



# **Community Engagement and Mobilisation: Critique of a Public Dialogue Day**

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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

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On Saturday 25 February 2012 the Connected Communities Programme research funding call in Community Engagement and Mobilisation held a one day dialogue activity. The Science Communication Unit (SCU), University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol undertook a critique of the Dialogue Day assessing whether the objectives of the Dialogue Day had been met.

The Dialogue Day was organised and facilitated by an external dialogue contractor, Hopkins Van Mil, supported by the Connected Communities programme team. The Dialogue Day formed part of a two-stage grant application process and was anticipated to provide a one day space in which members of the public could deliberate on some of the issues funding applicants were seeking to address, enabling two-way engagement between the applicants and the participants.

The critique contained in this report is 'light-touch' and utilises observations, questionnaire and interviews to ascertain the key outcomes of the Dialogue Day. It has gathered data from the perspectives of participants, applicants, dialogue contractor, Connected Communities programme team and the funding panel. In addition to reflecting on a variety of aspects of the day, and its role in the funding process, final outcomes are mapped to the Guiding Principles for public dialogue on science and technology, set out by SciencewiseERC.

Overall, this report demonstrates that the public dialogue was a valuable activity which could be considered again for two-stage funding calls of this nature. This critique report summarises a number of key results from the Dialogue Day, around four key themes: context; scope; delivery; and outcomes of the day.

### Context

- The aims and objectives for the Dialogue Day were set out from the start of the process. Its purpose and objectives were clearly provided for participants by the dialogue provider and for the funding panel by the Connected Communities programme team.
- The inclusion of a public Dialogue Day within a broader Connected Communities programme was recognised as appropriate given the nature of the research area amongst participants, applicants and the funding panel.
- Some elements of openness were constrained by the issue of confidentiality. These raised practical and perceptual issues but were very well considered and accounted for by the dialogue provider.

- The timing of the Dialogue Day allowed applicants to develop initial proposals, prior to the submission of full proposals allowing engagement with the Dialogue Day. This was an appropriate timing for an activity of this type.
- The timescale, as opposed to timing, was responsible for a number of the aspects highlighted as negative factors in the day, such as the choice of venue, pressure in preparing materials and communicating with applicants.
- Communication and management of the Dialogue Day between the dialogue provider, Connected Communities programme team and evaluator was respectful, efficient and effective throughout.

### **Scope**

- The scope of the Dialogue Day permitted a range of issues to be covered, representing four applications that included a wider range of researchers and community partners in support. These were relevant to the issue of Connected Communities as set out by the Research Councils.
- The design of the Dialogue Day and the range of activities incorporated allowed applicants and participants to cover a variety of broad questions for in-depth discussion.
- Participants felt confident to express their views and the dialogue providers, Connected Communities programme team and applicants were open and honest in their participation.

### **Delivery**

- The dialogue provider offered clear information in advance of the day for participants as to what the day would entail and how they would be participating.
- The dialogue provider set out to ensure all applicants were treated fairly in their preparation and activities during the Dialogue Day.
- A variety of activities were designed and included in the Dialogue Day in order to meet the objectives. A suite of written materials were provided for participants, applicants and facilitators in order to support these activities.
- Effective facilitation and activity design allowed participants to feel they could express their views in a supportive environment and question the applicants.
- Consideration of hard to reach group requirements were included by the dialogue provider in planning, recruitment and materials for the day.
- The contracted dialogue provider was professional and competent throughout, essential to the success of the Dialogue Day.

## Outcomes

- Participants reported having appropriate information on which to base their discussions. The activities and facilitation were designed to allow applicants to present their proposals, whilst also permitting participants to develop their own attitudes and views towards those approaches.
- The Dialogue Day was received positively by participants who identified the role of such activities within a funding process.
- Applicants were each provided with transcripts from their individual discussions. As appropriate to confidential content, a broader output on the day could not be provided for applicants (or wider readers) by the dialogue provider and nor did this appear to be necessary for applicants.
- Observation notes and interviews with participating applicants suggest there were positive outcomes from their involvement, as well as some areas they recommended for improvement.
- The Connected Communities programme team and funding panel suggested there was recognition of the role and remit for such activities within engaged research on community issues.
- The outcomes of the Dialogue Day were used to inform applicants and the funding panel rather than determine their decision.

Reflective of the innovative, tentative and experimental nature of the dialogue activities inclusion within a funding process, the critique also highlights a series of 20 key **Learning Points** for continued reflection, as well as a series of recommendations. These are detailed within [Section Five](#) of this report and include a number of practical considerations for organisations and funding bodies considering the inclusion of such activities within a funding application process.

## I. Introduction

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The following document reports on a public dialogue activity organised as part of the Connected Communities Programme research funding call in Community Engagement and Mobilisation. The Dialogue Day occurred on Saturday 25 February 2012, with the critique reported here occurring between January to August 2012.

The Science Communication Unit (SCU), University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol undertook a critique of the Dialogue Day, with the main aim being to assess whether the objectives of the public dialogue had been met, namely:

The main objectives of the dialogue are:

- To enable grant applicants to engage with the public in a formalised setting around their proposed research topic
- To enable the public to deliberate on the issues and challenges raised by the grant applicants
- To inform, where appropriate, further development of full proposals, in light of outcomes of the dialogue

This report presents;

- [Background](#)
- [Critique Approach](#)
- [Critique Findings](#)
- [Summary, Learning Points and Recommendations](#)

## 2. Background

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Connected Communities is a cross-council Research Programme led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The overall aim of the programme is to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health and wellbeing by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities (AHRC, 2012)<sup>1</sup>.

The ESRC in funding partnership with AHRC, working together under the Connected Communities Programme, invited outline proposals for two large research grants in 2011. Each grant could be costed up to £2.4 million in the area of community engagement and mobilisation.

The research call was a two stage process. Firstly, the submission of an outline proposal, from which shortlisted applicants would then, secondly, be invited to submit a full proposal. All applicants invited to submit a full proposal were asked to participate in a one day public dialogue activity prior to the deadline for the full proposal. This was designed to enable the dialogue to take place prior to the submission of the full research proposal, and had the potential to inform the views and proposals of the applicants.

The public dialogue was anticipated to provide a one day space in which members of the public could deliberate on some of the issues applicants were seeking to address, enabling two-way engagement between the applicants and the participants. The public dialogue was designed to take place over one day, on a pre-planned date (Saturday 25 February 2012) at a venue in London. Covering topics the shortlisted applicants had proposed, it was envisioned that the day would consist of a series of round table discussions, including short presentations by each of the applicants, followed by facilitated discussion. The planning, organisation and facilitation of the public Dialogue Day was awarded to a public dialogue contractor, Hopkins Van Mil in December 2011.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the main objectives of the dialogue detailed on page seven, its management and results were planned to adhere to the Guiding Principles for public dialogue on science and technology, set out by SciencewiseERC.<sup>3</sup> A summary of key dates and outcomes is provided in Figure One. Details of the Dialogue Day programme can be found in [Appendix One](#).

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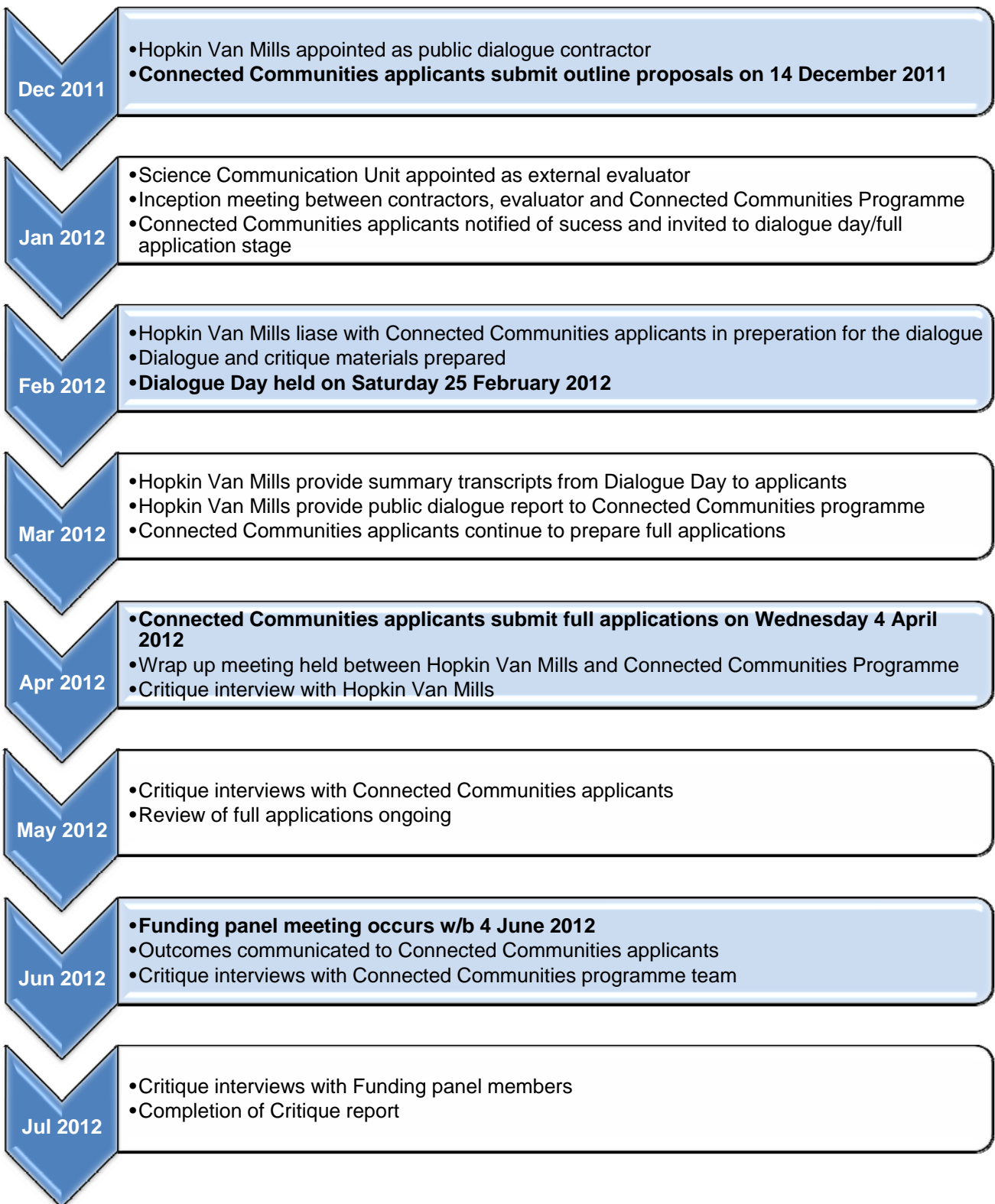
<sup>1</sup> Further information about Connected Communities can be found at:  
<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Further information on the SciencewiseERC Guiding Principles for Public Dialogue can be found at:  
<http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>



Figure I: Key dates and outcomes



### 3. Critique approach

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The following section outlines the key methods used to generate data for this critique. It was intended from the outset that the critique would be 'light-touch'; however a variety of techniques were included in order to capture the experiences across the range of participants involved in the dialogue process.

#### 3.1 *Observation of the Dialogue Day*

Observation of the Dialogue Day supported and contextualised data collated, as well as allowing for observation of how the day enabled applicants to engage with the public and for the public to deliberate on the issues and challenges.

The main external evaluator (Clare Wilkinson) was present at the Dialogue Day on the 25 February 2012, recording informal observations. The observation set out to follow the design of the day as specified by Hopkins Van Mil, to ensure good coverage across the activities. Observations occurred at three of the four 'Research Stations' during small group discussion, at two of the four Research Stations during the 'Roving Ideas Storms' and during plenary activities. Whilst the observer was present during breaks and before and after the dialogue, these did not form part of the observation period.

Participants received information on the observation in advance and were invited to contact the researcher should they prefer not to be observed. A brief verbal overview was also given by the evaluator for participants at the outset of the day, inviting any questions. However, no participants expressed any concerns or queries to the researcher beyond friendly questions about the evaluator's role. The evaluator introduced herself to each researcher and facilitator, outlining her role in the day and minimising any distraction her presence might cause.

Detailed notes were taken during the observation, and these were supplemented by additional notes taken by the observer directly after the event, as well as a diagram of the venue provided in [Appendix Two](#). The notes were analysed for key points, and these are reflected in the critique findings section.

#### 3.2 *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were provided for completion at the end of the Dialogue Day activity. These were distributed for community participants to complete and enabled participants to consider their opportunities for engagement and deliberation. This included questions covering:

- Their demographic profile and community interests

- Their expectations prior to the dialogue event and any involvement in similar activities before
- Their involvement in the dialogue event (eg how valued and empowered they felt to state their opinions)
- How much they valued involvement and any recommendations they would make for similar activities in future

Whilst questionnaires have their limitations, they are effective at events of this type in providing honest, quick and detailed responses from participants who may not reply to a request for follow up at a later date. The questionnaire was completed by 30 participants, a completion rate of 88 per cent and analysed using SPSS. Table I provides details of the demographics for those completing the questionnaire, and demonstrates that it was broadly representative of those attending the day.

### *3.3 Interviews*

The final stage of the project involved a series of short telephone interviews, with a member of staff from Hopkins Van Mil, the lead applicants from two of the Connected Communities applications, two staff members from the Connected Communities programme team and two members of the funding panel.

A telephone interview occurred with a member of staff from Hopkins Van Mil shortly after the Dialogue Day (April 2012), covering preparation, the Dialogue Day, and reflection since the activity. The Connected Communities applicants participated in short interviews, following completion of the full proposal but prior to receipt of any funding decision (Mid-April 2012). Interviews were kept brief, to reflect interviewees expected lack of time, and the external nature of the critique was stressed in order that applicants were not concerned regarding any influence on the funding decision. The interviews with applicants covered key questions such as:

- Their expectations prior to the dialogue event and any involvement in similar activities before
- Their involvement and experience at the dialogue event
- How helpful the dialogue event was in designing their full proposal

Table 1: Demographics of participant respondents

Participant Demographics	Critique Data	Connected Communities Sampling Aims
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	13	At least 20
Female	17	At least 20
<b>BME</b>		
White British	18	At least 7 (reflecting current national average estimates of 16% of population) but more important that we have a range of ethnic groups throughout the sample
White Irish	2	
White Other	1	
Caribbean	1	
Pakistani	1	
Any Other Asian Background	1	
African	2	
Any Other Black Background	1	
Any Other Ethnic Group*	1	
<b>Age</b>		
18-39	14	At least 13
40-59	10	At least 14
60-75	6	At least 13
<b>Social Class</b>		
ABC1	21	At least 20
C2DE	8	At least 20
<b>Community Activists</b>		
(Active/Very Active)	14	No more than 20 activists

\* Other categories were provided but were not selected by participants.

Interviews with Research Council staff working within the Connected Communities programme team and selected members of the funding panel also took place and covered key questions such as:

- Views on the Dialogue Day
- Their use of any similar materials in making prior funding decisions
- How helpful the dialogue report was in informing the discussion of the funding panel
- Recommendations and suggestions as to how such dialogue events can be used again in future funding

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate in this context as they allowed for a fuller discussion of elements related to the experience, process and outcomes of the dialogue activity. The interviews were transcribed and analysed for key themes related to the critique aims. The critique process had ethical approval from UWE, Bristol.

## 4. Critique findings

The following results have been broken down into the three key aims of the Dialogue Day, and within this have been themed around key issues. It should be recognised however that many of these themes contain issues of connection and overlap.

### **4.1 Enabling grant applicants to engage with the public in a formalised setting around their proposed research topic**

#### *4.1.1 Recruitment of public participants*

One of the initial key challenges for the public dialogue contractor was the recruitment of public participants for the Dialogue Day. Hopkins Van Mil were appointed in December 2011, which left them with a short period of time to recruit the required public participants, a process made easier due to the careful planning that they had already undertaken during the tender process:

*We'd agreed that it should not be a nationally representative spread... we just didn't feel that was possible in the timescale...the focus should be on making sure we had rural and urban representation and hopefully a balance between those groups...Recruitment can take a very long time and then we had a vetting process...We didn't have time to go back, which you'd normally do in a recruitment process...and question that a bit more. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

Hopkins Van Mil and the Connected Communities programme team were satisfied with the participants recruited over the short time period. Care was taken via a vetting questionnaire to recruit variation in age, social class, ethnicity, and community activism, meeting the criteria agreed upon and including telephone interviews for those that may have found a self-completion form challenging. However, from Hopkins Van Mil perspective there were aspects that could have been perfected with the benefit of more time, including a more careful examination of the urban/rural criteria amongst participants and how that was distinguished. The limited timescale of this process was commented on by the Connected Communities programme team, who highlighted that Hopkins Van Mil expertise in this area, their contacts and knowledge was crucial to the success of the day within the timeframe:

*The timetable was very tight and that made the job for them [Hopkins Van Mil] very difficult, particularly in terms of recruiting participants. We have learnt for the future that we need to allow more time in the timetable to ensure that there is enough time to get relevant people there and to have as much sort of coverage and spread of different types of people from different backgrounds as we can. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 1*

Within the budget Hopkins Van Mil also provided an incentive for participant attendance. This was a possible issue of contention and had been discussed in advance of the day with the Connected Communities programme team regarding the potential that it may lead to a reduced level of participation amongst those that attended. However, Hopkins Van Mil were clear that it did not pose an issue on the day:

*I was worried about that [offering an incentive] for about five minutes and then I thought, no, these people really have things to say and they want to say them and yes we're paying them for their time, not nearly enough for their time but something and I felt that was the right thing to do. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

The incentive was provided for participants at the end of the day, and did not appear to impact on engagement amongst participants.

#### *4.1.2 Information provision on the Dialogue Day and research topic*

Both the quantity and potential complexity of materials to be discussed over the Dialogue Day required a level of information provision in advance for participants and facilitators. In terms of the information provided in advance, participants were sent a variety of information, including a 'Help Point' document outlining some background on the day, useful points to remember and some aspects for participants to think about in advance, and a confidential 'Think Piece' providing a brief overview of each of the applicants outline proposals. A 'Discussion Guide' assisted the facilitators to manage the day, and was created with bespoke elements relevant to each team of applicants that was present<sup>4</sup>. Each of these documents was prepared and distributed by Hopkins Van Mil, in conjunction with the participating applicants and staff from the Connected Communities programme team.

In terms of how the Dialogue Day was organised from a participant perspective, there was generally high levels of satisfaction expressed in the questionnaire data. Ninety-three per cent (n=28) of participants felt they had about the right amount of information in advance of the Dialogue Day on its purpose and aims, though one participant highlighted it would have been useful to have this information earlier.

Despite the materials being generally well received from a participant perspective, creating this documentation was a key stage in preparing for the Dialogue Day and in itself had challenges. In particular Hopkins Van Mil and the Connected Communities programme team were conscious of language issues, applicants being highly familiar with the technical terminology could express issues differently to how a community member might typically discuss them. As such Hopkins

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<sup>4</sup> Within the framework of the day designed by Hopkins Van Mil, applicants were able to design their discussions to focus on aspects and points most relevant to their individual proposals. This meant that the questions and discussions held between each team of applicants and group of participants varied.

Van Mil worked with the applicants to create the documentation for the day. Hopkins Van Mil discussed how this process involved a lot of back and forth to the applicants, before taking a decision to trust their own judgement on the documents, supported by Connected Communities programme team:

*The Discussion Guide quite straightforward [to prepare], the Think Pieces less so and it was about language again, if you've been working for five years on a project and you're very embedded in it your language does become, you know either researcher speak or you know community jargon... And I just wanted to avoid both those things...in the end I had to just go with it. What was going to be simplest for the communities to understand, and I told them [applicants] that's what I was going to do because there was a time limit, we were running very tightly to the wire and it was a week before the session. I needed to get the stuff out to people.*  
Hopkins Van Mil interviewee

From the perspective of the Connected Communities programme team this liaison between the applicants and Hopkins Van Mil had worked adequately, and they were in full support of the dialogue providers making choices and decisions on language use based on participant need. At the point of our interviews with applicants they appeared fairly appeased by these preparations:

*We had to provide information, and although the time schedule was quite compressed, nevertheless we had plenty of time. I think they [Hopkins Van Mil] were very supportive, facilitative and also, being academics sometimes you kind of appear picky so, when I corrected some of their English they took that well (laughs)... If things are done in a hurry then I hope people take that in the right spirit.* Applicant interviewee 1

Whilst then the materials provided in advance to and during the day appeared useful and appropriate, language was contentious in regards to a different aspect of the day. In planning the activities Hopkins Van Mil proposed the use of a 'Marketplace' style discussion where by participants would have an opportunity to drop in on each of the applicants across the day, however as the following quotes illustrate this terminology was less popular with applicants:

*[We] talked about a souk in the marketplace... people go to visit the market, you know sample some of the fruit and then move off... but one of the research teams, very early on said they...very strongly hated the idea of being in a marketplace and I thought okay let's not do that anymore.* Hopkins Van Mil interviewee

*I commented on the fact that [Hopkins Van Mil] called these sessions where the groups went round the different teams, the marketplace, and I really went back and said 'this is entirely inappropriate, calling it the marketplace' and they did change that.* Applicant interviewee 2

Whilst the concept of participants visiting different applicants remained, the terminology surrounding this changed to satisfy applicants concerns. Unfortunately however for the researcher quoted above, the concept of the marketplace left an impression of a competitive



funding environment, as we will return to later, and a concern that Hopkins Van Mil were less familiar with community-based contexts than was perhaps the case.

Despite some of these issues in advance, participants were largely satisfied by the amount of information covered on the day, with only ten per cent (n=3) of participants requesting more information be included and a further two participants asking for less information to be covered.

#### 4.1.3 The setting

The Dialogue Day was held at Toynbee Hall, London<sup>5</sup>. The London location was designated from the outset, but the venue itself was something Hopkins Van Mil had to promptly secure once they were awarded the contract. Toynbee Hall offered a variety of benefits; it fitted the budget, had an extensive history of community engagement, was well located for public transport, and was appropriately comfortable and informal for this type of activity. However from the outset it was clear that there were not enough separate spaces and a joint decision was made between Hopkins Van Mil and the Connected Communities programme team that it was a suitable option given the time constraints<sup>6</sup>.

Hopkins Van Mil spoke with the applicants in advance of the day regarding the venue, and whilst attempting to describe in detail the facility, it was problematic at times to assist the applicants to visualise the space. One research group shared some specific concerns with Hopkins Van Mil about the room that they would be placed in and what visual materials they could display, however this was not problematic on the day and they appeared largely comfortable in their space. A different research group similarly commented on this process, initially commenting on the request not to use powerpoint:

*I took it that the Hopkins Van Mil people were more used to running these events than I was...if their view was that powerpoint in hands of academics can be not the best means of communicating then I'm happy to be guided by them. So it then left to us to think, how can we get things across? So we still wanted to use some visual things. The facilities weren't great for putting the materials on the wall... in the end, it was fine, we knew in advance what to do and what to expect...If it's the same for everybody then I don't think you can have any complaints about that. Applicant interviewee 1*

Here on reflection the researcher had felt supported and fairly treated in their preparations, appreciating the opportunity to think about those that they were communicating with and to

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that originally it was expected that three proposals would be shortlisted, the need for a fourth space was therefore only recognised in close proximity to the Dialogue Day and at a point when an alternative venue could not be sourced.

design an approach, including an element of visual appeal that worked for participants. However it is notable that they refer to it being 'the same for everybody', in preparing for the day, making sure all applicants had the same understandings and opportunities was important. Both of the applicants that we were able to interview had not participated in an event like the Dialogue Day before. Despite being very experienced in terms of community issues, they were facing uncertainties in predicting how the day would pan out:

*We set up a sort of mock version of it, where we had a whole lot of people from the faculty who had been interested in the project, who came along and we did our presentation to them and they gave us a lot of hard questions (laughs)... This was the best we could do in terms of trying to mimic what it was going to be like....after that we went away and we re-wrote it more or less. Applicant interviewee 2*

During the observations it was noted that there appeared to be both a variety of participation styles and preparation levels amongst the differing applicant groups, and whilst powerpoint was discouraged some applicants had brought along more traditional elements of content as the observation notes recorded:

The applicants introduced this aspect of the discussion in a relaxed and humorous way, saying that they have 'a little act'. They appear to have prepared in advance, and seem quite relaxed to be presenting in a more informal way. The applicants were supported with a variety of visual aids including props and visual images which they passed around the group for individuals to look at. They had planned these to relate to key aspects of their project. Participants appeared engaged throughout this segment, to be listening and carefully examining materials. Observation notes

The applicants have all taken seats within the participants and spread out. They have placed a number of visual aids in the room. Some appear to be a large printed powerpoint slide (for instance containing bullet points, graphs and images). As the discussion continues the applicants appear to be using them more as a memory prompt for themselves than for participants who cannot always see them or clearly read them due to size. Observation notes

Hopkins Van Mil had to reassure applicants about the content, materials and venue for the day in advance and applicants were also warned that they could be sharing a large space with a different group. On the Dialogue Day reactions to the venue, which included two separate rooms and one shared space, were mixed amongst the applicants as Hopkins Van Mil explained:

*[The applicants] reaction when they saw the space was really, really bad. I felt that was a particular low point and I was very sorry that it happened at the beginning of the day...but I think once the barriers [physical boards erected to separate the shared space] were up and the other team complained about the noise from that team, that was quite nice actually because it*

was sort of then 'oh well, ok you know they've got a challenge too'. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee

The two applicant groups sharing one space both complained about the situation, as the interviewee above expresses in some senses this at least built up a sense of mutuality amongst these two separate research teams on the day, applicant 2 expands on this point:

*I'd been led to understand that each group would be in a separate room because there were issues of confidentiality between the groups... I turned up to discover that our group and another were in the same hall-like-room. I kicked up a fuss, the best they could do was to put the screens... there were times when it was very difficult to hear actually, you could not help but hearing what was happening in the other group... The confidentiality bit was less important, more important was the fact that it just made it very difficult to have discussions with the group... as people got very excited and interested, which was exactly what you wanted them to do, we had to say well 'keep the noise down' (laughs). Applicant interviewee 2*

A resolution was sought by screening the two areas, though there continued to be occasional issues of noise and initial concerns over implications for confidentiality subsided as it made listening and participation more difficult for those working in that room. As might have been expected then there were some criticisms of the venue from participant perspectives:

*The venue could've been better, not always possible to hear properly because of relatively cramped space. Participant 17*

*Although the Dialogue Day was generally well organised and run, Toynbee Hall was not a suitable venue. Having more than one small group in one room was distracting during discussion times. Smaller rooms with just one group are needed for confidential discussion. Participant 9*

*Whilst the facility used was okay there should have been separate meeting rooms for all groups in order for the presenters and participants to be able to hear and share each other without potential interruptions from other groups. Participant 3*

Finally, an unusual aspect within this small setting was the presence of observers, as Hopkins Van Mil commented:

*I suppose there were a large number of observers, for us a large number of observers, because in some community groups the people who might become observers often leave the room. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

On the day, in addition to the evaluator, four members of the Connected Communities programme team were present, and each shadowed a group<sup>7</sup>. This was not something which participants commented on as problematic, though it was noted during the observation that participants were often keen to try and involve observers within discussions and it may have had influences on the applicants involved, a point returned to later.

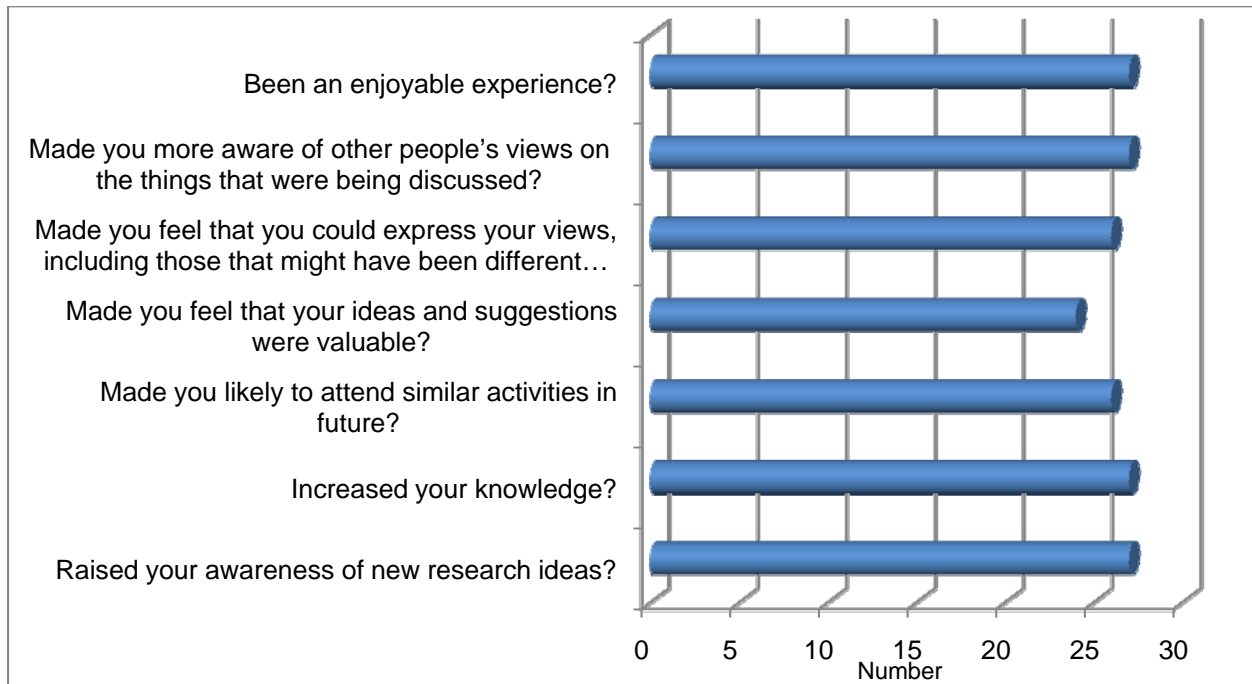
#### 4.1.4 Engagement

Although there were some areas which may have better met a small number of participants needs, it was clear that many took something away from the day. Importantly 90 per cent (n=27) enjoyed the day, increased their knowledge and had found out more about new research ideas, as illustrated in Figure 2.

*I have never experienced anything like this before but found it thoroughly enjoyable and productive. Participant 28*

*This has been interesting and beneficial in opening my mind to new ideas and processes and very enjoyable. Participant 25*

Figure 2: Participant engagement over Dialogue Day



<sup>7</sup> The Connected Communities programme staff were present at the Dialogue Day as this was a relatively new activity for the Research Councils involved. Their observations were for their own learning purposes, rather than judgement on participant/researcher involvement and this was highlighted both in the materials in advance and at the outset of the Dialogue Day.

It was also clear that good numbers of participants felt they were in a supportive and constructive environment. Eighty per cent (n=24) felt their ideas and suggestions were recognised as valuable, and 87 per cent (n=26) felt they could express their views, including those that might be different to the researchers. As well, 87 per cent (n=26) said that based on their experience of the day they would be likely to attend similar events in the future. Applicants and the Connected Communities team shared similarly positive views to the sense of engagement expressed by participants:

*It was useful that the tone of the session or sessions, the tone of the sessions was one in which everyone felt able to speak. I think the facilitators did make sure that everyone had their chance to say, although it was quite time compressed. Applicant interviewee 1*

*Its general set up, atmosphere and the quality of the facilitation produced a very good and productive conversation... Everyone seemed to understand that they were there in order for their voice to be heard... [A concern] might have been that the research teams would dominate the conversations but that didn't happen, partially due to the sort of skilled facilitation and setting up the ground rules in advance. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 2*

In summary, grant applicants were engaged with a range of public participants during the Dialogue Day. The structured and formalised setting of the day allowed for a good amount of content on the proposed research topic to be discussed, despite many of the problematic and difficult issues encountered a result of the limited time available within the Dialogue Day planning process.

## **4.2 Enabling the public to deliberate on the issues and challenges raised by the grant applicants**

### *4.2.1 Confidentiality of grant applicants*

The inclusion of the Dialogue Day within the funding process added to some relatively unusual challenges for participants, applicants and those designing the day. From the outset it was made clear to all participants that the contents of any of the applicants proposals would remain confidential, that any points raised in one group could not be raised in another, and it was understandably an aspect applicants were keen to be reassured about:

*We had some concerns about the confidentiality issue, because it was on the twenty-fifth February and the applications had to be in on the fourth of April. We felt we might put into the hearing of the competing bidders, some of the things we felt were particularly good ideas... We*

*were very pleased when they emphasised the importance to the members of the public who were attending the day treating each presentation as confidential. To this day, the only things we know about the other bids... is the people that were at the day because we started off the day by saying who we were...they handled that professionally...the confidentiality of the material was handled well. Applicant interviewee 1*

Confidentiality was a point of concern for applicants and created practical challenges for Hopkins Van Mil. It also had perceptual challenges, envisioning community engagement without the typical sense of openness, though in practice it proved to be less of an issue than anticipated:

*Community engagement is, in best practice terms, open and transparent for everyone. Everyone involved, it's a level playing field, everyone knows why they're there, what they're talking about and what the outcomes are supposed to be and in this case we couldn't do that...I think I was finding that really an overwhelming barrier to some things but actually it isn't. I realised there are pros and cons to the confidentiality business and it was essential... but I think there were bits around the edges of confidentiality which would have been better to be open and transparent, like building trust with the research teams a bit more thoroughly. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

Hopkins Van Mil had in part been attracted to participate in the project in order to 'model best practice in facilitation' and so whilst aware of the necessity for confidentiality it also presented additional layers of complexity. The opportunity to build trust and work with the applicants is something Hopkins Van Mil strongly expressed that they would have liked to have had the time and opportunity to better construct. This was an aspect also commented on from a researcher perspective:

*I don't think any of us liked the way this was all set up as being competitive...as academics we generally don't like this sort of competition thing. We feel that the whole nature of academia is that we should be working together and collaboration is an important part of it. So the way the Dialogue Day was set up with the four groups there, just reinforced that sort of competitiveness...we weren't really able to have any dialogue with the other teams there. Applicant interviewee 2*

For this applicant drawing the applicants to a central location had not been as effective as the potential to hold discreet, local events in a less competitive setting without the problematic elements of confidentiality. Despite some of the challenging elements of confidentiality in advance of the day it was noticeable that this was something both the applicants and participants became strongly committed to:

*I found peer review was happening throughout, in my group there was someone who's name I've forgotten, he kept trying to refer back to other groups and the whole group would say 'Oh*

*no don't do that!' it became quite funny and rather nice and the peer sort of support was good. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

Though on reflection and during the running of the day the issue of confidentiality decreased in its significance, it did take up a considerable amount of time in preparation. Hopkins Van Mil fielded a variety of requests from applicants around protecting confidentiality, room layouts, the display of visual materials that were compounded and more extensive due to the confidentiality issue.

#### 4.2.2 Deliberation activities

In striving to allow participants to deliberate and discuss each research team's ideas, a busy and varied day was planned for them by Hopkins Van Mil:

*The more people that could interact with each research team the better... we allowed people to have time with three of the research teams and then the roving ideas storm, quick fire brainstorming point was partly because we felt really after three, that is probably the tolerance levels of any reasonable person and that we wanted to end the day on a high and something quite buzzy and fresh...It was a challenge to get that kind of interaction. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

There were generally high levels of satisfaction on participant's parts with the types of activities included within the day. Seventy-seven per cent (n=23) of participants felt there was about the right amount of formal presenting from researchers, and whilst the remaining seven participants felt there could be more formal presentations there was also demand for continuation of the discussion opportunities. Sixty per cent (n=18) felt there was about the right amount of extended discussions with other participants, with the remaining 40 per cent (n=12) requesting more. The Roving Ideas Storm, quick fire small discussions, also proved popular, with 27 per cent (n=8) stating there could have been more of these. Overall 80 per cent (n=24) of participants thought the format (eg timings, types of activities etc.) was suitable for this type of event. Participants were given the opportunity to add open comments, and this drew out occasional criticism of facilitation:

*I was disappointed by the poor quality of the facilitation... I'd very much like to know how facilitators were selected. I only stayed out of respect for the other participants and because I really valued hearing what they had to say. Participant 2*

Whilst one or two participants were rather critical of the facilitation, such comments were in the minority. Other participants were complimentary, and perhaps recognised the challenges of facilitating groups which in some cases included active and experienced facilitators:

*Some participants seemed to come with really negative feelings towards facilitators. They couldn't do anything right. Participant 24*

*I thought that our facilitator was fantastic and straight to the point. Participant 7*

*Our group benefited from an excellent facilitator and people manager. Participant 8*

In addition to the participants with facilitation experience, many of the applicants themselves would have been familiar with such roles. Within the observation it was noted that:

There appear to be some tensions between applicants facilitating the agenda or allowing the facilitators to take control. Some applicants being very respectful of the facilitator and asking for permission to pick up on points, others straying away from the discussion guide when participants raise points of interest to them. Over the course of the day both applicants and facilitators appear to become more comfortable with each other around these aspects... Facilitators have a lot to keep up with, their participants, researchers, different ideas, writing down notes and different structures in each discussion. Experienced facilitators are absolutely essential. Observation notes

The applicants we spoke with after the day were also generally complimentary regarding the facilitation process, as were the Connected Communities programme team, and the sequencing of activities which allowed for natural transitioning points:

*All the facilitators were very accommodating, so if there was a point where we felt we might clarify an issue, then we were allowed to do that. I think we had a concern that we might have our time for our presentation and then might be in listening mode for the rest of the time, but actually we were able to participate. So the fact that they had experienced facilitators alleviated any fears we had on that point... we have all been at community kind of context meetings where there is a strong agenda and then things can go well or can go awfully. Applicant interviewee 1*

*All the facilitators had really good skills in facilitating... There were a lot of questions...and due to timing I think it would have been very difficult to get through all of those... by the end of the day all of the questions had been covered but not necessarily by every group... That was a very good way of structuring it...the researchers did have information to take back on all the different issues they wanted to cover. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 1*

Applicant interviewee 1 continued to discuss the tight timings during the activities, whereby each applicants discussions were broken into different aspects. They highlighted that this did make some discussions rushed, but that facilitators responded to the group, continuing a discussion when it had reached a point of momentum. At the time this had led to some concern on the part of the researcher that views across different groups would not be comparable, a view alleviated by the end of the process when a more holistic perspective could



be taken. On reflection the researcher suggested they would have introduced more interactivity into their discussions and focused less on demonstrating the breadth of activities they planned to cover if funded: 'we didn't want to speak about only a small part of what we were doing on the grounds that then people might say, gosh I could spend 2.4 million pounds much better than that.' It was clear that for all of the applicants there was a level of uncertainty prior to the day as to what their individual discussions might involve, and there was also the difficulty of presenting their plans for the applications, or their experience and past research in an academic area, as noted during the observations:

This research team are referring back a lot to past research that they have done and been involved with, feels more presentational in style. Unclear if participants are able to distinguish between the work they have previously carried out and their proposals for this funding. Observation notes

The negative perception amongst a small number of individuals towards certain facilitators may also have been exacerbated by groups remaining with a single facilitator over the duration of the day, as Hopkins Van Mil discussed this had positives and negatives:

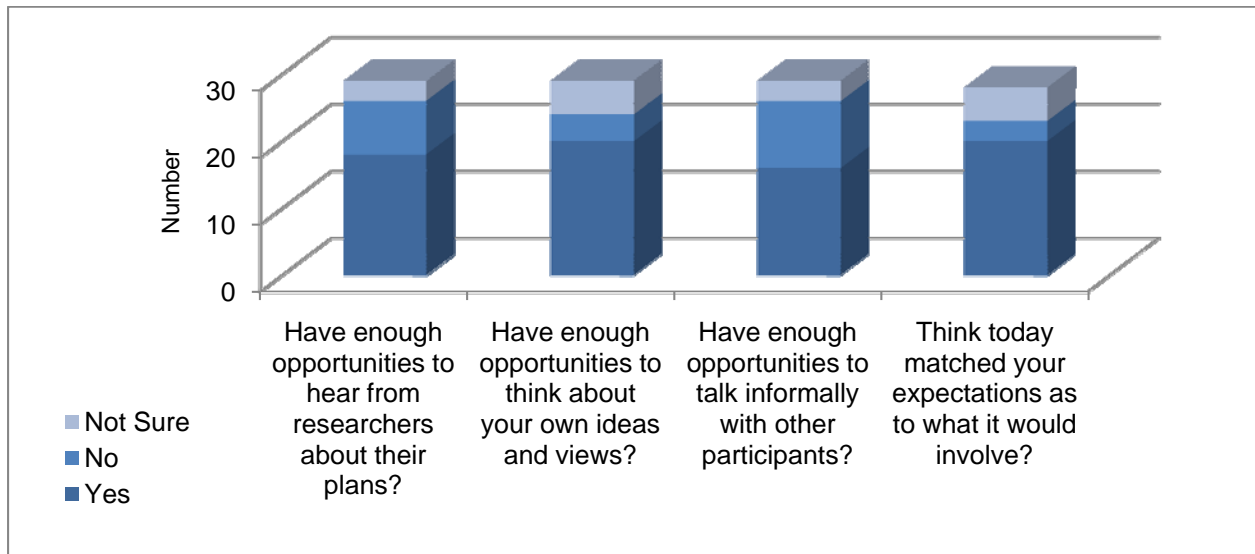
*[Participants] all went in with very open minds, were very up for the discussion. I found the discussions quite moving, I was worried about a level of trust being built up and that's why we decided to keep the facilitators with the same group all day rather than keeping the facilitator with the research teams, now that has pros and cons and it could be that maybe we didn't get the level of the trust with research teams we might have done but I think for the community it was really the right thing to do...The wonderful stories that came out of that day. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

Within the observation notes the sense of cohesion developing amongst groups was also noted:

The group has started to facilitate each other, for example participants highlighting to the facilitator other participants that wish to speak...The participants seem very bonded at this stage (early afternoon), to the extent that one might assume they knew each other prior to the day, and they also appear to have built a good rapport with the facilitator. Observation notes

Applicant 1 highlighted that the rapport building up between facilitators and their participant groups over the day was clear to see. Participants were asked to reflect on how they spent their time over the course of the day and here again there were broad levels of satisfaction expressed. Participants were generally satisfied with the opportunities they had to think about their own ideas and views, and it largely matched expectations as demonstrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Participant view on activities



Though a number of participants highlighted that they had very few expectations and therefore these had been greatly exceeded. Twenty-seven per cent (n=8) of participants would have liked to have heard more from researchers on their plans. However there were a small number of open comments regarding the researchers' roles:

*Research teams weren't very patient. Happy to talk a lot but then complained they were running out of time – maybe expectation management – [be more] realistic. Participant 24*

*Format was about right and timings were adequate. Felt in some instances that researchers were allowed to potentially influence views. Participant 3*

Whilst only a small numbers of comments were made about the applicants directly the variation in interactions amongst applicant teams and participants was noted during the observations on the day. Some applicants were very relaxed in their discussions, others appeared to be more in control of the agendas, even including reference to particular academic literature in support of comments they were making:

Participants now move to the next activity with the facilitator posing a question from the discussion guide. An applicant interjects and says you can say a particular response. Facilitator says 'let's not pre-empt'. Various comments that participants now make start to prompt two-way discussion between the participants and researchers. The applicants at times appear to give strong confirmation of views in this group with comments along the lines of 'that's exactly right'. Observation notes

The lead researcher introduces their proposal, with a relaxed, friendly, although quite didactic style, occasionally dropping in more technical terms and jargon. The group however are quick to pick up on this and ask for clarification...All participants appear to

be making the effort to listen though some occasionally look less engaged, for instance when visual material is referred to that is located behind them...a participant asks quite a specific question about the research methodology, the researcher responds with 'that's a good question' and then this opens out to numerous questions being posed. The applicants respond to these questions very openly. Observation notes

Additionally, 33 per cent (n=10) would have liked more opportunities to talk informally with other participants. Though there were a number of breaks throughout the day, when participants could chat with each other, applicants, the Connected Communities programme team and the evaluator, it was a busy day with a good deal of activities planned in order for each participant to hear about each research idea, and to prevent the need to return for a second day. Careful facilitation and planning assisted in keeping these activities on track:

*I was worried...the participants would just get lost in the process. But they sort of didn't they stayed with their group, they knew what they were doing and I was very pleased that so many people stayed on [for the full day]... I thought people might just say 'I've had enough'. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

*I think it was very good that the participants were given the opportunity to hear about and feedback on all the projects. I think it would have been a shame if they only heard from about one or two of the four... three of them in detail and one in a bit of a quick-fire way... if we tried to cover all four in detail it would have been far too much for the participants. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 1*

From the Connected Communities programme team perspective the busy and at times tiring day was essential in allowing all participants an opportunity to hear from each applicant team. However, one potentially negative implication of this was that it allowed for little room on the participants part to shape the agenda.

#### 4.2.3 Role of grant applicants

Applicants had been informed in writing of the expectation of the Dialogue Day since the outset of the process of applying for funding. However in preparing for the day it was noted by Hopkins Van Mil that some teams were less aware of the finer details of the activity and this was also apparent in some of the comments made by applicants:

*I don't think we were very clear to what it [the Dialogue Day] was, we initially thought it was, more like sort of an interview, but anyway, we were aware we had to do some event. Applicant interviewee 2*

Hopkins Van Mil contacted all of the lead applicants to participate in a preparatory interview with them, shortly after applicants had been informed of their progress to the full application stage:

*I was incredibly keen that we spent time with the research teams and we suggested in our proposal you could actually have a meeting of the research teams, where you didn't share methodologies but as a group you thought through what it was you wanted to achieve from the Dialogue Day, they met each other and I really felt that would have added to the process... Clearly we needed the separate conversation with them about the methodology they were using... but I think that that open dialogue at that point with the research teams would have really, really been helpful. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

Hopkins Van Mil continued that it became obvious after the first telephone call that applicants were less clear on the day and had apprehensions:

*It became very clear that they absolutely were not clear what the Dialogue Day was for, how it would run, they knew nothing really only that we were having it... I mean there was enormous fear around this, which was unsurprising it's a pilot programme... It raised immediately a tension between us as professional facilitators and them as research teams, who know their work. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

The apprehension of the applicants involved was compounded by issues over devising appropriate materials to summarise the research as previously discussed. The tight timeframe meant Hopkins Van Mil and the applicants had to communicate effectively and efficiently, whilst also traversing the uncertainties of the day. The applicants involved in interviews commented that responses from both Hopkins Van Mil and the Connected Communities programme team over this period of time were responsive, quick and useful. Hopkins Van Mil was highlighted as being professional and flexible, in particular when working under time pressure. The Connected Communities programme team also reflected on the initial communications with applicants about their role in the Dialogue Day:

*I think that on reflection we probably needed to have more contact with them [researchers] because I think many of the researchers didn't quite understand what the purpose of the day was, even on the day itself, and a couple of people did say to me on the morning 'I still don't understand why we have to do this'. I think it may have been better if we had brought them all together for a meeting or the Research Councils had directly had more communication with them rather than just handing them written information; that we had talked it through with them and made it clear exactly why we were doing this and why we thought it was important. Connected Communities programme team interviewee I*

*I think that everyone concerned understood that this was something in the nature of an experimental process to the [Research Councils]... We made it very clear from the outset, that people were expected to participate in the dialogue and we expected that to add value to their*

*bids, just in terms of depth and richness and that sort of thing. We weren't very specifically going to make any sort of requirement that they changed their plans as a result. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 2*

The Dialogue Day was a learning process not only for the applicants, who were new to the activity, but also for the Research Council team involved, and as such more information could now be available for applicants engaging in similar processes in future, with clearer information from the outset.

During this Dialogue Day, each group of applicants was permitted to bring along a maximum of three members of their team (all groups brought three, though disciplinary areas, seniority and roles varied across the teams). Both applicants that we spoke to expressed an initial lack of clarity around this, for instance one had been expecting to bring along around ten members of their team on the day and so was surprised as planning progressed that this was limited, reducing the numbers of community participants they were able to involve. The selection of three members in itself could be a tricky issue for the collaborative researchers, as one researcher expressed:

*We did ask whether we might be allowed to take more [researchers], even as observers but we were told that wouldn't be fair to the other teams...So that then gave us the challenge of who to have representing the consortium...in the end we had a phone conference and through discussion...we decided it would be better that as representatives of our project we have two academics and one community partner. Applicant interviewee 1*

In this case the applicant expressed that as the co-applicants were already working well together, there were no issues of offence or discomfort in coming to the decision. However, as the explanation continued it was apparent that other factors were also influential, for instance selecting researchers that mapped to the different elements of the Research Councils involved. Applicants were clearly conscious from the outset not only to be relevant and useful to the participants on the day, but also to be seen to select the right people and to say the right things from a Research Council perspective. This was noted within the observation notes from the day, where one researchers work was probed in the presence of Research Council staff:

The question of community definitions continues to be raised by participants. The researcher, who is most relevant to this, looks unsure as the participants are being quite vocal in their criticism. The researcher sits back and seems a little uncomfortable; at times the discussion is quite negative to the element of research they are planning... As the discussion draws to a close the researchers thank the group for their comments and the researcher whose work was more sceptically received makes a joke about the lack of optimism around it. Group breaks for coffee, though a number of participants remain speaking to each other and the researchers. Observation notes

Whilst the additional presence of Research Council staff may have led to discomfort at times, as one applicant we spoke with discussed, the presence of Research Council staff had not been problematic from their perspective:

*I liked having people from the ESRC and AHRC there. I think that was really useful, partly because it gave us an informal chance to talk to them, so I thought that was good. They mostly stayed in the background and that, I guess, was quite appropriate. Applicant interviewee 2*

In the case of Hopkins Van Mil the time spent in discussion with applicants resulted in some of the work that they were undertaking occurring outside of the budget of the project. As a social enterprise this was something they felt appropriate but it should be recognised that this may not have been a commitment an alternative dialogue provider would have offered or been capable of providing within a budget<sup>8</sup>. Despite some of the initial challenges in reassuring and working with applicants, Hopkins Van Mil were quick to highlight that tensions had promptly reduced once discussions were underway:

*The research teams once there and once in the process seemed to really engage with the communities...they did seem to value the comments that were coming out and I think because they treated the communities with great respect they got respect back...I think the interaction between everyone was great ... It met its outcomes, the aim was to get good interaction on a subject with the research teams so that they could test their ideas and see whether there was potential for development or not. I think it did that to a large extent. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

Whilst then deliberation between participants and the applicants on the day had worked, the additional activities in advance of the day to prepare for this were noted by the Connected Communities programme team:

*I think we needed to be more generous with the timetable, it was quite short and Hopkins Van Mil had a very tough task. I think we could have been a bit more generous with the budget...I think it was quite difficult for them to achieve everything they needed to and in particular in terms of booking venues...we need to make sure if we are going out to tender again...we need to make sure we are realistic when it comes to budgets and timetables. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 1*

In summary, the creation of effective and varied deliberation activities for the day, efficient and professional facilitation and considerable effort on the part of the dialogue provider and applicants to work within and around the boundaries of confidentiality, allowed the public to deliberate both with and on all issues raised by the grant applicants.

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<sup>8</sup> Hopkins Van Mil (2012) *Connected Communities Dialogue Day Facilitation Process Report*.

### 4.3 Informing, where appropriate, further development of full proposals, in light of outcomes of the dialogue

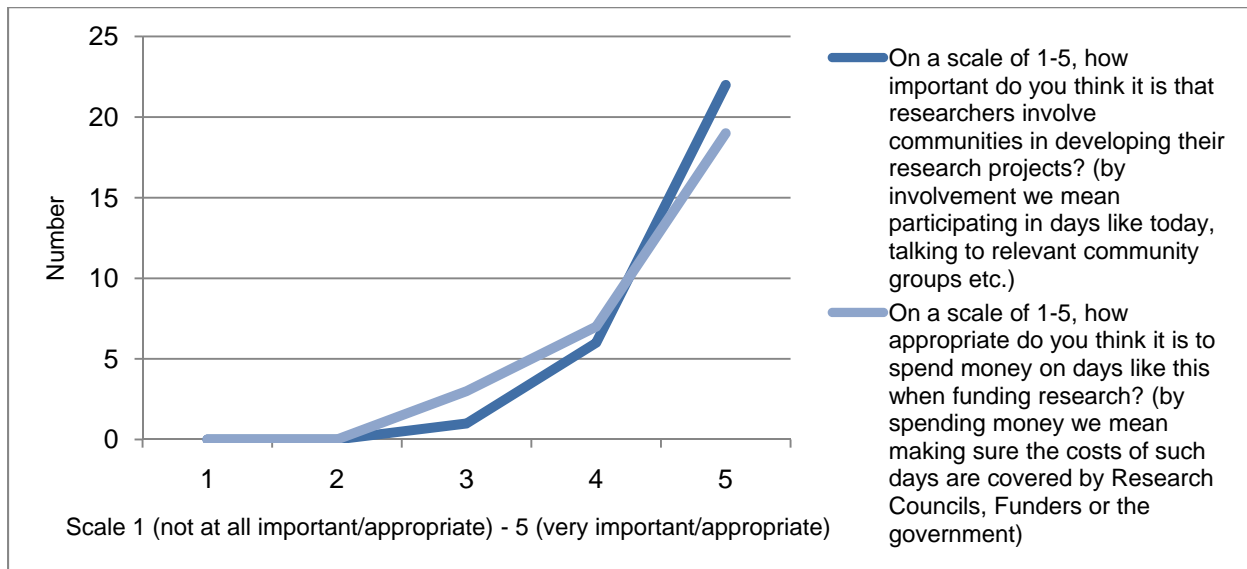
#### 4.3.1 Participant outcomes

The questionnaires for participants took the opportunity to ask some broader questions as to views on such activities and this suggested that participants valued the opportunity to be involved in this process. As demonstrated in Figure 4 there were high levels of agreement that researchers involve communities in developing their research projects, with 73 per cent (n=22) rating this as 'very important'. Over 80 per cent (n=26) of participants similarly thought it was appropriate to spend money on activities like the Dialogue Day when funding research. Twenty-nine of the 30 participants that completed questionnaires said that they would like to receive further information on the Connected Communities programme. In the open comments it was clear that a sense of community had developed within the day itself that some participants were keen to pursue:

*Be informed how info used. Keep in touch (contact details) of Unis and research projects/ publication. Participant 16*

*Let participants into a forum for knowledge exchange. Participant 20*

Figure 4: Participant view on role of community in funding



There was a strong sense amongst many participants that they had expectations to hear more about the research that had been discussed, to find out which applications would be funded and to have some follow up from the day. However, the closing elements of the Dialogue Day were

not as clear as they could have been on how this would happen, as the observation notes reflect:

As people start to file through to collect evaluation forms and their incentives participants and applicants are called back to the main room. It is apparent a closure is needed, though this had not been planned. Research Council staff gave an overview of the next stages in the funding and highlight that academics will be reviewing and making a decision on the outcomes. A researcher thanks all the participants for their comments on behalf of the researchers. A participant asks how they could find out more about how their views were contributing. The response is slightly vague around this, highlighting the role of Hopkins Van Mil for follow up and the evaluation. Outcomes for participants could have been more clearly communicated. This potentially misses an opportunity to highlight more clearly how participant's comments will be valued and reflected. Observation notes

Hopkins Van Mil reflected on this aspect:

*I thought we had all agreed that we should try and create some kind of follow up...we did suggest that it would be great if we could keep an online forum going, after the event. Maybe it was just the sort of complete overwhelming nature of the day [laughter] for them that it could fall off the agenda and it could so easily... it would also be really nice for the research teams if they knew they could call on that resource, because I think some of them would have valued ongoing interaction with the groups that were there. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

As it was a rather ad hoc approach was taken on the day of the dialogue to provide information for participants at a later date. The sense of continuity on the participant's perspective was also something retrospectively discussed by the Connected Communities programme team:

*I'm not sure it [participants need for follow up] was considered in advance. I think it was something that surprised us on the day, how much the participants wanted that future interaction and that information about what happened next. I think we saw it very much as an one-off day, the participants would come, feed in and that would be the end of it and then the research teams would take that forward and I think that was probably a bit naïve on our own part, that the participants wouldn't want to know more in the future. Connected Communities programmes team interviewee 1*

*The day was planned so it would provide feedback...we will certainly tell [participants] who the successful bidders are, once that is publicly announced... we will flag it to Hopkins Van Mil who will then notify anyone who expressed interest in finding out what the outcome was... The successful teams will, over the course of the project, will probably set up websites and we can flag people towards those. I think the arrangements for sort of follow on are quite good. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 2*



Whilst steps were taken then to inform participants as to the outcomes of the day, these could have been better planned and valued. Hopkins Van Mil did not appear to have a continued role or budget available to maintain communication with the community that developed, and whilst the critique is likely to be of interest to some participants, it was the value and connection to the research applicants that participants were keen to maintain.

#### 4.3.2 Informing proposals

Whilst there were some limitations in further information which was planned from a participant perspective, there were also aspects of confidentiality which limited the feedback given to applicants. Hopkins Van Mil provided a transcript of the Dialogue Day discussions for each individual applicant group, again the contents of these being confidential. From Hopkins Van Mil perspective this was different to the type of information they would have normally looked to provide:

*I wanted to provide something meaningful for the research teams and I wonder if we achieved that, certainly transcripts are there and useful but normally we would look for patterns in the discussion...confidentiality definitely raised it head...I only sent the sort of commentary report to RCUK... I hope from that the research teams don't feel let down that we didn't provide enough for them as a result of the day....If you'd had initially your research teams induction meeting you could have then said to them 'Oh what do you need from this? What would be useful?' and we didn't ever ask that question, and I don't know that it was our question to ask actually...the brief said very clearly what it should be. Hopkins Van Mil interviewee*

As it was the limitations of the transcriptions did not appear to be a particular problem for the research teams involved. In our interviews we were able to directly address the outcomes of the day for the applicants, and it was clear that they had taken a variety of things away from the day, 'sharpening up their ideas' via their own notes and the record provided by Hopkins Van Mil:

*We did get some useful feedback and subsequently in fact were invited in the submission to reflect on those...It brought home to us that communities are very diverse, so it was very useful having such a wide range of people of all ages...It was useful for us to be reminded that although we work quite closely with community groups, they are, they tend to be people who are more on the active side of things by definition. So it was useful to be reminded that communities are made up of people of all different points of view... we were helped with some of our ideas, our bid is particularly about [content of bid removed]... It was interesting hearing people's thoughts about that. Applicant interviewee 1*

*I think the group discussions, the discussions, we got a lot out of...we got lots and lots of notes and we got lots of ideas, we certainly got a sense of what people felt and a lot of it did actually help reinforce that the approach we were taking was right, so that was good. Applicant interviewee 2*

The varied community perspectives provided, including those from less vocal groups, was frequently commented upon. Whilst both of the applicants we were able to interview mentioned specific elements of their proposals that had developed, altered and been added to following the day, there was also a sense of contradiction. As this applicant discusses on the one hand there was no expectation that it should influence the final proposal, but on the other a sense that in practice it had:

*It [the Dialogue Day] wasn't supposed to be taken into account as part of the decision-making process. By the end of it, it still wasn't absolutely clear what purpose it was supposed to form really. When we were drafting the final proposal we did certainly go back to the notes we made and some of the points that had been made very strongly by several of the participants, we did address those points. Applicant interviewee 2*

The confusion over whether the purpose of the Dialogue Day was to influence the final applications, and/or to provide an example of community engagement from the outset of a Connected Communities programme, is likely reflective of the novelty of the day and its role in the funding process, as applicant interviewee 1 highlights:

*In a way the process is as important as the specific nature of the outcomes... one of the things we have fed in or built into our proposal is making sure that we have regular conferences where we include our community partners... if we are following a route that people are not thinking is the most useful they will tell us...it sort of sensitised us to impacts but exactly how that might have figured in the day, as a full bid is being prepared, I'm not sure...Which in a way emphasises the importance of process and collaboration all the way through and not people from universities coming and telling people in community groups what is good for them, which (laughs), which is what we are trying to avoid. Applicant interviewee 1*

Both applicants identified the positive practice aspects of embedding community engagement, but for one applicant there were other contradictions raised in this process, as they discussed the benefits of holding an alternative local activity:

*We were able to have a decent discussion with the groups about our proposal... I think there would have been better ways of achieving the same thing, for me one of the biggest problems was that it was in London...I think that given the nature of what we were trying to do, talking about Connected Communities, that was just wrong...They could just have said to us 'okay, this is what we want to do, here's some money for you to do it, go and do it within your own communities prior to submitting your final proposal'. It shows a centralist mentality that I thought the whole Connected Communities programme was trying to get away from. Applicant interviewee 2*

It is possible that had the organisation of the dialogue been placed within the applicants control there would have been less diversity in the communities involved, and more reliance on the traditional groups that those researchers engage with. It would also have been very challenging

for individual applicant teams to organise an event to a similar scale within the timeline, without the professional support of a dialogue provider. However, the point made here by the researcher is noteworthy, broader flexibility around the location and therefore the participants engaged may have been useful and avoided some of the issues of confidentiality and competition experienced by holding one Dialogue Day, in one location. Nevertheless despite suggestions for consideration, initial concerns about the purpose and role of the day positive outcomes were also noted by the Connected Communities programme team:

*I think [some applicants] went into it with the attitude 'we don't understand why we are doing this, we don't see what we are going to get from it', but I think they all commented at the end that it was very successful day, that they got to know all sorts of different people they wouldn't have done otherwise and got very useful feedback for their projects...they did say to everyone in the room how much they had appreciated it and how much they taken from it, so the participants then knew their feedback was taken on board, which I think is really good. Connected Communities programme team interviewee I*

#### 4.3.3 The role of the Dialogue Day in the application process

There is then a tension between encouraging broad outcomes from such an activity and accommodating that within a funding scheme, as a member of the Connected Communities programme team expressed it is very difficult to look at an application on paper and say 'yes, that came from the Dialogue Day'. From the outset the Dialogue Day was planned to occur in February, with a decision made on the full proposals at a funding panel meeting in June. Applicants could include within their application comment on how the Dialogue Day had influenced their thinking but it was not a required aspect.

However, having viewed the confidential proposals in full the Connected Communities programme team felt that all of the applicants had added depth or small changes to aspects of their applications that 'seemed to have emerged as a consequence of their engagement in that day'. During the critique process we also sought feedback from members of the funding panel, one of whom similarly emphasised that whilst the Dialogue Day had not been part of the funding criteria it had influenced:

The Dialogue Day wasn't one of the key grading criteria, but it was part of the context in which the full proposals were actually scooped...so there was reference to it and it was part of the context... it was part of the architecture around [the panel], but it wasn't a specific grading criteria...it was part of the context of the whole process...such days are really wonderfully important because it's all about doing engaged research... It's all part of spreading the message of the importance of doing engaged research. Funding Panel interviewee I

This interviewee highlighted that they would very much have liked to attend the Dialogue Day, and had read the report with interest but that diary commitments did not allow. We also gathered feedback from a further funding panel member, but perhaps reflecting the difficulty of the connection between the role of the Dialogue Day and the funding panel they largely highlighted that it was very difficult to comment on the Dialogue Day and its influence. As such the Connected Communities programme team had clearly already started to reflect on how the processes could become more inter-linked were such activities repeated in future:

*[It could have been] a much more integrated programme rather than having the Dialogue Day as one aspect and the panel and their role as another. I think we really encouraged the research project teams to get involved and take on board the feedback from the community but we didn't necessarily do the same with the panel and I think they should have been much more engaged...given the opportunity to come along to the event. They were given the opportunity but I think pressed a bit more to say it would be really good if they could come and really important for them to see how the event worked and to feedback in to their decision-making process. Connected Communities programme team interviewee 1*

In summary, it was clear that the Dialogue Day had influenced and informed a number of the full proposals, but that there were also broader outcomes for participants and applicants achieved through engagement with this process. The challenge for the Connected Communities programme teams is to value and demonstrate the significance of such processes within a funding mechanism, without inappropriately institutionalising and enforcing set outcomes.

## 5. Summary, learning points and recommendations

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This summary section has grouped the key outcomes resulting from the Connected Communities Dialogue Day within the framework of the *Guiding Principles for public dialogue on science and technology*<sup>9</sup>, set out by SciencewiseERC. In addition, a summary of how the Connected Communication Dialogue Day met its three key aims is provided at the outset.

It should be noted that as the SciencewiseERC guidelines are primarily orientated at a science and technology context, rather than specifically community engagement, some aspects are less relevant or have been interpreted to the context of the objectives and purposes of the Connected Communities Dialogue. In addition to the summary outcomes, a series of Learning Points are also highlighted, in addition to a number of recommendations. It should be noted that a number of these Learning Points and recommendations are also present in the recommendations provided by Hopkins Van Mil Facilitation Process Report.

### *5.1 Summary of aims achieved*

- To enable grant applicants to engage with the public in a formalised setting around their proposed research topic:
  - The timing of the Dialogue Day allowed applicants to develop initial proposals, prior to the submission of full proposals allowing engagement with the Dialogue Day. This was an appropriate timing for an activity of this type.
  - The design of the Dialogue Day and the range of activities incorporated allowed applicants and participants to cover a variety of broad questions for in-depth discussion.
  - The dialogue provider set out to ensure all applicants were treated fairly in their preparation and activities during the Dialogue Day.
  - Participants reported having appropriate information on which to base their discussions. The activities and facilitation were designed to allow applicants to present their proposals, whilst also permitting participants to develop their own attitudes and views towards those approaches.
  - The inclusion of a public Dialogue Day within a broader Connected Communities programme was recognised as appropriate given the nature of the research area amongst participants, applicants and the funding panel.

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<sup>9</sup> Guiding Principles for public dialogue: <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>

- To enable the public to deliberate on the issues and challenges raised by the grant applicants:
  - The aims and objectives for the Dialogue Day were set out from the start of the process. Its purpose and objectives were clearly provided for participants by the dialogue provider.
  - The scope of the Dialogue Day permitted a range of issues to be covered, representing four applications that included a wider range of researchers and community partners in support. These were relevant to the issue of Connected Communities as set out by the Research Councils.
  - The dialogue provider offered clear information in advance of the day for participants as to what the day would entail and how they would be participating.
  - A variety of activities were designed and included in the Dialogue Day in order to meet the objectives. A suite of written materials were provided for participants, applicants and facilitators in order to support these activities.
  - Effective facilitation and activity design allowed participants to feel they could express their views in a supportive environment and question the applicants.
  
- To inform, where appropriate, further development of full proposals, in light of outcomes of the dialogue:
  - Participants felt confident to express their views and the dialogue providers, Connected Communities programme team and applicants were open and honest in their participation.
  - Applicants were each provided with transcripts from their individual discussions. As appropriate to confidential content, a broader output on the day could not be provided for applicants (or wider readers) by the dialogue provider and nor did this appear to be necessary for applicants.
  - Observation notes and interviews with participating applicants suggest there were positive outcomes from their involvement, with some areas recommended for improvement.
  - The Connected Communities programme team and funding panel suggested there was recognition of the role and remit for such activities within engaged research on community issues.
  - The outcomes of the Dialogue Day were used to inform applicants and the funding panel rather than determine their decision.

5.2 Key outcomes and learning points within the Guiding Principles for Public Dialogue on Science and Technology

<p><b>The Guiding Principles for Dialogue in Science and Technology</b></p>	<p><b>Connected Communities Public Dialogue Day</b></p>
<p><b>(I) Context</b></p>	<p><b>(I) Context</b></p>
<p>Be clear in its purposes and objectives from the outset</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The aims and objectives for the Dialogue Day were set from the outset of the process. Its purpose and objectives were clearly provided for participants by the dialogue provider and for the funding panel by the Connected Communities programme team.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 1 #</b>  <b>Whilst applicants were informed of the Dialogue Day from the outset of the funding application process, its purpose, objectives and the potentially positive outcomes for applicants, could be more clearly communicated and incentivised.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Be well timed in relation to public and political concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The timing of the Dialogue Day allowed applicants to develop initial proposals, prior to the submission of full proposals allowing engagement with the Dialogue Day. This was an appropriate timing for an activity of this type.</li> <li>▪ The inclusion of a public Dialogue Day within a broader Connected Communities programme was recognised as appropriate given the nature of the research area amongst participants, applicants and the funding panel.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 2 #</b>  <b>Though the timing was appropriate, the timescale for the organisation and preparation of the Dialogue Day was very constrained. In future activities of this type, extending the timings of the funding application process would overcome some of the restrictions in timescale imposed on the Dialogue Day.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Commence as early as possible in the policy/decision process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The timing of the Dialogue Day was appropriate in allowing applicants to develop initial proposals. Held any earlier engagement with a much broader group of applicants would be necessary, exceeding the likely benefits. It would also result in less tailored and effective</li> </ul>

	<p>discussion between applicants and participants during the Dialogue Day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 3 #</b>  <b>Whilst the timing was appropriate in allowing participants to consider a limited number of applications in more detail it allowed for little room from a participant perspective to vocalise broader, pertinent community issues. Future Connected Communities activities could consider a broader public Dialogue Day, permitting participants to frame the agenda without reference to particular research proposals.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Feed into public policy - with commitment and buy-in from policy actors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The intention of this Dialogue Day was to feed into the funding process. Applicants reflected and utilised information from the day, and implicit links were apparent to the funding panel and Connected Communities programme team.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 4 #</b>  <b>The relationship between the Dialogue Day and the funding panel could be more clearly established. Inviting the panel to the Dialogue Day, and clarifying the outcomes of the Dialogue Day within the application review procedure both offer potential benefits (eg recognition of the value of the day) but also risks (eg increased pressure on applicants involved, perception of an instrumentalist purpose to the day). The Connected Communities team would be advised to develop a clear strategy around this relationship.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Take place within a culture of openness, transparency and participation with sufficient account taken of hard to reach groups where necessary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants felt confident to express their views and the dialogue providers, Connected Communities programme team and applicants were open and honest in their participation.</li> <li>▪ The recruitment process, though constrained, put in place an approach which could access hard to reach groups, eg rural participants and non-active community members.</li> <li>▪ Some elements of openness were constrained by the issue of confidentiality. These raised practical issues and perceptual issues but were very well considered and accounted for by the dialogue provider, and did not prove as problematic in practice.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 5 #</b>  <b>Applicants may have been more reassured around the openness and transparency of the process were more time available to build trust between the dialogue provider, between and across applicants, reducing the sense of</b></li> </ul>



	<b>contradiction in a collective but competitive process.</b>
Have sufficient resources in terms of time, skills and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The strengths and professionalism of the dialogue provider were essential to the success of the day. As was their provision of ‘in kind’ resources above and beyond that which they had been funded to carry out.</li> <li>▪ Additional resources provided by the Connected Communities programme team to support the hire of a venue and participant incentives were also essential.</li> <li>▪ The timescale was responsible for a number of the aspects highlighted as negative factors in the day, such as the choice of venue, pressure in preparing materials and communicating with applicants.</li> <li>▪ The critique whilst able to meet its objectives operated within a minimal budget and also required the addition of work ‘in kind’.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 6 #</b> The timescale to incorporate a Dialogue Day within a funding application process should not infringe on key objectives, nor potentially draw important aspects of the Dialogue Day into risk. The inclusion of a Dialogue Day in a funding process should allow for adequate preparation time and the sourcing of appropriate resources.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 7 #</b> Budgets that are adequate to cover a routine Dialogue Day activity may not account for those involving additional layers of complexity and novelty, such as issues of confidentiality. For future activities it is important that budgets represent true costs or this could diminish the quality of providers involved, and the perception of the value of the Dialogue Day in the process.</li> </ul>
Be governed in a way appropriate to the context and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication and management of the Dialogue Day between the dialogue provider, Connected Communities programme team and evaluator was respectful, efficient and effective throughout.</li> </ul>

(2) Scope	(2) Scope
<p>Cover both the aspirations and concerns held by the public, scientists in the public and private sector, and policymakers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The scope of the Dialogue Day permitted a range of issues to be covered, indicative of four applications whom were representing a wider range of researchers and community partners in support, relevant to the issue of Connected Communities as set out by the Research Councils.</li> <li>▪ Whilst, as noted in <b>Learning Point 3 #</b>, an earlier event could be held to allow public participants to better inform the agenda, there were opportunities within the activities designed and the facilitation process for participants to raise their own issues, aspirations and concerns.</li> </ul>
<p>Be focused on specific issues, with clarity about the scope of the dialogue. Where appropriate we will work with participants to agree framings that focus on broad questions and a range of alternatives to encourage more in-depth discussion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The design of the Dialogue Day and the range of activities incorporated allowed applicants and participants to cover a range of broad questions for in-depth discussion. Although prompts and questions for discussion were provided these were broad in nature. Facilitators made certain that participants could raise alternative framings and reminded applicants when necessary not to influence the direction of comments.</li> </ul>
<p>Be clear about the extent to which participants will be able to influence outcomes. Dialogue will be focused on informing, rather than determining policy and decisions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The outcomes of the Dialogue Day were used to inform applicants and the funding panel rather than determine their decision.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 8 #</b>  <b>The clarity of the role of the Dialogue Day in influencing outcomes could be more clearly communicated to participants, alongside a clearer statement around how participants can remain involved in this process. It is important in such communication that the Dialogue Day does not appear tokenistic, with the value of the contributions not seen to be superseded by the academic decision making process to follow.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Involve a number and demographic of the population</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear information on the demographic profile aims were designated and adhered to from the outset of the process. The dialogue provider successfully met these expectations,</li> </ul>

<p>that is appropriate to the task to give robustness to the eventual outcomes</p>	<p>regardless of the difficulties in timescale. The number of participants on the day was appropriate to enable discussion and to achieve the qualitative transcripts required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 9 #</b> <b>For future dialogue events recruitment of a dialogue provider and therefore recruitment of participants earlier in the process would enable refinement in the recruitment process. The limitations of holding one London-located event could also be considered.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>(3) Delivery</b></p>	<p><b>(3) Delivery</b></p>
<p>Ensure that policymakers and experts promoting and/or participating in the dialogue process are competent in their own areas of specialisation and in the techniques and requirements of dialogue. Measures may need to be put in place to build the capacity of the public, experts and policymakers to enable effective participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The dialogue provider offered clear information in advance of the day for participants as to what the day would entail and how they would be participating.</li> <li>▪ The submission of outline proposals ensured that the applicants present on the day were competent in the areas under discussion.</li> <li>▪ The nature of a Connected Communities programme created a sense of awareness of the need for community engagement. Awareness of community engagement does not necessarily mean all applicants will have confidence when initially engaging in dialogue activities of this type. Considerable uncertainty was noted amongst applicants. The dialogue provider responded by communicating regularly and putting in place increased measures to support the applicants involved to enable effective participation.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 10 #</b> <b>Increased support for applicants should be accounted for in the budget and planned in advance. As a compulsory aspect of the funding process, the untried nature of it from an applicant’s perspective could be better recognised. This might include more time for the preparation of suitable materials and communication between the dialogue provider, Connected Communities programme team and applicants, in order to reduce the level of uncertainty and to build trust in the run up to the day.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Employ techniques and processes appropriate to the objectives. Multiple techniques</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A variety of activities were designed and included in the Dialogue Day in order to meet the objectives. A suite of materials were provided for participants, applicants and researchers in order to support these activities.</li> </ul>

<p>and methods may be used within a dialogue process, where the objectives require it</p>	
<p>Be organised and delivered by competent bodies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The contracted dialogue provider was professional and competent throughout, essential to the success of the Dialogue Day. An organisation with less experience could easily have lost their way around the demands of confidentiality and facilitation required.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 11 #</b> The novelty, demands and expectations of a Dialogue Day held within a funding process require a professional organisation to deliver and it is important the budget does not deter professional dialogue providers from applying.</li> </ul>
<p>Include specific aims and objectives for each element of the process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aims and objectives were included for both the Dialogue Day provider and evaluator; these were communicated to participants and other contributors at relevant stages of the process, though improved communication could be provided for applicants, as noted in <b>Learning Point 10 #</b>.</li> </ul>
<p>Take place between the general public and scientists (including publicly and privately funded experts) and other specialists as necessary. Policymakers will also be involved where necessary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Dialogue Day included public participants, applicants (researchers and community members) and members of the Connected Communities programme team. Invitations were also extended to the funding panel, though as noted in <b>Learning Point 4 #</b>, this offers potential benefits and risks to a Dialogue Day within a funding process.</li> </ul>

<p>Be accessible to all who wish to take part with special measures to access hard to reach groups, including considerations of appropriate venues and technical equipment in line with the Disability and Discrimination Act 1995. Where the objectives require it, media partners may be needed to ensure that the process reaches the wider population</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consideration of hard to reach group requirements were taken into consideration by the dialogue provider in planning, recruitment and materials for the day, for example easy to read materials were provided.</li> <li>▪ Critique materials considered hard to reach group needs, for instance an opportunity was provided to complete questionnaire with the evaluator rather than in writing.</li> <li>▪ Media partners were not required for the objectives of this Dialogue Day.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning point 12 #</b> <b>Whilst hard to reach groups were catered for within the Dialogue Day, this was to a minimal level. Extending timescales may allow more detailed materials to be prepared and more appropriate venues to be utilised, for example the shared space at Toynbee Hall created difficulties for those with hearing associated issues.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Be conducted fairly with no in-built bias; non-confrontational, with no faction allowed to dominate; all participants treated respectfully; and all participants enabled to understand and question others' claims and knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The dialogue provider set out to ensure all applicants were treated fairly in their preparation and activities during the Dialogue Day.</li> <li>▪ Effective facilitation and activity design allowed participants to feel they could express their views in a supportive environment and question the applicants.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 13 #</b> <b>Extending timescales for future Dialogue Day would allow more time to identify the most suitable venues available. Providing all applicants with an opportunity to discuss their plans in a private, closed room would be preferable for equity of opportunity.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Provide participants with information and views from a range of perspectives, and access information from other sources, thus making them informed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants were provided with information and views from four groups of applicants over the course of the day, in addition to hearing the perspectives of other participants.</li> <li>▪ Participants were provided with information in advance of the day which would allow them to seek information from other sources in advance of their attendance.</li> </ul>
<p>Be deliberative - allowing time for participants to become informed in the area; be able to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Activities were designed by the dialogue provider which had variety, were in-depth and bespoke to differing applicant ideas and issues.</li> <li>▪ Facilitators ensured that all relevant aspects of the applications were covered at some stage</li> </ul>

<p>reflect on their own and others' views; and explore issues in depth with other participants. The context and objectives for the process will determine whether it is desirable to seek consensus, or to map out the range of views</p>	<p>over the day, even if some individual activities were dropped in some groups due to the pressures of time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants were able to express their own views and reflect on the views of others.</li> <li>▪ When appropriate, consensus was sought but for this Dialogue Day the mapping of a range of views was more prominently captured and relevant.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 14 #</b>  <b>Participants experienced a very busy Dialogue Day and some views were expressed suggesting participants may have liked more time to informally discuss ideas with other participants and the applicants. Dialogue Days such as this must strike a balance between covering the aims of the day, the applicant's needs, but also participants own opportunities to pursue a level of informal discussion.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Be appropriately 'representative' - the range of participants may need to reflect both the range of relevant interests, and pertinent socio-demographic characteristics (including geographical coverage).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear information on the demographic profile aims were designated and adhered to from the outset of the process. The dialogue provider successfully met these expectations, regardless of the difficulties in timescale. The number of participants on the day was appropriate to enable discussion and to achieve the qualitative transcripts required; however there are aspects to be considered in representation, noted in <b>Learning Point 9 #</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>(4) Impact</b></p>	<p><b>(4) Impact</b></p>
<p>Ensure that participants, the scientific community and policymakers and the wider public can easily understand the outputs across the full range of issues considered</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants were given an opportunity to view the outcomes of discussions held by other groups during the Roving Ideas Storm.</li> <li>▪ Applicants were each provided with transcripts from their individual discussions.</li> <li>▪ As appropriate to confidential content, a broader output on the day could not be provided for applicants (or wider readers) by the dialogue provider and nor did this appear to be necessary for applicants.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 15 #</b>  <b>Relating back to Learning Point 8 #, clear communication is needed for participants at the end of the Dialogue Day as to the further communication</b></li> </ul>

	<p>they can expect to receive. Participants could be sent a short note at a later date on behalf of the funding panel, informing them of any key outcomes. This would reiterate to participants that their contributions were valued and recognise their contributions.</p>
<p>Ensure that participants' views are taken into account, with clear and transparent mechanisms to show how these views have been taken into account in policy and decision-making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anecdotally all applicants appear to have featured aspects from the Dialogue Day within their full applications.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 16 #</b>  <b>Relating back to Learning Points 4 # and 8 #, the relationship between the Dialogue Day and funding panel requires clearer communication whilst avoiding an instrumental framing of the purpose of the day.</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 17 #</b>  <b>Future critiques of work of this type could better shadow how outputs from the day have featured in the process, for example by seeking permission to view the applications in full.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Influence the knowledge and attitudes of the public, policymakers and the scientific community towards the issue at hand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participants reported having appropriate information on which to base their discussions. The activities and facilitation were designed to allow applicants to present their proposals, whilst also permitting participants to develop their own attitudes and views towards those approaches.</li> <li>▪ Though applicants did not report that the presence of the Connected Communities programme team was problematic, and in some cases reported it had been a useful opportunity for communication with Research Council staff, this provides a secondary focus to the day.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 18 #</b>  <b>The presence of the Connected Communities programme team or other funders within such Dialogue Day activities may distract applicants from the primary needs of the participants or create more pressure within the interactions on the day. The presence of these staff could send contradictory messages to applicants about the purpose and outcomes of the day, requiring clear communication from the outset and/or consideration if observations should occur more broadly and not at individual group level.</b></li> </ul>

<p>Influence the knowledge and attitudes of the public, policymakers and the scientific community towards the use of public dialogue in informing policy and decision-making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Dialogue Day was received positively by participants who identified the role of such activities within a funding process.</li> <li>▪ Observation notes and interviews with two of the participating applicants suggest there were positive outcomes from their involvement, despite some of the areas they recommended for improvement.</li> <li>▪ The Connected Communities programme team and funding panel suggested there was recognition of the role and remit for such activities within engaged research on community issues.</li> </ul>
<p>Encourage collaboration, networking, broader participation and co-operation in relation to public engagement in science and technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Dialogue Day provided an opportunity for participants, applicants and the Connected Communities team to network and where appropriate, participate and co-operate together.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 19 #</b>  <b>The outset of the Dialogue Day process did not foster a sense of collaboration amongst applicants. For future activities greater consideration could be given to incentivising the process and its outcomes for applicants, as well as encouraging a more collective sense of identity when entering the day, avoiding the competitive elements which were reported as unhelpful.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Be directed towards those best placed to act upon its outputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transcripts from the Dialogue Day discussions were provided for all applicants to utilise (if appropriate) in their full applications.</li> <li>▪ A broader report on the Dialogue Day authored by the dialogue contractor was provided for the Connected Communities programme team and the funding panel.</li> </ul>
<p>To represent the rationale and implications of divergent views</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transcripts recorded all aspects of the discussion, in addition to opportunities when relevant for participants to focus or highlight key feedback, allowing for the expression of variety and divergence in views.</li> </ul>
<p><b>(5) Evaluation</b></p>	<p><b>(5) Evaluation</b></p>
<p>Be evaluated in terms of process and outcome, so that experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Observation, questionnaires and interviews were designed to critique the Dialogue Day process from the perspective of preparation, the day itself and outcomes from the dialogue.</li> <li>▪ The report on this critique can be published publically in order to contribute to good</li> </ul>



and learning gained can contribute to good practice	practice.
Ensure that evaluation commences as early as possible, and continues throughout the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The critique methods were designed in advance of the Dialogue Day, though there was a very limited period of time available between the contracted start date and the Dialogue Day occurring.</li> <li>▪ An extended period for the critique was essential in allowing it to capture the broader outcomes for the process, allowing it to reflect aspects throughout the full funding process, rather than focus solely on outcomes noted on the day.</li> </ul>
Ensure that evaluation addresses the objectives and expectations of all participants in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The critique was designed to map to the objectives of the Dialogue Day and to capture views on the process from all participants, the public dialogue contractor, applicants, the Connected Communities programme team and the funding panel.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning Point 20 #</b>  <b>Future critiques of this type might consider more extensive work with participants. Budget and time limitations required that their perspectives were only captured via questionnaire, it would have been desirable to also capture their views in more depth and detail representing their value and significance in this engagement process. It would also be insightful to include an opportunity to capture information around the expectations of applicants prior to the day occurring, and to observe a funding panel, which time and budget did not allow on this occasion.</b> </li> </ul>
Be evaluated by independent parties (where appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The critique was put out to external tender and carried out by an evaluator external to the AHRC/ESRC.</li> </ul>
Addressing the reasons for adoption or non-adoption is the responsibility of policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The above <b>Learning Points</b> are aimed to assist the Connected Communities programme team in considering the role of the Dialogue Day with regard to future activities of this type.</li> </ul>

### 5.3 Recommendations

Overall, this report demonstrates that the public dialogue was a valuable activity which could be considered again for two-stage funding calls of this nature. Recommendations from the dialogue include:

#### Communication (Learning Points 1, 4, 8, 15, 16, and 18):

- Clearly communicate the purpose, objectives and expected outcomes to applicants to incentivise their involvement in the Dialogue Day from the outset of the application process.
- Clearly communicate the strategy of the Dialogue Day in terms of its expected outcomes within the application review procedure and the role of the funders in any observations during the Dialogue Day.
- Clearly communicate to participants the further communication and information that will be available to them (should they wish to remain engaged) after the Dialogue Day.

#### Timescale (Learning Points 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, and 19):

- Maintain the timing of a Dialogue Day after initial proposals and before full funding applications to efficiently utilise applicants time (minimises the applicants involved to those with the maximum chances of funding success) and participants time (allows the discussion of ideas around a semi-formulated agenda) when engaging in a research funding process.
- Extend the timescale of the funding application process in order to appoint a dialogue provider as early as possible, to better reflect the time required to organise a Dialogue Day, to support applicants preparations, build a sense of trust between the Dialogue Day provider and applicants, recruit participants effectively and to make sure the constraints of timing do not impact on the quality or objectives of the day.

#### Agendas (Learning Points 3, and 14):

- As a Dialogue Day within a funding application process restricts participants framing of the agenda, consider coupling these activities with a broader Dialogue Day framed by the wider programme context.
- Maintain timings in activities which also allow participants opportunities to break for informal discussion, both with other participants and applicant teams.

### Budget (Learning Point 7, 10, and 11):

- Allow for additional budgetary costs that reflect the complexity and novelty of activities that are innovative or being carried out for the first time.
- Anticipate additional costs associated to supporting applicants through the process of preparing for the Dialogue Day and in particular the issues of confidentiality that can incur supplementary cost.
- Allow a budget that is sufficient to support professional dialogue providers in delivery, befitting the complexity of the activities involved.

### Location and venues (Learning Point 9, 12, and 13)

- Consider whether alternative central locations (outside of London) could be organised for such activities and if holding localised activities to applicants would offer any benefits (applicants can be informed by local, relevant communities in a less competitive setting) over their potential costs (applicants do not have opportunity to network with each other, participants are only able to contribute views to one group of applicants).
- Book venues in advance that will provide a private space for the maximum likely number of shortlisted applicant groups.

### Outcomes (Learning Point 17, and 20):

- Consider allowing critique/evaluators access to outputs from the day (eg funding applications/funding panel) in order to better map the influence of the process on applicants.
- Extend critique to allow more detailed participant perspectives to be captured, in addition to applicant's expectations, prior to and after the Dialogue Day.

## Appendix One: Dialogue Day programme

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### Dialogue Day - 25 February

#### Draft Programme

Arrivals, Registration and Coffee	09.30-10.00
1. Plenary Introduction session Welcome, introductions, purpose of the session Role of participants, applicants and facilitators Purpose of the Connected Communities Programme	10.00-10.30
<b>Market Place</b>	
2. Small Group Discussion - Research Stations Set 1	10.30-11.45
3. Break	11.45-12.00
4. Small Group Discussion - Research Stations Set 2	12.00-13.15
5. Lunch	13.15-13.50
6. Small Group Discussion - Research Stations Set 3	13.50-15.05
7. Break	15.05-15.20
Roving Ideas Storm	
8. Fast and furious energy filled discussions	15.20-16.00
9. Closing session and next steps	16.00-16.15

# Appendix Two: Dialogue Day observation diagram


## Diagram Key

Entrances and Exits 

Small Group Discussion/Roving Ideas Seating 

Plenary Seating 

Visual Aids 

Observer 

Barrier 

