct two case studies as part of the wider inquiry. The first case study will look at the use of behaviour change policy interventions to tackle obesity. Obesity remains a major challenge for society. In 2008, almost a quarter of adults in England were classified as obese; and 16.8 per cent of boys aged 2 to 15 and 15.2 per cent of girls were also classified as obese, an increase from 11.1 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively in 1995.¹

A 2007 Foresight report on obesity, *Tackling Obesities: Future Choices*, called for a systems approach to behaviour change interventions to tackle obesity and, in 2008, the Government launched *Healthy weight: healthy lives*, a cross-government strategy for England which introduced a number of interventions. Nonetheless, prevalence rates amongst some childhood and adolescent groups and adults continue to rise. These trends predict worsening public health, increased pressure on the health service and a very large cost to the national economy.

Case study 2: to be announced

The second case study topic will focus on community-based interventions and will be announced in October 2010.

The Committee invites evidence on the following questions. Submissions are not required to cover all questions. **The deadline for written evidence submissions is Friday 8 October 2010.**

Questions

Research and Development

1. What is known about how behaviour can be influenced? What special considerations apply to addictive behaviour?
2. What are the policy implications of recent developments in research on behaviour change?
3. Is there adequate research capability within the United Kingdom to support the current pace of developments in behaviour change policy interventions? Is there sufficient funding for the evaluation of behaviour change interventions?

Translation

4. Are there adequate structures and expertise across government and the public

¹ Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet: England 2010, The Information Centre for Health and Social Care, NHS.

services more generally to support the translation of research developments in behaviour change into policy interventions?

Policy design and evaluation

General

5. What should be classified as a behaviour change intervention?
6. How should different *levels* of intervention (individual, organisational, community and national) and different *types* of intervention (legislative, fiscal, educative) interact in order to achieve policy goals more effectively?
7. Should behaviour change interventions be used in isolation or in combination with other policy interventions?

Practical application

8. Have publicly funded behaviour change interventions been both evidence-based and subject to effective evaluation? How successful have such interventions been?
9. Within government, how are the lessons learnt from the success or lack of success of behaviour change interventions fed back into the design of future interventions? Are lessons learned from industry and voluntary sector behaviour change activities also taken into account?
10. What mechanisms exist, at national and local government level, to provide advice and support during the design, piloting, implementation and evaluation of behaviour change interventions in order to ensure that they achieve intended policy goals and also cultural changes within government and public services more generally?

Cross-government coordination

11. What mechanisms exist within government to coordinate and implement cross-departmental behaviour change policy interventions?
12. What mechanisms exist within government to cascade learning and best practice on behaviour change policy interventions?

Ethical considerations

13. When is it appropriate for the state to intervene to influence the behaviour of members of the public and how does this differ from when it is appropriate for the commercial or voluntary sector to intervene? In particular, when should this be done by outright prohibition and when by measures to encourage behaviour change? Are some methods of producing behaviour change unacceptable? Which and why?
14. Should the public be involved in the design and implementation of behaviour change policy interventions and, if so, how? Should proposed measures for securing behaviour change be subject to public engagement exercises or consultation? Should they be piloted? Do considerations differ in the case of

interventions aimed at changing addictive behaviour?

International comparisons

15. What lessons can be learnt from previous successful or unsuccessful behaviour change interventions in other countries? Which countries provide the most helpful examples of best practice? Are behavioural change interventions generally transferable between different societies?

Tackling Obesity

16. The Committee would particularly welcome submissions on behaviour change interventions, whether in the public sector, the private sector or by voluntary organisations, designed to tackle obesity, in the United Kingdom or internationally, in order to examine:

- a. the latest developments in the evidence-base in relation to changing eating and physical activity behaviour;
- b. who are the most effective agents for the delivery of behaviour interventions to tackle obesity;
- c. how current behaviour change interventions tackle obesity and what use is made of available scientific evidence;
- d. whether such interventions are appropriately designed and evaluated; and
- e. what lessons have been learnt and applied as a result of the evaluation process.

The Committee would also be interested to hear about any other issues not already covered by this call for evidence that are relevant to the scope of the inquiry.

The Committee will hold public meetings from November 2010 and the Committee's report will be published during the summer of 2011.

Submissions should be sent to: Christine Salmon Percival, Clerk to the Science and Technology Committee, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW

and preferably by email to: hlscience@parliament.uk

Please ensure that you include relevant contact details. Evidence should be attributed and dated, with a note of your name and position, and should state whether it is submitted on an individual or corporate basis.

Short submissions are preferred; longer submissions (more than 6 pages) should include a summary. Hard copy should be clearly printed or typed on single sides of A4 paper, unstapled. Paragraphs should be numbered.

Evidence should be prepared specifically for this inquiry. Witnesses are encouraged to focus on those issues of which they have particular knowledge or experience—submissions are not required to cover all questions.

Evidence becomes the property of the Committee, and may be printed, published electronically or circulated by the Committee at any stage. If your evidence is not printed, it will in due course be made available to the public in the Parliamentary Archives.

You may in addition publicise or publish your evidence yourself, but in doing so you should indicate that it was prepared for the Committee. If a submission is substantially the same as work that has already been published or disseminated for some other purpose, or is deemed not to be relevant to the inquiry, it will not be treated as formal evidence.

Personal contact details supplied to the Committee will be removed from evidence before publication and from the copy deposited in the Archives. However, personal contact details will be retained by the Committee Office and used for specific purposes relating to the Committee's work, for instance to seek additional information or to send copies of the Committee's Report.

The Committee will invite some of those who submit written evidence to give oral evidence at Westminster. Transcripts of such evidence will be published.

You can follow the progress of the inquiry via the Science and Technology Committee web pages, accessed from <http://www.parliament.uk/hlscience>.