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The Select Committee on Science and Technology

Sub-Committee I

Inquiry on

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

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TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2010

3.35 pm

Witnesses: Dr David Halpern, Ms Karen Hancock, Dr Rachel McCloy, Mr Richard Bartholomew
Memorandum by the Government (BC 114)

Introduction

The Government welcomes this timely exploration by the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee into the use of behaviour change interventions to achieve policy goals.

The Coalition's Programme for Government rejects "the assumption that central government can only change people's behaviour through rules and regulations" and promises that "our government will be a much smarter one, shunning the bureaucratic levers of the past and finding intelligent ways to encourage support and enable people to make better choices for themselves".

Asking individuals, communities and institutions to adapt or change their behaviour to help achieve a particular policy goal is not new.

The new feature of the scene is the Government's focus on the fact that changes in behaviour can often be brought about in ways that are much less authoritarian than rules and regulations.

As a recent paper from the Department for Transport puts it:

- If you organise the food in a school cafeteria in the right way, children will tend to eat more healthily.

- If you redesign a junction correctly, you can reduce the likelihood of collisions between vehicles.¹

Government Activities

Behaviour change theories can help us to understand why individuals behave the way they do. They can also help policy makers frame choices for individuals in order to 'nudge' them into behaving differently and regulating their own activities. For example, there is evidence that interventions that encourage self-regulation and self-monitoring are more effective at promoting healthy eating and physical activity than those which do not.

Even before the Coalition's new emphasis on bringing about behavioural change, some Departments across Whitehall have sought to strengthen their understanding of both the theory and practice of behaviour change, building on existing expertise to promote and foster new ways of thinking among policy makers drawing on a range of academic literature including seminal publications such as Robert Cialdini's Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's Nudge, and David Halpern's Social Capital and MINDSPACE: a joint collaboration between the Cabinet Office and the Institute for Government.

¹ Nine Big Questions about Behaviour Change, Simon Christmas et al, November 2009.
Departments have also drawn on the expertise of their communications units to help understand how they can affect behaviour, as well as on the work of the Research Councils, e.g. the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC). All Departments recognise the need to balance general principles of behaviour change with specific challenges; approaches to achieving behaviour change in transport, for example, will be different to approaches in health or education.

Successful behaviour change interventions vary from the very small to the very large. We know that some cost virtually nothing to introduce, e.g. amending the way information or correspondence is written. Others may require funding to effect, e.g. building cycle-ways. Still others may form part of a panoply of interventions which include both 'nudges' and subsides (e.g. grants, fiscal support) as well as regulatory measures, e.g. auto-enrolling employees into pension plans. The more complex the desired change, the greater the need to ensure relevant levers all operate in the same direction. This requires close working both within and across departments. Examples of the work that Departments have undertaken in recent years are attached at Annex A.

**Promoting and Co-ordinating Government Activities**

Behaviour change interventions have often involved several different Departments. Examples of joint working during the years before the last election include liaison between DfT, Defra and DECC on sustainability, between DfT and DH on active travel, and between the Ministry of Justice and other Departments on youth re-offending.

The new Government wants to increase the amount of joint working between Departments when designing, implementing and evaluating behaviour change interventions. A closely related theme in the Coalition Programme for Government Agreement - that of changing the culture within Whitehall to move away from a reliance on conventional regulatory and legislative approaches - means that we can expect a richer mix of interventions being used to achieve our policy goals. These include, for example, interventions that enable and guide people to make healthier choices such as smoking cessation services, brief interventions for alcohol misuse and the supported self-management of long term conditions. We aim to ensure that we capture the best ideas and spread best practice, informed by robust evidence applicable to the particular policy goal.

**Engaging beyond Government: leveraging other sectors sector more effectively**

The involvement of private and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector organisations will be crucial for us as we apply behavioural insights to achieving our policy goals. A core idea of the Big Society is that we encourage ‘people to help people’ rather than assuming that the state and conventional public services are the answer. Most people want to help others but there are many barriers that inhibit our ability to help and support each other in everyday life, including lack of information, lack of trust and bureaucracy. We want to remove these barriers, so that we can draw on the vast resources of goodwill that exist in our society to provide more personal and more effective help for those members of our society who need that help.

We will be building on efforts to strengthen charitable giving; we hope charitable organisations become an increasingly important partner of Government - helping us develop a mix of conventional approaches and "nudges" that encourage citizens to give more of their
resource (time and money) to good causes. We will also be building on work undertaken by departments such as DECC, which successfully engaged with utility companies in the design of its Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP). Utility companies will be central to the roll out of the Green Deal, helping install energy efficient devices in homes.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation is a key component of Government policymaking. Evaluating behaviour change interventions is often difficult, both because of long lags between action and effect, and because it is difficult to be confident of linking cause to effect when non-regulatory behavioural interventions have been introduced alongside more conventional regulatory interventions.

There have also been occasions where evaluation has been distorted by being focused on customer attitudes and programme outputs, rather than outcomes. We will seek to deal with this by specifying the desired behaviour change outcomes (e.g. drug-abstinence or reduced recidivism) at the outset of policy development Wherever possible, we will also 'pay by results' for the provision of public services, so that the evaluation and the flow of funds in public services are both focussed on obtaining desired behaviour outcomes, leaving providers free to decide how best to achieve the desired results.

HMRC is among those departments whose interventions lend themselves to relatively quick and relatively certain evaluation. Introducing 'prompted choice' to help 'nudge' taxpayers into filling their tax returns on-line, HMRC was able to demonstrate significant financial savings to the Exchequer. Similarly, the Defra, DfT and DECC campaign "Save Money, Save Energy/Save Fuel 'Dad' "(2008-2010) featured a range of actions people could take with a view to encouraging more people to insulate their homes. One of those actions Defra's creation of an ACT on CO2 carbon calculator - has resulted in 1,788,031 unique visitors to the website since mid-2007, 38% of whom completed their carbon footprint calculations, and many more who said they were likely to take action or are planning to take action as a result of the campaign.

The Cabinet Office's Behaviour Insights Team is, with other departments, looking to champion rigorous approaches to evaluation. They are starting by collecting evidence on the effectiveness of non-regulatory approaches to reducing energy consumption and increasing charitable giving. In the medium term, evaluation will enable us to set out more clearly where and when behavioural-based interventions work best, and - as importantly - how small scale interventions can be scaled up.

The team will also be looking to foster more inter-departmental discussion about the effectiveness of different means of changing behaviour. This is already working well in parts, for example Defra and the Departments for Education, Communities and Health have been contributing to Government’s understanding and knowledge of behaviour change through initiatives including research centres, toolkits and guidance. Elsewhere, Departmental Heads of Analytical Professions regularly meet to discuss issues affecting all departments, e.g. the Social Impacts Task Force, jointly chaired by DWP and Defra.
Ethical Considerations

A key question for us is when it is - and when it is not - appropriate for Government to attempt to influence individuals to behave in certain ways.

One of the Coalition's main aims is to increase the freedom of the citizen. Indeed, this is a large part of the reason why we are so interested in finding non-coercive ways of changing behaviour: quite apart from the fact that such methods can be more effective than coercive methods, they are also much more respectful of the freedom of the individual.

But we are conscious that, even if the methods used to change behaviour are non-coercive, a decision by government to intervene in itself raises the level of intrusion into people's lives. A balanced and proportional approach is required. We will therefore aim to apply behaviour change theory only in ways that minimise intrusion and maximally respect people's privacy and free choice.

Future Developments

The establishment of a new, central team signals a new phase in the application in the UK of behaviour change theory to public policy. The team is and will remain small in number and can only achieve its objectives by working with and through others in Whitehall and beyond - drawing also, where possible, on international experience. The Government's agenda to reduce policymakers' reliance on regulation, led by the Better Regulation Executive, can help provide additional impetus for the work of the central team.

Some Departments have already expressed an interest in seconding staff to the team in order to learn from the approaches it is developing. This will help accelerate understanding and application of behaviour change theories and applications in a range of policy areas. Working together, we expect to introduce more cost-effective and less bureaucratic ways of changing behaviour, which give citizens and communities more control of their own lives, thereby delivering one of the Coalition's key commitments.

Case Studies

A. Defra case study - encouraging energy efficient products

Encouraging people to buy and use more energy efficient appliances is central to Defra's objective of promoting a low carbon and eco-friendly economy. The department have focused on stimulating the supply and demand for energy efficient products and on raising the salience of a product's energy efficiency when people can make decisions.

Drawing on research into consumer purchasing patterns, Defra put in place a combination of measures to increase uptake of energy efficient products. On the supply side, engagement with manufacturers and retailers has led to more innovative, sustainable products being developed. On the demand side, energy efficiency labelling and communications activity have helped retailers and consumers build their understanding of products' energy performance.

The package of measures has had marked success over a short period of time. In 1996, fewer than 5% of fridges and freezers purchased by consumers were A-rated for energy
efficiency. By 2007, over 70% were A-rated or above. These energy savings were delivered at little financial cost, but with large overall savings for consumers’ energy bills.

B. HMRC case study - debt collection

HMRC is carrying out a rapid transformation of its entire debt collection approach. As part of this work they have re-written their tax collection letters, to experiment with different messages to see which prove most successful in terms of people. The key changes they have made to the letters are to include a range of triggers designed to influence the behaviour of the recipient and to spell out the choices the taxpayer could make upon receipt of the letter. Early results indicate that these letters have been very successful typically generating a response rate of around 50% and in some instances the response rate has been as high as 85%.

An example used was to state in the first line of a letter is '9 out 10 UK citizens pay their self assessment tax on time funding the public services from which we all benefit' This letter was intended to indicate to those who had not paid that they were in the minority and therefore not displaying normative behaviour. It was used in the first campaign which has been evaluated and which successfully cleared 86% of the debt portfolio compared to 57% cleared in the previous year. However, although HMRC believes the letters have made a material difference to the success of our collection strategies, they are not able to isolate their impact because we have made a number of other changes simultaneously.

C. OWP case study - benefits thieves

Behavioural change is central to DWP’s business. Examples of campaigns and interventions that aim to change behaviour include:

The Targeting Benefit Thieves campaign began in 2002 and supported the policy goal of driving down fraud and error in the benefit system. The campaign tracked people’s attitudes and self-reported behaviour as a result of seeing the campaign. Tracking research indicated that the proportion of claimants who consider it ‘very easy’ and ‘fairly easy’ to get away with benefit fraud declined from 41% (Oct 2006) to 29% (Mar 2010). The proportion of claimants agreeing with the statement, ‘the chances of getting caught abusing the benefits system are slim’ has declined, falling from 39% (Oct 2006) to 21% (Mar 2010).

D. CLG case study – energy performance and value

Working with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), CLG has explored why household investments in energy efficiency are not valued as part of the home buying process, and how to address this. The project focused on existing housing stock and primarily on private properties – excluding the rental sector.

The project found that consumers don’t understand energy measurement or the benefits of investing in energy efficiency in the home. Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) were found not to support rational or informed decisions.

CLG is now working to improve the information provided by EPCs, and to include practical information on what can be done to individual houses to make them more efficient. The intention is that these changes will nudge home-buyer behaviour which, alongside work done
by the RICS to develop guidance on the value of energy efficiency measures, should start to establish a link between house-values and energy efficiency.

E. OfT - OVLA case study - increased take-up of OVLA's electronic vehicle licensing service (EVL)

DVLA has sought to raise awareness among drivers of the benefits of going on-line or using an automated phone to tax their vehicles on time.

The V11 tax-reminder pack was changed to incorporate a strong call to action, encouraging customers to purchase their vehicle tax on-line or by phone. The envelope was changed from manila to white and incorporated a new creative design. This action produced an immediate 5 percentage point increase in EVL take-up. A Prize Draw to win a zero vehicle excise duty car (donated by SEAT) was introduced and achieved a further 10 percentage point increase in take-up. Subsequent television and on-line campaigns further improved take-up.

Outcomes and evaluation

EVL take up has reached a perceived saturation point (based on analysis of willingness/ability to use access the internet or automated phone service) and has remained at a stable 49% each month since the overt marketing activity was stopped in April 2010.

F. BIS case study - Stem

The Roberts Review (2002) found that fewer students in the UK were choosing to study many science and engineering disciplines.

As a result of these trends, and increasingly attractive opportunities for skilled individuals to work outside research, the review concluded that emerging shortages in the supply to R&D employers would act to constrain innovation in the UK, not just in these disciplines, but also more widely, since much cutting edge research is multidisciplinary.

To enhance young people's understanding of and enthusiasm for STEM subjects, STEMNET - a UK-wide organisation - was established to improve both the role models and inspiration for studying STEM subjects. Working with BIS and the Department for Education, STEMNET set up the STEM Ambassador's scheme, and brokered STEM related activities in schools in order to exemplify how STEM subjects can both be exciting and also enhance career opportunities.

To create positive messages and incentives, and exemplify further positive role-models for young people to engage in STEM subjects, a National Science and Engineering Competition was established, in response to Lord Sainsbury's *The Race to the Top*. This culminates in a high profile annual presentation of the UK Young Scientist and UK Engineer of the year awards. This ceremony takes place within the 'Big Bang' - a national fair celebrating young people's achievements in science and engineering.

Uptake of science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects at GCSE and A Level have been rising steadily. 2010 saw an increase in the number of entries to Further Mathematics, Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Chemistry Student enrolments for HE
science courses were up by 3% at undergraduate level, and 7% at postgraduate level in 2008/09, compared with 2007/08.

G. DH case study - Health Trainers

The Health Trainer Programme was set up to provide one to one support for individuals' wishing to improve their health. A community participation scheme, run by Primary Care Trusts, the Programme aims to help build a workforce with the right skills to tackle health inequalities and deliver sustained health improvements - particularly among less advantaged, 'hard to reach' groups.

The programme is based on behavioural science, drawing on principles of behaviour change developed in social and health psychology, and adopts a personalised care planning approach focused on self-care and empowering clients to make informed decisions about their health and behaviour. The evidence base for this approach was derived from a number of different sources including the literature on chronic illness (where there is evidence that encouraging self-management can produce significant improvements in outcomes and well-being, and reduce use of services and sickness absence) and on cognitive behaviour therapy for common mental disorders.

The Health Trainer programme has been very successful up to this point. By mid-2010 there were more than 2,300 health trainers and health champions either in post or in training within the NHS, and some 90 per cent of Primary Care Trusts were covered by a health trainer service.

Preliminary results from the Health Trainer Data Capture Reporting system (DCRS) demonstrate the ability of Health Trainers to connect with individuals in hard to reach areas and groups, with 67% of clients from the two lowest quintiles (01&02). Over 53% of clients surveyed to date reported they had achieved their chosen goals A full evaluation of the Health Trainers initiative is expected to report early in 2011.

Effecting behaviour change in foreign publics

H. FCC Consular activities

The main objective of Consular Communications is to help Britons have safer trips abroad. Rather than assuming that the number of UK citizens experiencing problems abroad is fixed, the FCO has a 'Know Before You Go' campaign to reduce the number of preventable Consular cases.

The campaign aims to make British travellers better prepared before they travel and has used research to identify 5 groups that cause disproportionate numbers of Consular cases. The campaign has seen a decrease in preventable cases over a sustained period. Although other factors will have influenced the numbers of consular cases, the downward trend of preventable cases has occurred despite an overall upward trend in the number of trips abroad.

I. DfID - Health

South Africa - Communications through Mass Media Drama (Soul City)
Soul City is a non-profit making organisation, which was developed to harness the power of mass media for Health and Development Communication. O110 has provided £13m over 13 years. To date it has produced over 140 hours of prime time TV drama episodes, over 40 million good quality print booklets and 2430 X 15 minutes episodes of Radio dramas in 9 African languages. It addresses 20 different health and development topics ranging from maternal health care, xenophobia to domestic violence, substance abuse as well as having a strong emphasis on HIV and AIDS. Soul City has reached over 70% of the South African population and 26m people in the wider region.

Evaluation and outcomes: Soul City's 2007 regional evaluation found that, in all countries covered, those exposed to Behaviour Change Communication materials were more likely than not to use a condom and that only 17% of the adults exposed to the materials had more than one sexual partner in the last 12 months compared to an average of 26% before the programme got underway. Positive changes in behaviour have also been measured in the 2nd South African National Youth Behaviour Survey. An independent study has been commissioned to study the effect of the Behaviour Change Communication programme in more detail.

October 2010

**Memorandum by the Government Economics Service (GES) and the Government Social Research Service (GSR) (BC 24)**

Joint response from the Government Economics Service (GES) and the Government Social Research Service (GSR)

*GSR and GES*

The Government Social Research Service and Government Economic Service provide the government of the day with evidence and evidence-based advice to support the rationale, objectives, appraisal, monitoring, evaluation and feedback to support effective policy-making and delivery. This adds value to strategy, policy and delivery, and decision-making in general, by providing rigorous guidance within a policy context identifying what works, what’s worth investing in, potential pitfalls and unintended consequences.

The Government Social Research Unit (GSRU) and Government Economic Service Team (GEST) in HM Treasury (now the combined Government Economic and Social Research Team – GESRT) provide the professional support and leadership for social researchers and economists across all Government Departments.

*Professional standards and work on behaviours*

There is a lot of scope for work from the behavioural sciences to inform policy. GES and GSR aim to ensure that this is done in an evidence-based way, with high-quality design, evaluation and analysis.

The work of the GES and GSR is underpinned by a comprehensive framework of professional standards. This ensures high quality social research and analysis for government that is rigorous, relevant and valued. The purpose of the GES and GSR is to ensure that
policy and delivery are guided by the best available analysis and evidence, in particular ensuring that government and frontline decisions are built on an understanding of and engagement with the people and organisations affected by that decision, as well as an understanding of the wider social consequences. As such, the social and wider behavioural sciences are fundamental to this work.

All aspects of the ROAMEF cycle require input from the social sciences, however, appraisal and evaluation are two key stages of the policy cycle informed by evidence. The ‘Green Book’ is HMT guidance on conducting appraisals. The ‘Magenta Book’ was developed by GSR and provides guidance for policymakers and government analysts carrying out or commissioning policy evaluation. Work is now being undertaken to update the Magenta Book, rebrand it as Treasury guidance and ensure it is endorsed by all the analytical professions.

**General view on the use of insights from the Behavioural Sciences in informing policy**

There has recently been a move toward discussing behavioural science and insights from behavioural science rather than using the term “behaviour change”. GES and GSR broadly welcome this move as ‘change’ can imply something transformative and extreme, whereas interventions seeking to influence toward a behavioural goal can equally be about adopting new behaviours, or affirming existing ones as well as ‘changing’ existing habits and practice.

Some risks that we have identified in the area are that work should not be based on anecdote, that context is vital to particular outcomes and that the small scale manipulations used in experimental research need to be checked in terms of scalability when being applied. GES and GSR play a key role here in making sure that policy is firmly rooted in the evidence base, and that the implications of the findings from this area effectively inform the design and delivery of the mix of measures to influence behaviour are well understood. GES and GSR welcome and are keen to support initiatives involving pilot activity in real policy settings (for example, DEFRA’s pilot projects), using what we know about what works and drawing on input from the communities, from business, and civil society as well as government to enable action.

That said, insights from the behavioural sciences, and their rigor can be very powerful, and have, to date, not been used as widely as they could be.

**Previous and current GSR and GES work on behaviours across government**

Building on existing work across Government, since 2008, the GES and GSR have explicitly worked and reported on the new developments in the application of behavioural science to policy. The GES formed a cross departmental group, led by DCSF, to assess the present position of work on behavioural economics in Government. The group produced a guidance note on behavioural economics and a census of existing applications [see here](#). Behavioural economics has become part of GES professional development, with inputs from Lord Layard, Professor Paul Dolan and other leading academics.

In parallel to this, the GSR commissioned work to provide an overview of social and psychological ‘behaviour change’ models and a summary of the key elements of ‘behaviour change’ theory from this perspective. The work also provided guidance on selecting and using models. The outputs from this project can be found [here](#).
To promote and assist this policy focus, in February 2010 GES and GSR appointed, via the ESRC public sector placement fellowship scheme, an academic fellow (Dr. Rachel McCloy) to help coordinate work on behaviours across government and to build capacity and capability in this area. In consultation with colleagues from across Government, both within and outside the economics and social research professions, the fellow has worked to identify key issues around the use of behavioural insights across government. The key issues identified were for a better understanding of the need for a rigorous approach that takes due regard of the research base; the importance of context in applying behavioural insights to policy; more shared practice in terms of what works and what does not work in influencing behaviour, so that the work of more experienced teams within Government can benefit those who are relatively new to working in this space; and a need to bring people working in this area across government together and to foster and champion good practice as well as what is cost effective. In order to address the issues identified above we are engaged in a number of ongoing pieces of work, currently led by our joint ESRC fellow.

We have been working to set up a network of interested people across Government. This network is being supported by a Civil Pages community (Behavioural Science in Government Network), and plans for a number of face-to-face events, the first of which is a joint GES/GSR miniconference to be held at HM Treasury on October 1st. The Civil Pages community will also act as a forum for the sharing of relevant information on work in this area across government. As part of this initiative, we are compiling an inventory of work on behaviours across Government. We also expect the civil pages community to become a resource for anyone searching for extant reports on behaviour change, and information about relevant events, research developments etc.

We are also working to foster and promote good practice in work on behaviours in a number of ways. We have put features spotlighting high quality research within government in our membership communications (e.g., GSR members magazine), and will again be highlighting these as part of our network launch conference. A particular focus here has been on the work of interdisciplinary teams, where social researchers, economists, customer insight, communications, policy and other colleagues have come together to share knowledge and expertise around project.

October 2010

Members present

Lord Crickhowell
Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
Lord Krebs
Lord May of Oxford
Baroness Neuberger (Chairman)
Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve
Baroness Perry of Southwark
Earl of Selborne
Lord Sutherland of Houndwood
Lord Warner
Examination of Witnesses
Witnesses: **Dr David Halpern**, [Cabinet Office], **Ms Karen Hancock**, [Chief Economist, Department for Education], **Dr Rachel McCloy**, [Government Economic and Social Research Team], and **Mr Richard Bartholomew**, [Joint Head of the Government Social Research Service, Department for Education].

Q1 The Chairman: Can I start by welcoming our witnesses to the first public hearing of this Inquiry and also welcoming the members of the public—rather a lot of members of the public. We’re delighted to see you. We’re very pleased to see our four witnesses. Just to make sure everybody knows, the proceedings are being webcast and there is an information note available for the public who are here with some background on the Inquiry. It gives you a list of the Members’ interests in so far as they are relevant to the Inquiry. Members will declare their interests orally the first time they speak today. What I would like to do now is to ask our witnesses to introduce themselves for the record. After you’ve done that, I’ll give each of you a chance to make a short opening statement, if you wish to do so. Can we just hear who you are for the record please?

**Dr David Halpern:** I’m David Halpern. I’m now back in the Cabinet Office.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

**Karen Hancock:** I’m Karen Hancock. I’m the Chief Economist at the Department for Education and I’m here representing the work we did in the Government Economic Service on behaviour change and policy.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

**Dr Rachel McCloy:** I’m Rachel McCloy. I’m an ESRC Public Sector Placement Fellow with the Government Economic and Social Research team.
Richard Bartholomew: I’m Richard Bartholomew. I’m joint Head of the Government Social Research Service and also Chief Research Officer in the Department for Education.

Q2 The Chairman: Thank you very much. Just before I ask you whether you want to make an opening statement, I should just warn you that the acoustics are ghastly in here. Actually, I even found it quite difficult to hear just now—I don’t know whether other members of the Committee did—and I suspect members of the public behind you will find it even worse. So if you could speak relatively slowly, though saying that we do want to finish by about 5 pm. The acoustics are awful and you’re not the first people to have found that. I don’t know whether any of you would like to make an opening statement but if you would, we’d be delighted.

Dr David Halpern: I’ll just make a general comment. When I came to talk to your Lordships—goodness, it must have been a number of months ago—I was outside of government. Clearly I’ve come back into it to do this agenda. I personally welcome that government is using what is a powerful set of tools, albeit cautiously. Certainly I and the Government welcome your interest in this area. It is both very powerful in practical ways for policymakers. In some ways it also illustrates some aspects of the style of the new administration, but there are clearly also risks to using the approach if it’s used inappropriately. We share, I think, your interest in keeping it as a very evidence-based approach and that is part of what we’re doing, certainly in terms of the unit that I’m heading.

Q3 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed; does anybody else want to add?

Richard Bartholomew: In Government Social Research, one of our roles is to advise policymakers and Ministers on the evidence. We’re experts on research within government and our role is to assess the quality of that evidence and advise our colleagues and Ministers
on its reliability. We certainly embrace this interest in behavioural change. A main part of our role as government social researchers is to examine and understand behaviour. The change element is a relatively newer one, but we’ve certainly been involved—over many, many years—in getting to understand people’s motivations, getting good robust evidence for that and we’re working very closely with the other professional groups in government, certainly the Government Economic Service, to bring together the synergies of our different skills; we leading perhaps more on evaluation evidence, the Government Economic Service very much on the theories coming out of behavioural economics. We see this as a really important opportunity for the professional groups across government to work together.

Q4 The Chairman: Anyone else? No. Okay, well I will start and then hand over to various colleagues.

Lord May of Oxford: I can’t resist saying that, although it’s not statistically significant, the two males chose to speak and the two women didn’t.

The Chairman: I noticed that too, but I decided that it wasn’t statistically significant and I would get reproved by our specialist adviser.

Lord May of Oxford: Well, it’s statistically significant at a lower level. Sorry.

The Chairman: No, it’s fine. I’ll start and then I’ll hand round to other members of the Committee. The first question, which I think you’ve had in advance, is what does the Government classify as a behaviour change intervention?

Dr David Halpern: Shall I have this one? Now, Lord May, you’ve made me self-conscious every time I’m going to speak.

Lord May of Oxford: That may have been my intention.

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2 Karen Hancock noted: This characterisation is inaccurate. A group from the Government Economic Service, led by Karen Hancock, carried out a survey of how evidence and ideas from behavioural economics were being used in policy. It then produced general guidance in 2008 on how theory and evidence from behavioural economics could be used to make more effective policy. Government economists are recruited on the basis of being able to apply empirical economic evidence to policy issues.
**Dr David Halpern:** I do want to emphasise that most of our team are actually women. Yes, actually we tend not to use the words “behaviour change”. We did wrestle with this fairly deeply for lots of reasons, but one of which is that almost every area of policy is characterised by, or concerned with, some aspect of human behaviour. Often, actually, as a strategy for most of us, because we’re often locked into our behaviours by a number of factors. If you want to effect change, the thing to do is often not to make it feel not like change at all. The behaviour can carry on but the outcome can be different. We go fairly broadly in terms of our remit, I think. We decided not to over-wrestle with what constitutes change or not, but that’s why we went with a broader framing in terms of my own team, the Behavioural Insight Team, rather than saying it was all about behavioural change. Because often it’s simply understanding the other kinds of behavioural influences that are in play around that individual or a community, and you may be able to attenuate one or the other; then your positive effects occur. I realise that may be too broad an answer, but we have wrestled with it. I just want to acknowledge that issue.

**Q5 The Chairman:** Our evidence is clearly wrestling with it too. We range from absolutely everything—anything that might change behaviour—being a behavioural change intervention, to something that is much sort of narrower, behavioural components of all policies arguably, or what just simply might be regarded as behaviour change by behavioural economists or psychologists. We feel that there is some confusion here. So is there any more enlightenment from some of the other witnesses?

**Karen Hancock:** Amongst economics, in government, we’ve been thinking about this as well, because obviously we tend to think of taxation and regulation as being behaviour change interventions as well, possibly. But I think what people are generally talking about when they talk about behaviour change is details of policy design which are non-regulatory,
and non-tax or subsidy, which can be added to the list of policy levers, if you like, to make policy more effective. I know the health literature has been grappling with the issue of the problems of a variety of definitions of what is a behaviour change intervention. They think it is really important that some clear definition is arrived at because it makes it difficult to evaluate and assess different interventions without such standardisation. I think that is what people are generally referring to when they talk about behaviour change interventions. It is somewhere between regulation and tax incentives, but as an addition to the policy library, if you like.

Q6 The Chairman: Are we hearing different views on what behavioural change interventions are from different departments of government? Because it sounds to me as if you’re not quite saying the same.

Richard Bartholomew: Because I work actually as Chief Research Officer in DfE on interventions in Children’s Services, to me it has a rather more micro-meaning, in terms of quite intensive interventions with children at risk; for example, foster children, improving their wellbeing, and indeed helping foster carers to improve the way they provide support to these children. So, there are quite a number of quite intensive interventions. I don’t know if they’re more traditional but they’re rather different from the population default type of intervention that you get on, say, taxation, where you’re trying to effect a small change but over a very large number of people. With the sort of interventions that we’re often involved in evaluating, we’re actually trying to produce quite a large change—an improvement in the behaviour and wellbeing of a small group of very disadvantaged children or those who have major behavioural problems, which does have a big benefit both to them and to the taxpayer ultimately, in terms of saving on later behaviours, such as criminality, which may be
very expensive. So I think they're equally part of the equation, but perhaps not what people would normally think of in terms of the new science of behaviour change.

**Q7 The Chairman:** Yes, do you want to come back in?

**Karen Hancock:** Thank you. The work that we did across government, when we were talking to economists in lots of different government departments, suggests that quite a wide range of things are thought of as behaviour change interventions, including things like form design in HMRC, about setting defaults in the Department for Work and Pensions, as well as the more health-promotion type of interventions, maybe one-on-one, to get people to give up smoking and things like that. My perspective is that it is understood to mean quite a broad range of things across government.

**Q8 The Chairman:** Is there an attempt to reconcile all of that?

**Dr David Halpern:** If I get behind what I think you're asking by that question, when we look at how governments have tended to look at affecting behaviour, or, indeed, achieving policy, there has been a relatively limited menu. So, you think of regulation, you think of taxes, your think of price signals and so on; also it tends to be premised on quite a cognitive, rational model. If there is a basic insight it is that there is an additional suite of approaches when you get your head inside a more nuanced model of actually what drives behaviour change, what drives decision-making and so on. If you looked at it inductively across the departments, I think our point would be that some departments do indeed have behavioural insight groups of various kinds, but often that might be rooted in social marketing or advertising. Well, that's quite a narrow take. Others will necessarily have a much more almost legislative or legal view on the world. Of course those are all affecting behaviour too
aren’t they? But our additionality is to bring in some of those less cognitive, less familiar approaches and to round out our policy toolkit.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Lord Sutherland, you wanted to come in.

**Q9 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** Just a point of clarification, Dr Halpern, can you help me? You suggested that there could be examples of where behaviour remains the same but the outcomes are quite different. If you could give me a couple of examples that would help me just to focus my mind. But a broader point, does it matter whether behaviour change is an expansive term as long as we’re clear what kind we’re talking about in terms of the appropriateness, first, of the questions and, secondly, of the way you evaluate it?

**Dr David Halpern:** Sorry, it was an opaque comment. Many of us don’t eat as healthily as we should and we know that. One way you can take that head on is to say, “Well actually you mustn’t eat x, y or z foods”. The alternative is that you can change aspects of the food; so you carry on eating—that is my point—and you don’t experience it as a great change, but actually something has happened along the way. Of course, similarly in terms of habits, a lot of our behaviour is very habit-based.

**Q10 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** But if you withdraw salt or the volume of salt in any particular food, that is not a change in behaviour by those who eat, but it has consequences for their health.

**Dr David Halpern:** Absolutely, that’s a better example than mine, in that sense.

**Q11 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** But that simply raises the general point. What kinds of change are we talking about? Does it matter as long as we appropriate the
questions to the type of change? Because what you’d ask about that is really rather different from trying to cure someone of drug addiction.

Dr David Halpern: Let me give you one more example, a well-known one, often discussed and, indeed, discussed this week, on defaults around pensions. One thing that never changes is that we procrastinate; we always put off our decisions for tomorrow. Actually, if you change the framing of it—the consequences of that change, even though it looks like the behaviour has not—do you see what I mean? So, it’s sometimes going with the grain of how desire predicts our behaviour. Of course, often it is actually an overt behaviour change we’re interested in.

The Chairman: Having reminded everyone else to declare their interests, I forgot. I chair the Responsible Gambling Strategy Board and the Responsible Gambling Fund, which could, conceivably, be relevant to this inquiry. I think Lord Sutherland, you didn’t have any, is that right?

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Well, not that I know of, but I’m beginning to wonder now; I filled in a tax form, does that give me an interest?

The Chairman: Exactly, it’s everything isn’t it? It’s life. Lord May.

Q12 Lord May of Oxford: I should begin by declaring some interests, including one that I didn’t put on the thing. I’m a member of the Committee on Climate Change, where I think I keep saying that social sciences and behaviour is the most important science, which is odd for a physicist. I’m an adviser to the Tesco Sustainable Consumption Institute and a non-executive director of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and I also keep telling them that they ought to draw more inspiration from behaviour and social sciences. Having teased you Professor Halpern, I’m directing my question to you. What is the role and the
intended remit of the Cabinet Office’s behavioural Insight Team? What’s it designed to do? In what ways will it make government make best use of behavioural change theory?

**Dr David Halpern:** In some sense, it comes from the coalition agreement. It’s a way of expressing its objection to assumptions that the Government can only change people’s behaviour through rules and regulations and trying to move to: “Our Government will be a smarter one, shunning the bureaucratic levers of the past and finding intelligent ways to encourage, support, and enable people to make better choices for themselves”. In some ways, it’s a tool to make that a reality. We’re deliberately keeping the team quite small — six to eight people is all that we’re talking about — and very much working with departments to catalyse their sophistication about how they think about and use these issues. In practical terms, this boils down to three or four key elements; one is essentially educative, so doing work with senior civil servants across departments, explaining to them these approaches—where they can use them, where they can’t, essentially, it’s an additional toolkit. In some areas, Ministers or departments come forward and they have a particular issue. Actually, we haven’t had gambling yet, but you can imagine someone will come and say, “Is there some new angle we might think about in this area?” And it may just be a conversation, bouncing backwards and forwards. Clearly one of the things to identify is what are the small number of areas where this is actually really a game changer? Public health is an obvious one we might talk about, with the public health White Paper coming shortly. A meta-issue that I suspect, from earlier conversations, you will share our interest in is, driving up the evidence base all the time. It’s a very empirical approach. A lot of these effects have been established in north American labs or with 20-year-old college students. Do they work in the field? How do they play out? How do they not? We have to stay pretty empirical on it. One of our roles is very much to stay close to that to drive the evidence base with departments.
Q13 Lord May of Oxford: Given that it is a small number of people, does it have a mainly co-ordinating role, or is it also going to be actively engaged in collecting and analysing evidence? Is it too early to say?

Dr David Halpern: No, it’s not too early to say. It is early, but in at least a small number of areas that I’ve mentioned where this agenda clearly looms large, we are quite actively working with departments to help expose them to some of this thinking. Partly, we’re just sometimes bringing in external expertise; people like Richard Thaler and we just had Dan Ariely, in from the US, last week. When we get them in, we invite the relevant people in departments that we think will learn from it. In terms of driving specific experiments, evidence, one person working with us is Paul Dolan of the LSE; he has a number of PhD students. On the one hand, yes, we want to encourage him to do exemplar projects out there, but actually the bigger play is to not just have a few PhD students. Sally Davies sits on £500 million of research moneys, of which, I think I may have quoted this stat to you before, we believe less than 0.5% of health research goes on behavioural factors, and yet we know that more than half of all years of healthy life lost are to known behavioural factors; that’s a pretty big discrepancy. So, yes, we would like to see a shift in the emphasis and we’d like to keep it evidence based. That’s been the roots of this tradition and we’d like to see that continue and grow in government too.

Q14 Lord May of Oxford: I’ve got a couple of follow-up questions. Given that there are only eight or so people in the team, does this enable you, in the insight team, to reflect on all of the diversity of disciplines and sub-disciplines from which behavioural theories are drawn? I would’ve thought there were more than eight.

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3 Karen Hancock noted: Individual departments are also independently bringing in expertise, commissioning research and applying the evidence to policy issues.
**Dr David Halpern:** Well, it seems to me that you've answered your own question. Clearly, we have tried to be deliberately a bit broad. My own background is that I used to teach, at Cambridge, social psychology and natural sciences; Paul Dolan, very much an economist; we have other people who have a more marketing-type background. We've tried to reflect some of those differences in the group. We're also located, and serve as a sister unit, with both the strategy unit—which means you can get Paul into many major policy areas—and actually increasingly, particularly as of this week, with the Office of Civil Society, given that the big society is one of the areas where there is great interest and focus. I take it you feel that there are some other disciplines, notably perhaps in the harder sciences, which you think we should be engaging with.

**Q15 Lord May of Oxford:** My own experience as chief scientist is that there is a lot, within government, of uncoordinated things going on in different places that should've been better coordinated. In particular, in this instance, it's been drawn to my attention that there is, and correct me if I'm wrong, the work of the Government Social Research Service, which is oriented to social and psychological behaviour, and on the other hand, there is the Government Economic Service, which is focused on behavioural economics, which are fairly distinct things but with quite a bit of read-across. Why is there that separation? Do you think it is useful or not useful? What are you hoping to do about it?

**Dr David Halpern:** I hope that we do engage with those groups. Do we engage enough? I don't know. We are very practically focused. We have one foot in the broader external literature and group of experts, which, of course, other groups also have an interest in, but we're also situated very much working in the heart of policy-making on the White Papers and so on. Of course, some of those other groups would also say that they're doing some of it. The alternative charge would be, how can we be pursuing, in central government,
major policy initiatives without having incorporated some of this expertise? So, it’s just a vehicle to do that, but maybe others would want to —

Richard Bartholomew: You’re absolutely right, there are over 1,000 government social researchers, many of them are social psychologists, sociologists like me, as well as some economists, and we have around 1,300 or so, Karen will correct me, economists, many of whom are becoming very knowledgeable about behavioural economics. We have statisticians as well, and there are psychologists in the Psychological Service, so I think we are working with the team. We had a joint conference at the beginning of October, where Paul Dolan spoke. We would wish to work with the team, and there is a lot of expertise in terms of evaluation techniques, and in terms of economics, where clearly it is for the team to provide the strategic direction. It would be more difficult for individual departments to do that without the team in the Cabinet Office, but I think a lot of the implementation of these ideas, and certainly the evaluation and development of them, will be in individual departments. We cover in GSR, 22 other departments, and other agencies; GES covers slightly more, I would imagine. This is why this working together is so important to actually have a practical impact on the development of departmental policies.

Karen Hancock: Thank you, the Cabinet Office behavioural insight team is obviously a fairly recent development, since the coalition Government came in. Behavioural economics has been going on—academic endeavour goes on almost independently of whatever a government is thinking—for quite some time. Economists in government have been pondering for some time about how to use the insights and knowledge from behavioural economics and how it’s relevant to policy making. So we started talking amongst ourselves, quite a while ago, and we were particularly thinking about how one can use it, as I say, in developing good policy. We produced our guidance on how to use behavioural economics in policy-making in 2008; it’s been very popular among economists. There has been quite an
appetite. People had heard about behavioural economics and didn’t quite know what to do with it and how to use it. We found developing this guidance quite useful; it shows—at different stages of the ROAMEF (rationale, objectives, appraisal, monitoring, evaluation and feedback) policy cycle—that insights from behavioural economics can be used to develop better policy. So, we’ve been doing this for quite a while among economists and working with social researchers as well and with our different economists who are based in the different departments, who have been working with their own policy people in the departments. So work on behaviour change has been going on even before the insight team was set up; it will continue to go on, and be given extra momentum by it, but it’s not the only source of knowledge and expertise.

**Q16 Lord May of Oxford:** If I could give you one final comment that might be helpful to you. There are very interesting groups, bigger than yours definitely; the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory has some very bright young people, and to the best of my knowledge, they don’t know you exist. But, even more, I’ve been trying to get them to talk to 5 and 6, and each of those groups has really interesting things going on and only recently have they become aware of each other. I imagine that is a generic problem. It’s a challenge for you.

**Dr David Halpern:** One of the aspects of our role is to help make those connections in areas that you expressed an interest in, in relation to climate, and of course, we think about transport and so on; Stanford and MIT both have pretty interesting groups on it. There are commercial groups doing pretty interesting things on it. Fiat and Microsoft just did a pretty interesting piece of work on behaviour and driving. So there are many angles into it. So if we can even make a few of those connections that would be great.
Q17 The Chairman: You’ve raised the issue about Sally Davies sitting on a rather large sum of research moneys. On your team, do you have any health specialism? In particular, do you have health psychologists or do you have public health experts?

Dr David Halpern: The answer is probably half. We’re working with some. For example, we see a fair amount of Theresa Marteau, who, indeed, is being supported by the department, as you probably know. What we try to do is work with the department, so we have done a half-day away day looking at public health issues, bringing in a number of academics and people from the department, who often, you have to remember, have lots of their own silos to bridge across. I have done some work on it. As it happens, Paul Dolan has done quite a lot of work, particularly around the use of QALYs, and he advises NICE. I don’t think we’d want to claim deep expertise in every policy area, but we have certainly engaged with quite a few. I’ve just been reminded that we went to see UCLH about what it was doing in terms of behaviour change of clinicians. We couldn’t claim to have expertise with such a small group. We would then be subject to the critique that we were literally replicating what was happening in departments, so I think we have to be careful about what our value added is and what it is not.

The Chairman: Lord Warner, I think you wanted to come in on that.

Q18 Lord Warner: I just wanted to get a feel from all four of you. Do you see your role as reactive—you wait for the departments to come to you—or do you busy yourself, poking your noses into the departments, if I may put it that way, when you know there is a topic that is floating around there that you think it ought to be involved with?

Dr David Halpern: Maybe I should have said that the team has a steering group. Obviously, it expresses some views about topics we should go into. That steering group includes Sir Gus O’Donnell, the Cabinet Secretary, Steve Hilton from Number 10, Polly Mackenzie from
the Lib Dem side, and Robert Devereux, who is head of profession for policy-making. So it is a very strong group. The steering group has views on this. Essentially, we do a mix of what you describe. Partly, I’m sure we’re using the behavioural economic technique of being a scarce good, so we cannot respond to all the requests that we get. Sometimes we get approaches from departments. That happens on pretty much a daily basis, with a steady stream of, “Can you help us with x, y, z?” Additionally, we have some areas where we feel, “This is really interesting; we want to engage with it”. An example of the latter might be that we think the tax gap is incredibly interesting. We think HMRC has been quite sophisticated in these areas. It did not approach us; we approached it, first, because we wanted to see what it was doing and it’s absolutely fascinating and, secondly, because we just think that there is a big opportunity. In other areas, if we don’t get a strong push from departments—on some aspects of climate change, the department would feel that it has doing that for quite a long time—and if they’re not pushing for further help, then great, so be it, if that makes some sense. It is a combination.

Karen Hancock: Externally, I tend to wait until I’m invited. I’ve given quite a few talks now to other departments about behavioural economics and policy-making and at the professional conferences that we hold for government economists across government. For example, I’ve been to the Department for Energy and Climate Change and I spoke at the Cabinet Office for the launch of the MINDSPACE report. I’ve presented, by invitation, to the Better Regulation Executive and the Government Equalities Office and I’m about to present to the Law Commission. I wait until I’m invited to go and talk to other departments. It’s usually because someone in the department has heard me speak at a government economics event or a government economics and social research event and wants to find out a bit more about it, so asks us to come in and talk to them. Raising
awareness through giving presentations through your professional network is another route and then waiting to be invited to go in and build links that way.

**Richard Bartholomew:** The essence of my job as chief research officer in the Department for Education, if I may speak about that, is embedded. I lead a research and analysis division, which is part of a policy directorate. We have analysts and there is a degree of separation to retain integrity and objectivity, but my job is to help my policy colleagues and Ministers to develop policies that actually work. Part of that role is to use all the insights from science, including behavioural change, to try to achieve the results that they want to achieve using a range of methods. For example, why don’t poorer families take up sufficient childcare? Maybe we should think of something so that we can use the insights of behavioural change to give them the motivation and information to make sure that they’re making full use of what is now free childcare—15 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds. This is one of the policy challenges for us all. I see it as my day job to make sure that there are these insights and that we’re using the most up-to-date science to make those policies effective. As I say, there are other techniques as well; one can advise Ministers on what might work. You need a range of different approaches, I think. It’s my job to keep up to speed on that and to know what others are doing in the scientific field.

**Dr Rachel McCloy:** Because my role has been looking out across the Government Economic Service and the Government Social Research service, seeing what people are doing on behavioural change and behavioural economics, a lot of the time it has been me pitching up at a department and asking them what they’re doing, what they need and what would be useful to them in this area. Sometimes that has led on to doing things like Karen, presenting in departments or helping people on specific projects, but that has been very broad, depending on what people have needed. There is also a certain central role, because
I’m based between GES and GSR, co-ordinating from the bottom up, looking at the evidence base and making sure that that is well embedded.

**Q19 Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve:** I have to begin by declaring my interests. I’m on the advisory group of the Centre for the Study of Incentives in Health, I’m a trustee of Sense about Science, I’m on the council of the Foundation for Science and Technology and I’m a fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences, none of which, I may say, eats a great part of my life. I’m trying to get my mind around the space in which you all operate. It seems to me that most people, behaving as we all do, are in fact constrained by very many existing laws, regulations and institutional structures. The school system would be an excellent case for thinking about this. Do you address the question of removing the compulsory, highly incentivised and costly structures, some of them creating perverse incentives, before you start discussing behavioural change, or do you just take that background as something fixed?

**Dr David Halpern:** I think the current Administration definitely do not take it as fixed. You may know that part of the origins of what is now Behavioural Insight Team was deeply rooted in a deregulatory thrust; its parentage partly goes back to the Better Regulation Executive. You may wish to move to this question yourself but behind what you’re pressing is a deep one about the instincts of the Administration. Some of you may know that I served for six years in government before 2007 before coming back. Of course we knew about these issues back then and we did in fact do a paper on behaviour change in 2003-2004. It was pursued a bit but it was not heavily pursued by the Administration. One of the reasons why there is so much more enthusiasm is that it is precisely rooted in some of the instincts that you just expressed. In many areas, you may be able to dismantle, ease off or certainly use an alternative to a conventional regulatory framework by having something that is a softer approach. One thing that has bounced around for a number of years—it’s a
micro-example—is organ donation. Some countries have gone essentially for a more assertive, presumed-consent, regulatory approach, which of course has been debated in the UK. An alternative seen in some countries, certainly in some of the US states, is that, long before you do that, you see whether you can change some of the default framing of a question, which has much the same effect. At the moment, if you go and have your driving licence done, you can click on the screen and say, “Yes, I will be a donor”. I think that we got 28%. What would happen if that was a required field, so you actually had to answer, “Yes” or “No, not for now”? The evidence from elsewhere is that probably 60% to 70% would say yes under such a circumstance. That is clearly not a regulatory move, but it may mean that you can back off or avoid that alternative regulatory solution. That is something that is writ large in many areas. In the regulation of certain kinds of markets, you might ask, “Is there an alternative? Are you sure that there is not an alternative where we could dismantle some of this?”

**Q20 Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve:** Those are good examples, but I think that my question is more about addressing regulatory overdrive—the sort of thing that the Better Regulation Taskforce and so on did not resolve. Do you have to assume that a great deal of regulation is done away with before these questions can be addressed? Does one have to assume that Ofqual has gone or the like?

**Dr David Halpern:** It varies area by area. Clearly the instinct of the Administration is to reduce regulation where possible. The Government have introduced the “one in, one out” rule, from which you have already seen quite a dramatic effect in terms of what is coming through Ministers’ Boxes and Committees. It is often harder to actively remove large swathes of regulations, as many Governments have found. One of the arguments you might make about why it’s difficult is that the questions arise, “What are you putting in its place?”
and, “Is there some alternative?” Certainly some Ministers think of this area a bit in this way. If we offer a coherent alternative that will work in some areas, it becomes possible to do some dismantling. I know that your question is, “Could we do it a priori?” Well, maybe. The Better Regulation Executive continues to exist in BIS. Its job of course is to carry on driving that. I hope that in some areas we’ll see that happening. Whether it will satisfy you or not, I don’t know. Ministers would always like to go more rather than less in that direction.

**The Chairman:** I’m just going to move, if I may, to Lady Perry’s question, because it follows straight on, and then move back to Lord Sutherland’s.

**Q21 Baroness Perry of Southwark:** I should start by declaring what is only a tangential interest as chair of the Research Governance Committee for the Clinical School at Cambridge and Addenbrooke’s. I think that the only behavioural change we would like is from the regulators from the Department of Health. We’re very conscious that the Government’s Behavioural Insight Team is evaluating only non-regulatory intervention, whereas NICE, for example, said in its written evidence that sometimes legislation, regulation or some other change to the social economic environment that people inhabit is needed to produce or support behavioural change. Does the evidence show this to be the case? If so, why is the Behavioural Insight Team looking only at non-regulatory issues?

**Dr David Halpern:** Partly, the argument is that, because every other bit of government is busy, has a habit of and is quite good at producing more regulation, that is seen as a counterweight. It’s interesting to look at how our counterparts in the US, Cass Sunstein and others, have addressed this. They have been in the bit of government that was essentially responsible for assessing cost-benefit analysis of regulation in a conventional sense. Actually, as you press it, the lines become quite blurry. One thing that’s just going through at the
moment, and has been much debated, is the regulations on tobacco and whether you should cover up cigarettes in stores. That’s obviously a regulatory tool; in fact, you can make a pretty good case about why it will affect behaviour. It’s just that the current Administration’s instincts are to explore the non-regulatory initially. Of course, often a regulation has at its heart something that is affecting some other aspect of behaviour, so the line, when you push it, is pretty blurry, at least in terms of the instincts of the Administration. Another thing that I would add into the mix is that behavioural economic-type approaches are only one of a number of tools that can also do that. You’ve mentioned regulation, but transparency is a very big tool that can be used, which again the Administration are very keen on. It can often serve, to answer Baroness O’Neill’s question, as a very promising tool. In many areas, it looks like greater transparency might enable you—quite rapidly in some areas—to dismantle alternative regulatory approaches. So it’s one of a number of tools and I think it’s more a question of emphasis than an absolute hard line, if that is an answer to your question.

**Q22 Baroness Perry of Southwark:** Don’t you think that regulation should at the very least be based on evidence? You mentioned, for example, the tobacco regulation of putting the cigarettes down under the counter or whatever. The evidence where this has been tried is that it makes absolutely no difference at all. Why regulate something that all the evidence shows isn’t going to make any difference whatsoever in people’s behaviour? The amount of educational initiatives on sex education for teenagers has not reduced the number of teenage pregnancies and so on. Shouldn’t regulation, regulatory intervention, at least be based on the evidence of its effectiveness?

**Dr David Halpern:** Well, absolutely. I’m afraid I’m going to agree with you all the way on this in as far as all policy, frankly, should be based on evidence—if possible—and especially
these kinds of issues. On the very specific examples you’ve mentioned, my own reading of that literature would be the former on cigarettes; you can make a reasonable case that reducing the prominence of cigarettes is likely to have some, albeit very modest, effects, on the basis of at least some meta-analytic studies. It wasn’t a regulation which was introduced by this Government, as you know. In an ideal world what you would do? My view is you wouldn’t do it nationally; you’d try it; you’d have some trialling, and then actually we’d be able to answer your question. On the second one, on sex education, actually I think my own reading would probably be more negative in terms of the effects and, in fact, in some areas, it’s counterproductive.

The Chairman: Indeed?

Dr David Halpern: So teenage pregnancy; you can make a pretty strong case that introducing a highly articulate 21-year old who was a teen mum to a school to say “Don’t do it” actually has the reverse effect. But on all on these things, I’ve emphasised that we are very evidence-based and we’d like this area to be an exemplar for others in that practice.

Q23 Lord May of Oxford: But surely the incidence of smoking has been reduced by draconian things like forbidding it?

The Chairman: Yes, I don’t think there’s doubt about that; it was a specific thing about where you put the cigarettes when you’re selling them. Sorry, you wanted to come in?

Karen Hancock: Yes, sorry, I just wanted to add to that. The question and answer bit has jumped, sort of, straight into evaluation, but I think it’s really important to consider this type of non-regulatory changes alongside all of the other possible ways of affecting behaviour, and, as I said before, to subject them to the test of good policy making at the appraisal stage, so that, when the Government’s considering how best to meet its policy objectives, the widest possible range of options for how to do that—including taxing, spending and regulation and
things in-between and combinations of those things—is given adequate consideration. Now, obviously the option that you choose will be influenced by the evidence you’ve got available and whether it’s been tried before or if you’ve done a pilot or something like that, but the appraisal stage of policy development is where you might consider the benefits of deregulating alongside the costs of—I don’t know—doing something else. So, I think the appraisal stage in policy development is really important here for considering these non-regulatory approaches alongside everything else, all at the same time.

**Q24 Baroness Perry of Southwark:** The point I was trying to make was, whether regulatory or non-regulatory, there should be an evidence base for any kind of action you take. Just rushing in because it seems like a good idea is probably counterproductive in itself.

**Richard Bartholomew:** Absolutely.

**Dr Rachel McCloy:** We can’t disagree I think, at any rate, on that. And I think it would be against everything that the professions stand for to say that it shouldn’t be evidence based.

**Q25 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** Can I come in on a moment of happy unity.

Hurrah for evidence.

**The Chairman:** To ask about evidence, exactly.

**Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** You have all stressed the importance of this and of course, that’s our business and what we focus on very significantly in this Committee. But I wanted to probe a bit more on evidence and the extent to which the Government assess evidence basis for effectiveness of behaviour. Now, what’s come out in the last set of answers is that there are two aspects to this. One is: have you got enough evidence to suggest this is an appropriate intervention or regulation or what have you? But there’s also the second question of: will there be enough evidence to know whether it’s worked and is
there adequate probing of that at government level? If so, have the Government come up with any interesting conclusions?

**Richard Bartholomew**: In terms of evaluations there is a range across departments to look at particular interventions. But also, Government Social Research commissioned a review of the evidence about behavioural change and the science behind it, from Andrew Darnton at the University of Westminster, looking at both the aspects of theories of behaviour and whether there was enough underpinning from the science, particularly in social psychology, about what motivates people and what doesn’t, but also in terms of theories of change about how you translate those theories about how people work—how their minds work or how their motivations work—into actually practical options for programmes. And that was the area perhaps where he felt it was somewhat weaker in terms of theory development. You’ve got the theory of what motivates people and why they behave like that, but how do you translate that into change? And he came up with, I think it’s nine principles, I won’t read them out to you all, but actually a review of that literature to say what the weak points were and where the strengths were. As I say the models of behaviour is an area where there seemed to be good science, less so in terms of how do you actually translate those into practice. And I think his phrase was “It’s better thought of as a craft than purely a science”, in terms of developing empirically those practical methods where you do need very good evaluation on a range of examples that Rachel McCloy has collected together across departments, using random control trials and other experimental methods to test out whether that particular model, where you think you’re going with the grain of a particular behaviour, actually does work, because there are obviously lots of pitfalls on the way, on climate change, and so forth.
Q26 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Can I just push a little bit on that? In your own area, in education, there’s a discussion beginning to take place—and I dare say it will be fairly high-profile shortly—about the effectiveness of Sure Start in changing behaviour. Now, I’m not asking what did happen, that was a while ago, and I’m not asking what should finally decide it now, but what kind of material would you expect a Government to have probed before they introduce a policy like Sure Start? What kind of evidence now is appropriate to evaluating whether we continue to spend the money in that? Now just a little bit more complexity. I would assume the point of Sure Start—and in areas it’s worked very well—has been to change the behaviour of children coming into reception classes. And within certain contexts that has worked very well, but not in others. One of the questions that then follows is: was the intention of Sure Start also to change the behaviour of families from whom the most problematic behaviour-problem children have come? And how can you evaluate that? Sorry, it’s getting a bit complicated, but unless you get down into examples —

Richard Bartholomew: No, I could speak at great length, because I’m responsible for the Sure Start evaluation.

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Ah, good.

Richard Bartholomew: But you don’t want me to spend hours on it. We’re coming to the end of the major evaluation of the initial national Sure Start programme which started 10 years ago—and I was involved in setting it up—and it has been a very major evaluation, looking at both the impacts on the children and the impacts on the families, particularly the parenting skills of those families. The children now are just coming up to seven. We’re collecting data at age seven. We tracked a cohort through and their parents, of course, and we do find positive results at age three and results at age five are just about to be published, looking at parenting behaviours and parental warmth and other, seemingly quite soft measures, but actually significant measures—
**Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** Sorry, did you say parental warmth?

**Richard Bartholomew:** Yes, warmth or the way they interact; do they talk to their children and do they encourage positive behaviours? And we do find, certainly in the results so far, positive changes amongst the poorer parents who do access Sure Start and who live in the Sure Start areas. And we'll be following that through to see if that effect persists. So there are positive effects for the children, in terms of learning and broader social development, but also in terms of parenting styles. And in the end, although it's quite difficult to measure these things, they are absolutely crucial because they are a foundation for everything else.

We're following up now a new evaluation of Sure Start children's centres, because the programme is now national and rolled out, so there are difficulties in evaluating the, sort of, counterfactual for that. But the essence of the new evaluation is looking at the relative merits of different approaches in different areas and different Sure Starts. So it's more a comparative analysis, because you can't do a sort of policy analysis anymore. And we'll be tracking through cohorts of centres themselves to see what they're doing, parents and children. And we've got things like the early years foundation stage which is a common assessment of children at the end of their first year of compulsory schooling which covers a range of not just cognitive development, but a range of social measures as well, to look at the effects, particularly on the poorest children, to look at the gains they get from that. So one can, even with a relative assessment, get an idea of what works compared with alternatives and part of that is a cost-benefit analysis as well, which will be tracking some of the broader social benefits, both to the parents and to the children. So it's a very ambitious and extensive process of evaluation that we've built on gradually over the last decade.

**Lord Sutherland of Houndwood:** That's very helpful. I want a separate supplementary, but it may be there are other comments on this type of area.
Dr Rachel McCloy: I wouldn’t mind just adding to what Richard Bartholomew said, not on Sure Start, because it’s not my area by any means, but going back to the evidence base and making sure we have evidence and to the evaluation. A lot of the work that we’ve been doing centrally in the Government Economic and Social Research team has been inventory work that’s going on across government in this area and to look at examples of where projects have been well evaluated and to look at examples of what’s been going on, what is the evidence for using different techniques, for the behavioural techniques people have used, be they from the very nudgy end of things all the way through to the very intensive end of things that Richard Bartholomew highlighted before, where you’re working with individuals or with groups. One of the things we’ve also been very keen to promote—and we’ve been keen to highlight examples of good practice in this—is where people have been building in evaluation from much earlier on in the process. So thinking about it at the design stage of an intervention, so you’ve very well identified exactly what the behaviour is you want to change. It can often be a problem if you get to the end and think “What was it we were meaning to change?” So it’s a good idea to have properly set that out first, and understand that behaviour in the context around it and put in place the evaluation at that point. Then, when it comes to the end, you know what data you are looking for and the data have been collected online. So it’s something, across the professions, that we’ve been very much involved in pushing and trying to make sure that’s very much part of the process in considering any kind of intervention in this field.

Q27 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Clearly one of the issues—because this is a question about government—is whether government do this without a lot of prompting and pushing and cajoling. You have to go and knock on your colleagues’ doors very regularly and say, “Well, you’re thinking of a policy here; you’d better put in place the following”, which
they clearly have for Sure Start or you wouldn’t be able to make the judgments that you are clearly about to make.

**Dr Rachel McCloy:** I think it’s very much built into things like the professional code and the practice of the professions that this is the case. So having quite well organised professional groups and the GES really helps that way, because it’s something that does filter round and there is quite a bit of cross-talk within the two professions, between the professions as well and to professions outside too. So we discuss these issues quite a lot and there is the Cross Government Evaluation Group and things for example that drive this kind of work forward. It is not, therefore, just siloed in good groups or bad groups, there is a good bit of cross-government link up on it.

**Richard Bartholomew:** Could I just add something to that? Interestingly with the recent Spending Review settlements, you’ve seen there tremendous interest, for quite obvious reasons, in the quality of the evidence. Because remember we have to prove to the Treasury the case for our expenditure on things like Early Years and many others. I’ve been in the Government Social Research Service for over 30 years and I would say that in the last two decades or so there’s a tremendous increase in the quality of evidence that policymakers demand, that Ministers demand, to make those expenditure cases. It’s light years away from what it was many years ago, and there are very high expectations about the quality of proof needed, hence these large evaluations. And that focus on the spending cycle is a huge incentive to policymakers to look at the evidence and trust us to come up with effective evaluation designs.

**Karen Hancock:** Can I just add to that, if I may? I’d echo Richard’s thoughts about the current Spending Review process, which has been much more evidence based than previous ones I’ve been involved in over my nine or 10 years in a London department. When money’s tight, value for money is paramount. And looking for value for money has been a
key part of the discussions in the Spending Review. But in order to be able to demonstrate value for money you've got to have good evidence about costs and benefits. So we don't have to go knocking on people's doors anymore; they come to us. In the current climate, it's really raised the profile of evidence more than ever before and making the case for spending on particular areas.

Q28 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: But this takes me into a very sneaky supplementary which I think we thought we should ask and now is the moment to ask it. You've been talking about how your colleagues' attitudes have been changing a bit. And the big talk of every Government is, “We're going to, change the culture of Whitehall and the behaviour patterns in there really need to change, and unless that happens we won't drive forward as we should”. Will they use your expertise and skills and the skills of your scientists to do that: change the culture of Whitehall? That's behaviour change with a big B.

Karen Hancock: Early days?

Richard Bartholomew: I think that's an interesting question. I hope so. There are things about behaviours of organisations and people in organisations that I think science can speak to, both within government and, indeed, through local authorities. The Government's moving to a system of not having lots of performance indicators for local authorities so a big issue is there in terms of self-improvement and the motivation to do that; moving away from a culture where local authorities have perhaps been used to central government telling them what to do and what standards to reach. And now it's very much for local government and others, and citizens locally, to determine what sort of services they want, so there's a behaviour change there. I think, as a sociologist, that there is quite an issue about behaviour of organisations as well as of individuals and there is a literature on that.
Q29 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Will the Cabinet Office play a part in this?

Dr David Halpern: Well we have already been doing some of these actually. As you'll gather, we're quite evidence based. An early one was the 10% government target to reduce emissions from government buildings—you will have seen these, and some of you may be involved—but led of course by DECC and others. We wanted to actually ask, “Well, what would we do differently?”. So, for example, in most government buildings, when you go in now, you may have noticed that you can see the relative rankings of the 18 major flagship buildings, partly to drive comparison, to make people increase the salience of it, and so on. Ideally it's linked to specific actions that individuals can take. As I walked from the Treasury, I noticed this morning outside the lift there's some stuff about “turn off your appliances” or whatever it might be. So that's a little micro example. Of course we had our eye on the fact that at the same time you're increasing people's awareness of a certain approach. Take another one: it might be, in relation to big society, which is not something just out there: what can you do to increase payroll giving in the Civil Service, for example; or what can you do to increase levels of volunteering or action? You don't have to start with a message of, “You all do it out there”. Actually there is no reason why we can't start in our own backyard; so there certainly are some concrete examples.

Q30 The Chairman: I just want to follow up because you've talked a lot about evaluation. Presumably evaluation will then inform what else you recommend. But what are the primary models or the mechanisms of behavioural regulation that government draws on when it's designing behaviour change interventions, because that's relevant and you won't always have the evaluation of the previous model to draw on. How does that work?

Dr David Halpern: You —

The Chairman: Maybe you always do?
**Dr David Halpern:** I was going to— I don’t think this is oblique but one of the questions that hangs over this is, of course we should do certain kinds of classic evaluation. So you should build in from the policy design deliberate variation. You could argue on the Sure Start stuff about whether that was done explicitly enough versus just using the natural variation in the population. So, you do have to put it ideally into policy design. One area which I think it’s very intriguing to reflect on is: if you move to a world of payment by results, what does that do and to what extent does that get you off the hook of classic conventional evaluation? Because you could say, “Well, we don’t care what’s in the black box. We’ll pay you according to how good your child outcomes are”, or whatever it might be. And that’s pretty intriguing actually. I think it doesn’t let you off the hook completely for several reasons. One is because actually you still need some kind of theory of service, right? Or something like it. There is one other very intriguing one, which I think we’re only just starting to think about. Imagine you’re a third-sector or even a private provider and you say, “We’ve got this great programme which we think will change people’s behaviour to get them into work faster”. And actually, even in a world of social impact bonds—where a state just puts it out there and says, “We’ll pay you by results”—actually it still matters. So if you’re a private provider and you want your private sector investors to come in, you still have to make the case that actually your programme and intervention will be effective, albeit for slightly different motivations. I was going to raise to you earlier on that there partly remains a puzzle that you may indeed have views on yourselves. There is a long history of everybody saying you need a certain kind of evaluation. We can be straightforward, and the incentives on the various players are complicated in terms of Ministers; after you’ve been in power a long time often the particular officials, the various other players, the people who do the evaluations, want to get further work, if you’re a PwC or whatever. Do we have in place a strong enough set of institutions that are held in the crucible of this evaluative world,
whatever it is? Similarly, I know many of you have strong academic backgrounds, in terms of the institutions we have and the professions we have, we often generate certain kinds of things about what may be the causes; there’s actually not much good evidence often on what you do about them. Public health, as we’ve touched on, is a good example. We know a lot about the underlying drivers. Then you want to get into the concrete questions that policymakers want to ask: “What does work? What does not?” You run out of empirical road pretty fast. And so it’s a challenge. We spend a lot of money in our universities and through many other channels in our policies. But do we have a set of institutions that look fit for purpose, with enough independence and strength to generate this kind of material for tomorrow, so in five years’ time we’re not having the same conversation about smoking or sex education? We should be able to answer those questions much more confidently than we can today. And I hope one of the things that you do get with a change of Government is that kind of moment when you look back and you are able to say, “Oh my god, how comes our evidence cupboard is so bare in many areas?”, even in a Spending Review process, and you lash yourselves to the mast of saying, “Well, never again. We’ll build sets of institutions and processes, which will build that kind of evidence”. Now, that is true for behaviour change and behavioural economics, but it’s true for many other areas too.

**The Chairman:** Okay. Lord Selborne.

**Q31 Earl of Selborne:** I should first declare an interest as chair of the Partners’ Board of the Living with Environmental Change programme. When in the call for written evidence we asked whether we could answer the question as to whether there was adequate structures and expertise across government to support the translation of research developments and behaviour change into policy interventions, almost universally, from any number of people, we got a plea that there should be better mechanisms for translating
research from academia to policy and for sharing research findings more widely across government. So for that reason, clearly, we must welcome Dr McCloy’s appointment. Are you now satisfied that you have the appropriate structures to enable this sharing of expertise? How’s it going?

Dr Rachel McCloy: I think we’re getting there. I think there is still work to do. What we’ve tried to do over the last nine months, and it’s ongoing—and I have three more months of my time here to put into it—is to make sure that we do bring people and networks together much better across government to share both the practice that we’ve got going on in departments and the evidence base we’re aware of outside, and take advantage of some of the opportunities there are to bring academics and people into the discussion, so that when it comes to these future institutions that David’s talked about academics are better prepared for this as well, so that we know what the questions are that people want answered. Things like the fellowship I’m on, which is the Public Sector Placement Fellowship are very, very useful in that; very useful in bringing academics in so that we can see what it’s like on the other side of the table. I think at this point the network that we’ve set up has been very successful in bringing people together. We ran the joint conference that Richard mentioned, which was hideously oversubscribed and we’d people sitting on the floor all over the Treasury and a waiting list that went on for weeks, to launch this and to highlight some of the examples of good practice and things. Karen was one of our speakers in that from a department where we think the practice in this is quite good, along with others—Gemma Harper and Samantha Palladino—that you’ll probably hear from later. I think we still need to work out how to keep the network going. It’s always the thing with networks that you can get a good bit of impetus; it’s keeping the impetus up. But I think when we’re talking about a situation where people are having to provide this kind of evidence and these kind of alternatives, there’s very strong evidence coming down from
above. From having the Behavioural Insight Team there, people are much more aware that this is something we should be talking about across government. So I think that’s really helping give the networking side of things a push across government and we’re getting there.

Q32 Earl of Selborne: So if we look at the structural changes which are advancing the cause, we’ve got the network you referred to and you’ve got, of course, your own team, the Behavioural Insight Team. But isn’t there needed a sort of a step change in the sense that you really require people coming into policy, as part of their training, to take this on board. What progress, if any is being made on this? I know the National School of Government are taking this on board, but is it enough?

Dr Rachel McCloy: I think it’s a very good start. I think having this becoming more commonly part of the language of policy is a good start and I know that David and his team have been doing workshops, or will be doing workshops, with policy officials who are already in place as well, so there is a lot more education going on at this level. I think if you can start when people come in it’s got to be a good beginning on this, and it will build up over time.

Q33 Earl of Selborne: And what happens in three months when you go back to your university?

Dr Rachel McCloy: I’m working on that; fun and games. I teach and there’s an awful lot of marking waiting for me, I think.

Richard Bartholomew: We’ve certainly been looking at other options for fellowships. We’ve done a number of fellowship exchange schemes, particularly with the Economic and Social Research Council and, no doubt, other departments with other research councils. So we see that as an ongoing role to actually bring academic expertise into the department,
particularly, as Rachel said, so academic researchers do understand what actually has an impact on policy and what doesn’t. I suppose there’s a frustration on policymakers’ parts that there is very good academic research but academic researchers sometimes find it difficult to actually do the next step from research to “What would you do about it?” That is the question I’m asked by Ministers: “So Richard, that’s very interesting, but what do you suggest we do?” And I think that’s the step that’s quite difficult: for people not working within a policy environment to understand the importance of translating more theoretical research or empirical research that doesn’t actually quite have that payoff, always, in terms of “So what would you do differently?” or “What would you change?” That’s the key part of our role: having an impact and being prepared to commit to trying things. There are a number of academics who are very successful at doing that, in terms of running experimental trials, practical interventions and so forth, but we could do with more of that really, I think. A number of academics I know are very interested in it. In education there are a number. The Institute for Effective Education at York is very interested in this and there are others in other fields. So it’s that next step I think that will really have an impact in integrating the evidence better.

Q34 Baroness Perry of Southwark: Isn’t that also part of the problem for politicians themselves? They ask a question, “Please tell us what to do”, without sometimes understanding that social science isn’t exact in that way; it doesn’t give a simple answer that if you do X, Y will inevitably follow.

Richard Bartholomew: Yes, I think it’s true of most science—natural sciences as well sometimes—that you can’t simply read off what you might do directly from a piece of evidence. There is an exercise there for people like me to actually think, “Well, how does that apply to that situation”, because there are a lot of different factors that need to be
taken into account, as well as the research evidence. I think many Ministers do understand that. But it’s not just a mechanical process, no.

Karen Hancock: Can I just add to that?

The Chairman: Yes.

Karen Hancock: Working with policy colleagues I detect, as well as from the external presentations I’ve given, certainly in my own department a huge appetite. They’re heard about behaviour change; they want to know more about it. I’ve put on talks which have been standing room only. I’ve had Paul Dolan come into the department and give talks. I and a couple of my staff have given advice to various people with various policy problems. So there is a huge appetite. I think policymakers are willing, because they’ve heard about it—they know that it’s in the zeitgeist—but they want to know more about it and how they should use it appropriately. So I think the mood has changed from, say, five years ago; it’s much more in their consciousness because it’s talked about in the media and they’ve heard about it and they want to hear much more about it, so it’s not quite such a difficult job.

Q35 The Chairman: So are you saying between you that this will be easy to take forward or continue to be taken forward when the Behavioural Insight Team has gone? In a sense they will have embedded it into government?

Dr Rachel McCloy: Well, this is slightly different from the Behavioural Insight Team.

The Chairman: Yes. Sure. Sure.

Dr Rachel McCloy: I think the Behavioural Insight Team gives this a great impetus. I think once you get a network going it’s dependent upon the people who are involved and the enthusiasm there. In my time here I’ve been incredibly impressed by the enthusiasm of some people in government for this. It’s incredibly refreshing to come in and be asked “How do I use this?” when you tell people about an evidence base rather than “Will it be on
the exam?” But I think there’s enough of a groundswell that this will go on. There will be challenges to it, but I don’t think it’s either wholly dependent on myself being here or the Behavioural Insight Team being here. I think it’s becoming more of the language of government or part of that.

**The Chairman:** I’m going to move us on because we are running out of time. Lady Hilton.

**Q36 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** Thank you. You’re painting a very glowing picture of policy all being based on evidence and being properly evaluated, which has not been my experience, either here or in a previous incarnation, about how government works. Ministers tend to come in—politicians tend to come in—with bees in their bonnet about what they want to do. I wondered to what extent you can influence that and actually embed behavioural science into what they’re trying to do. Can you restrain them, pull them back, tell them that they need evidence before they do things and it has to be properly evaluated, or not?

**Karen Hancock:** Well, our professional job is to advise and warn Ministers, isn’t it? That’s what civil servants are for.

**Q37 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** Yes, but to what extent are you influential is what I’m asking?

**Karen Hancock:** Well, it varies.

**Dr David Halpern:** I recognise what you’re saying; I think it’s no great secret. We’d all aspire to a more evidence-based policy world. I do think in this particular area it’s easier than in some because it’s a toolkit in a slightly different way. So it’s of course for Ministers and the Government to say this is their objective. They wish to prioritise big society in a particular kind of way to increase philanthropy or giving and so on. And then the challenge
becomes, “Well, if that is the objective, what do we think would be the most effective way of doing it?” And you can marshal evidence to that particular objective. So it’s maybe more comfortable than in some areas where what you’re doing is challenging a fundamental presumption of an incoming Minister or Administration, where you’re saying, “Actually, no, you’re doing this completely wrong”. It doesn’t seem to me that’s the character in this particular area. We’ll see, of course; maybe that will change.

Richard Bartholomew: I don’t think things in my experience things are always as clear cut as you might imagine between what is clearly wrong and what is clearly right. And there are a range of things one can do around any broad policy objective. I don’t think it’s a sort of easy answer, “Oh, yes that’s completely against the evidence”. The evidence, if it’s good evidence, suggests that this is more likely to work than that, but I’ve never found that it’s that clear cut—“Oh, this is clearly a wrong thing to do”—because there is always a mixture of evidence. Ultimately, it is for Ministers; they’re elected, I’m not. I’m there to advise them what the right approach is to different objectives and, as Karen said, that’s my role. The science often isn’t good enough to make all decisions purely on the basis of science. That is taking the political process out of the whole exercise. There are questions of values in here and what Ministers are elected to do. I don’t think one can ignore those.

Q38 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: We sit in receipt of legislation that comes in presumably with all these objectives and plans and so on. Is this the dream of the Romantic, or is there any way in which we could persuade departments and Ministers to attach objectives and means to legislation? Then the evaluation would be clearer and the accountability of the Ministers would be frightening, but it would be much better for the process, would it not? Has such a question ever been put to you: how do I state the
objectives on the evidence base that would show us whether these objectives had or had not been achieved? Oh, your silence is eloquent.

Karen Hancock: There is the impact assessment process.

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Sure.

Karen Hancock: It has boxes on the form where they’re supposed to set out all these things.

Q39 Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: And in your opinion is that sharp enough for the transparency that I’m hinting at?

Karen Hancock: I suppose it would depend on whether Ministers thought that other people would take the impact assessment seriously.

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: Well, I don’t want to pursue this too far, but you can see why I’m asking it.

The Chairman: Lord Crickhowell you wanted to come in.

Q40 Lord Crickhowell: I’m sorry I wasn’t at the start; I was at a funeral. I’m just slightly amused by the most recent exchange. Pardon me for coming in. I’m reading Jonathan Powell’s book on Machiavellian government, which I suggest you all go away and read quickly. He has a passionate piece about how you’re all absolutely marvellous at stopping things happening or saying why they shouldn’t happen, but extremely poor about using creative ideas and getting things to happen. He has a very interesting section on it. Do you think that’s unfair?

Dr David Halpern: Jonathan launched his book at the institute, where I still retain a senior fellowship. A lot of government is often about stopping things and asking questions and probing and so on. As for his point about being creative, there’s no reason why you can’t
have that, but you can still expect and hope to see an evidence base following in its wake. You can have creativity. When benzine was identified, it came from someone having a dream—I think it was a snake biting them. That’s fine, but you still have to go and test that, whether it would actually work or not. So I do obviously recognise aspects of Jonathan’s —

**Lord Crickhowell:** I should have prefaced my remarks, as it’s my first intervention, by saying I don’t think I have any interests except I have a daughter who has submitted evidence among the 115 or 120 pieces of evidence that have been submitted.

**Richard Bartholomew:** It’s certainly not my experience that civil servants are primarily motivated to stop things happening. I think there’s tremendous energy and passion amongst my younger colleagues, and hopefully me too, in terms of new initiatives and different ways of doing things. I think that’s quite an old-fashioned view, if I may say so, of what the Civil Service is about: stopping things happening. As a researcher sometimes I have to advise caution about something if I think the evidence is not particularly sound. That may seem like a reluctance, but actually I think the reality is a much more candid culture in the Civil Service than perhaps was the traditional stereotype, if you like, of the civil servant who would think of lots of reasons for not doing something. That’s certainly not the case.

**The Chairman:** Lady O’Neill, and then we’re going to move to Lord Warner.

**Q41 Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve:** It’s delightful but, as Lord Sullivan said, very hard to reconcile with the legislation that comes from many departments to Parliament, which you can see, when you first look at it, is hypercomplex and will prevent people in the institutions from doing their jobs.

**The Chairman:** It is risk averse too, to an extent that is often beyond belief. But, anyway, I call Lord Warner.
Q42 Lord Warner: Can I bring us on to capacity? We've got all these zinging Ministers; we've got these standing room only seminars that you're conducting; but we've still got Sally Davies with her £500 million and not very much spent on evaluating the translation of all this wonderful science into practical applications. Is there sufficient expertise across government, including local government, to ensure that behaviour change interventions are properly designed, executed and evaluated and to identify where there could be room for improvements? You are winding people up to use this new approach?

Dr David Halpern: Definitely.

Q43 Lord Warner: How are you going to respond if they all take you at your word?

Dr David Halpern: It's of course a very salient question, not least, as you'll appreciate, in relation to the public health White Paper and, indeed, other health reforms. Actually it applies to most areas. So if you're pursuing a devolitional approach, actually when you look at the micro aspects of many of these approaches, is it really for central government to do them? Often not; it's other players who are out there who are going to do this. So health is probably a good example. And then it raises interesting questions about what is the role of central government, which clearly will be rehearsed in such documents going forward. But clearly, to follow your line of reasoning, one of the points would be: what do you have in place to support the evaluation of what 150 different local areas, or whatever, might be trying out in public health and then to accrue that learning? It seems, I think, a pretty straightforward argument to say that central government does have an important role to make sure that that is happening—not necessarily to micro direct; and indeed one of the questions is still about what are the outcomes that you're supporting and promoting with the incentives. I would personally be very disappointed if there were not a good story coming through in many policy areas which are handling that problem of, “Yes, let’s have a
diversity of different approaches out there, hopefully evidence-inspired if not evidence-based in the first step", but you build behind it all the time this evaluative element. In some areas—we touched on this professional question—within mainstream medicine, in order to become a consultant you probably will have done actual experiments and trials and so on. That’s not true for most professions. Even in public health it’s generally not true, and it is certainly not true in the criminal justice system and elsewhere. It will be nice to move us into that world and I’m sure that both central government but also many other intermediate institutions have a big role to play in ensuring that transition.

**Q44 Lord Warner:** You’re in the centre, but others are in different departments. How are you going to ensure that there’s enough expertise within each government department? You’re quite thin on the ground in the centre. Much of this action that you’re trying to promote, and the approach that you’re trying to promote, requires a level of expertise in the departments, doesn’t it?

**Dr David Halpern:** Well, there are two levels. As you may now, we set up the behavioural insight team with a two-year sunset clause deliberately. To me, what will count as success is not in five years’ time to have 50 people in the centre who are good at this, but to have that expertise widespread through the system, the 70,000—whatever it is we’ll have by then—Whitehall civil servants, let alone the 6 million public servants. That is, I think, our aspiration, and that’s why we’re working—it was mentioned as an aside—with the head of profession for policy-making, Robert Devereux, to do essentially a programme to try and cover most of the SCS to start off, getting them familiar with these approaches, but at the same time to keep pushing on, structurally, with how one builds the evidence base for tomorrow.
Richard Bartholomew: We certainly see that as a key role for the four main analytical professional groups. We have a very strong identity. We have training—induction training as well as a very rigorous recruitment process—to make sure people have got these skills and part of that will be the skills in understanding behavioural change. We’ve got a number of promotional activities in terms of a guide called The Magenta Book—that refers to the colour of the cover, alongside The Green Book—to look at how you would evaluate programmes. Again, behavioural change-type evaluations will be part of that, upskilling our own professional groups. As I said, we have over 1,000 researchers and there’s a large number of economists, so it’s quite an influential body, setting norms and expectations about the quality of social science one should have across departments as well as working, as David said, with the policy professions to make sure they understand how to use us and how to use the evidence.

Q45 The Chairman: But the government chief social scientist has just stepped down and we don’t know when or whether there is going to be someone new. So does that suggest that this is at the top of the government agenda?

Richard Bartholomew: The new heads of the Government Social Research Service are myself and Jenny Dibden from DWP, who has taken over that role.

The Chairman: Right.

Richard Bartholomew: But we do need strong representation of the professional groups across government, and part of our role is to be advocates for social science both inside and outside government. That’s quite a lot of my work as well.

Q46 Lord Warner: You’ve asked for a lot of training of the SCS through Robert Devereux. In a sense you have got this very honourable idea of working yourself out of a
job, so to speak, after a period of time. Probably the Government thinks it would like a few more people adopting that particular approach. But how are you going to ensure that the capacity of these departments to learn has actually taken place? At the end, when you reach your sunset time, how will we know?

**Dr David Halpern:** Right. I hope that we will have two or three areas where you will be able to say “God, actually, I can see it in practice. I can see, essentially, emblematic examples, where this is being played out”. Public health certainly would be one of them. I think there are aspects of big society where it might be nice to see the same. Other areas: I mentioned HMRC; they are already pretty sophisticated in how they do this. You can try a letter; you can try a variant—quite small changes of conditions for 10,000 people—and you can see what the difference was. So I think one of the best ways of doing this is to show people “actually this is what it looks like in action and this is why it drives better outcomes and better value for money”. I may be naïve in my optimism about that, but I think if we get those exemplars in place, that is probably more important than a formal standardised programme, with the National School, whoever it might be, to make sure our fast streamers have got those tools. Of course they should have those tools, but actually it’ll be the big exemplars that really drive it.

**The Chairman:** We’re running out of time so what I want to do is to move, if I may, to Lady O’Neill’s question, which is probably going to be the last one.

**Q47 Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve:** The question is what’s the Government’s role in changing the environment in which people make decisions in order to enable them make better choices? Most of what you’ve said to us has been about, as it were, enabling people to make better choices or encouraging them to make better choices or changing the default so that they actually make better choices. Public health is of course a crucial area there.
Behind choices there is an environment, in the widest sense of the term; there are a lot of social norms; there is a great deal that is, as it were, the fixed background. How do you think about that? Do you think about that as, so to speak, “that’s the given; that’s the context” and we have to see against that background how people can be brought to choose better, or do you say “choice isn’t everything; there are other things that have to be changed, which are not going to be a matter of altering people’s choices”?

**Dr David Halpern**: Well, there is a lot in that. There are clearly several levels to the issue, aren’t there? One is about individual moment by moment choices where you can frame it in different ways and you can of course construct the environment in different ways to effect that. An everyday example of it is driving—well-rehearsed, the lines on the road, do they affect you?—where in some sense you’re making a choice; you’re free to do it, but there are aspects of the environment which are cueing that. The next level of course is the social context. You’re essentially locked into a behavioural equilibrium, often with other people. Indeed, in my view, often the most powerful behavioural influence is just what other people are doing. So, littering is the everyday example. If there is litter on the ground you’re much more likely to drop litter yourself. So you’re kind of locked in it together. Sometimes there’s a route through that, where essentially what you want to do is make more explicit a certain behavioural norm. An example is alcohol consumption in students, where most students appear to overestimate, how much other students drink—I don’t know if you find this in your own experience in Cambridge, and they also tend to overestimate how much sex other students have and so on, and actually just simply providing that information in fact is an interesting corrective.

**Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve**: A sobering corrective.

**Dr David Halpern**: There was behind your question something else too, which goes to your earlier point. I was thinking about it—several of you asked this question about
regulation and the difference, and I think I probably wasn’t as good at answering it as I should have been. I think one of the key differences is a story about choice and agency, and therefore it’s not really about regulation or non-regulation per se, but it’s about when you do construct those choices, be it through a regulatory mechanism or some other way, the individual agency is enhanced, if possible, rather than removed. So we tend to, possibly wrongly, put regulation in the box of “we’ve taken away a choice; we’ve given you one choice only”. Of course, you can construct regulation to enable choices, but in the minds of the administration it’s clearly there. But there was one last thing—sorry, it’s partly a closing comment I suppose—which you haven’t asked us about today, which is the legitimacy of who is making those choices about choices. That’s actually a pretty big deal and a profound one, not least since many of the choices we make in the moment actually aren’t the ones that we would make on reflection. I guess it’s an argument that applies in many areas of science, but, boy, it applies in this one. You can’t stray too far from the legitimacy and the public permission of what you are doing. You already see, actually, some of the reaction against this early work, that people feel worried about it, and “is it illiberal” and “is this Orwellian?” Well, at local or national level, if you want to take these kind of approaches, particularly some of the more controversial ones like priming, you actually just have to have that public permission. You are going to have to have the discussion, the debate, where the public give you permission to do the framing around the choices. And if you don’t do that I think you can get in deep trouble. So you have to answer this agency point both at the individual level but also at a more collective, reflective level.

Karen Hancock: Can I just add an economist’s perspective to that? Once you’ve considered the social permissions and so on, changing the environment in order to help people make better decisions involves costs and benefits. So if, for example, the Government’s concerned about obesity and it responds to this idea that we live in an
obesogenic environment, where there are many factors which help the rising tide of obesity, one of the factors might be in building design, where lifts are prominently displayed and stairs are hard to find, therefore discouraging people from taking the stairs. Changing the design of a building obviously has costs and benefits, so if you want to change the environment, obviously that has more costs than making some small changes to help people make smaller decisions, but it might have bigger benefits. So the consideration of costs and benefits needs to weigh here I think as well.

**The Chairman:** Sorry, come in.

**Richard Bartholomew:** No, I think interestingly behind the questions is a slight assumption that the environment is static anyway and, of course, we know as social scientists it’s constantly changing. A lot of that change is way ahead of government or social scientists. I was thinking of the change in the acceptability of lone parenthood, for example, over the last 30 years: radically different attitudes. That wasn’t a change driven by government I don’t think. So in a sense government has to recognise that and have the good evidence and research to tell it what is happening and to actually make sure that it’s addressing those changes, rather than doing something that is completely against the grain of social attitudes and mores. We have a number of studies, as you know, that pick that up. So I think government is one player in this, but society actually is moving all the time and changing what is a reasonable expectation and what they will and won’t approve of, as David has said.

**The Chairman:** Right. Last question from Lord May.

**Q48 Lord May of Oxford:** It’s not a question, I must admit it’s two gratuitous comments, one of which, at least, I think is helpful. That excellent exposition that you just gave about how you go about forming an agreement about things you want to do, I thought was not merely excellent but it is enshrined in the—by this time 15-year-old—protocols for science
advice and policy making. And I thought that was excellent. On a more bleak note, I just
offer the gratuitous comment that the Civil Service really have a lot of good people,
conscientious people, but they’re vastly better in process than product. And my fear is that
for all we may be likely to say about “evidence-based” and “better coordination amongst
groups”, some of that is mechanical and can be done—particularly the better coordination
across—but I worry that, with the best of intentions, it will devolve into a lot of process
without anything substantial really happening and most people involved in it won’t notice
that that’s what’s happening. And that’s a rather bleak view.

Q49 The Chairman: It’s a very bleak view. Do you guys want to have a final comment on
that?

Richard Bartholomew: Yes, sure.

The Chairman: I think you should after that.

Richard Bartholomew: Under the new Government each department will have a business
plan with a very clear set of objectives. And they’re not process objectives, they’re outcome
and key-performance-indicator based.

Q50 Lord May of Oxford: Too often people don’t even understand the difference.

Richard Bartholomew: Well, yes, and so having an excellent process but no result will not
be a good performance by a department, so there’s a strong incentive there to focus on
what we are trying to achieve, rather than just how we think we’re going to achieve it.
That’s the key aim of that, to actually focus on what we actually change and do.

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood: So one of the key objectives of behaviour change for
you is to get your Ministers to say “well, this has actually got a 70% probability of
succeeding”. They never say that. Never.
The Chairman: It's virtually politically unacceptable, isn't it? Can I just say thank you to you for coming. Copies of the transcript will be sent to you for correction and if you've got any points that you wish you'd made but haven't or anything that you want to, if you like, add to what you've already said for clarification or whatever, please do write to Daisy and we will publish it alongside the transcript in due course. It's really been a very, very good session. Thank you so much to all four of you.