



Evaluation of the  
**Pathways through participation:**  
What creates and sustains active citizenship?  
research project

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Involve

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## **Summary of key findings**

*"I used to think that you had to be young and left wing to be effective, and the research has challenged this view very successfully. People participate for different reasons. There is a motivator at each stage for each volunteer. I used to ask 'are you a political animal, a communitarian or what?' But now I know that greens and religious people are just as committed as those with political motivations. The common link is that people want to make a difference." (Local Stakeholder Group member)*

### **Introduction**

- 1 *'Pathways through Participation' (PtP) was a research project which aimed to fill a gap in knowledge by answering three questions:*
  - *How and why do people participate?*
  - *Are there any trends and patterns in participation?*
  - *What are the connections between different types of participation in a lifetime, and what makes people move between them?*
- 2 *The research adopted a very wide understanding of participation, covering social, public and individual activities such as volunteering, belonging to a community group, charitable giving, and voting.*
- 3 *Good research findings were the first priority. But closely linked to that was the aim to share and discuss the findings, and consider their implications, with stakeholders interested in participation. These stakeholders were drawn from public service providers, policy makers, voluntary and community organisations, academics and commentators.*
- 4 *The project team appointed an independent external evaluator to look at the research process and its achievements. Evidence has come from a review of reports and papers prepared by the project team as the research was carried out; telephone interviews with a sample of research stakeholders; information gathered from stakeholders through self-completion questionnaires; observations at one of the participatory workshops held to share research findings; and reflections on the research process and its outputs from the project team.*

### **Approach to the research project**

- 5 *Unlike much of the earlier work on participation, the focus in PtP was on individuals rather than organisations or geographical areas. The research centred on gathering individual stories of participation.*
- 6 *The methodology was systematic. It started with a literature review. As well as exposing gaps in existing knowledge, the review was used to build a framework to help understand participation. Data collection was then done in three carefully selected, and contrasting, local fieldwork areas: Leeds (urban), Enfield (suburban) and Suffolk (rural). It focused on 101 in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The spread of fieldwork areas produced a great diversity of interviewees, and the chosen sample resulted in a breadth, depth and richness of participation experience which underpins the research findings.*

- 7 *Communication of findings to relevant stakeholders was integral to the research, both during and after its completion. The underlying aim was to influence policy and practice with respect to participation. The task of engagement and communication with stakeholders has therefore underpinned the methodology. This is a defining characteristic of the research.*
- 8 *The approach to stakeholder engagement and communications operated at both national and local fieldwork area levels. The project team aimed to reach out and engage stakeholders throughout the research period, using conventional and electronic media. This included a web-site, an electronic newsletter, posting blogs, and making available emerging findings through reports and briefing papers. Project team members went to conferences and other events and meetings where there were opportunities to brief relevant people on PtP.*
- 9 *Sitting alongside this outreach work was more focused activity in the fieldwork areas. A Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) was established in each, chaired by the local umbrella organisation for the voluntary and community sector. Key local stakeholders were invited to be members, drawn from the local authority, local service providers, and other voluntary and community organisations. The project team's aims for the LSGs were to strengthen local engagement in the project and enhance its impact. They eased the path of the researchers by providing local information and contacts, as well as offering their own knowledge and experience.*
- 10 *LSGs also played an important role in a wider process to present emerging findings to potential beneficiaries (local organisations and individual activists), to enable them to identify the implications of the findings for their own work, and to facilitate the emergence of specific practical actions that stakeholders want to take following the research. This was done through local participatory workshops held in the fieldwork areas. As well as sharing the findings, the project team were able to hear the follow up responses of the participants. These responses were then fed into the finalisation of the research report. The project team always hoped that LSG members would learn through their involvement in PtP, and would then lead local initiatives to develop local policy and extend local action regarding participation.*
- 11 *The launch of the final research report initiated a new phase of engagement and communication. Again electronic means of communication were used, enabling widespread access to the report and summary. A launch event was followed by three participatory national learning events for specialised audiences, each with its own targeted briefing paper and with opportunities for discussion of the findings and their implications. There were press releases, twitter conversations, presentations at events, and much else. The team successfully spread the findings, with each partner making extensive use of their own networks.*

### **Key successes**

- 12 *The evaluation shows that PtP started with a clear sense of what it wanted to achieve. The result was a successful research project, with substantial and valuable research findings, delivered in ways which ensured a broad reach, and which worked to embed the findings amongst the people interested in understanding and making use of them. Within this picture, a number of key elements in the success can be identified.*
- 13 *First, the project team took on board a very broad concept of participation. This meant that they conceptualised the research material in a way that is new, drawing together aspects of participation that are normally kept separate, and thereby promoting much*

*more holistic thinking. They then combined this broad conception with a participation framework to explain the factors and forces that together shape individual participatory practice. In other words, despite widening the scope of participatory activity, they made it more manageable through introduction of this framework of understanding.*

- 14 *Secondly, the collection and analysis of 101 individual life stories on the topic of participation is a significant achievement. The life story approach proved enormously valuable, but was demanding in terms of researcher organisation (finding an appropriate sample and setting up the interviews) and researcher emotional energy. But the process was also exhilarating for the researchers because of the intense and deeply personal nature of many of the interviews. The researchers felt privileged to have taken part. The project team made valuable use of the resulting material. They turned the interviews into an interesting and coherent narrative, and their use of a number of life stories as illustrations in the final report and summary successfully draws the reader into the research findings*
- 15 *Thirdly, the project team has integrated communications and engagement into the research process. Making this link is an important feature of the PtP project's success, and represents good practice for applied research. No matter how good the research findings, they risk being forgotten if they aren't actively promoted and shared. The scale of communications and engagement activity in PtP reflects the aim of the project team to influence both policy and practice through the research findings. Responses from stakeholders to the findings demonstrate that PtP has been effective in reaching out to potential users and has laid a foundation which will hopefully lead to the research being taken forward. Doing this has required significant commitment and persistence on the part of the project team when there were many other demands on their time and is in itself a substantial achievement.*
- 16 *Fourthly, and as an extension of the previous point, research needs to be well communicated if it is to be influential. In the case of PtP, the visual and written quality of the research outputs is outstanding. Use is made of a simple but effective project 'identity' for all written communications. Good drafting has made them easy to read. A series of deceptively simple diagrams encapsulates key elements in the findings, getting them across to readers in a direct and meaningful way, without diminishing the quality of the thinking behind them.*
- 17 *Fifthly, there is sufficient evidence to say that already the PtP project is being successful in increasing knowledge of participation, both amongst national stakeholders and amongst stakeholders in the fieldwork areas. It introduced new ways of thinking about participation. It also encouraged people to review what they already know and provided material and opportunities for them to update their knowledge and think about new ways of applying it. By these means, the research will help to promote practical action. Already there are tentative signs that this is happening, particularly in the field of volunteering. There is also evidence that reassessment of existing practice has begun in some places and organisations, alongside thinking through the potential for alternative approaches and actions. In the fieldwork areas, there is interest in the umbrella organisations taking the lead on moving forward the research. It is not yet clear how this will be done, and for all of them there are substantial resource constraints. It can safely be assumed that each area will develop in its own way. Meanwhile, more substantial evidence will take time to emerge.*
- 18 *Finally, the PtP project led to unanticipated benefits for the three partner organisations and the researchers themselves. This is not unusual in a major, externally funded, project but is nonetheless valuable. The benefits particularly relate to learning about participation, both for the partner organisations and the researchers. Equally important*

*are the opportunities that it provided for the partners in the research to learn from each other and to recalibrate their thinking in the light of experience gained. Furthermore, the high profile of the research helped them raise their organisational profiles, move in new directions, and extend their networks of influence.*

### **Areas for learning**

- 19 *The evaluation report contains a lot of learning, the very great majority of which revolves around the good practice that emerges from the approach taken by the project team. There are areas where the evaluation suggests that similar projects might pause for thought and consider alternative approaches, but these are matters for consideration rather than definitive points of learning.*
- 20 *The role and operation of the LSG is a particular area of interest. The evaluation interviews showed that the great majority of LSG members and all the project team members believe that the LSG approach worked well from the perspective of achieving good research outcomes. Furthermore, the majority of LSG members reported that being an LSG member was a valuable personal and/or work related experience. Reasons cited included good discussion, learning, networking, and/or the value of exposure to new thinking and the views of other group members who had a similar interest in participation, but from another perspective. Notwithstanding this success, a significant number of the LSG members interviewed felt that there were limitations to the approach when viewed from the local perspective.*
- 21 *Some of the limitations (e.g. not being clear about the role of the LSG) could have been cleared up quickly if the problem had been shared with the researchers during the lifetime of the project, which did not happen. But there was also a problem of unmet expectations at the end. Some LSG members had hoped for more specific outputs for (or about) their local areas and were disappointed that local implications and application of the research findings were not developed to a greater extent. However, the aim of PtP was always to communicate an understanding of the findings as widely and effectively as the resources permitted, and to stimulate discussion of 'now what?' amongst research stakeholders. The research could only go so far, and it was for practitioners and policy makers in their various capacities to pick up the research and take it forward.*
- 22 *The researchers had worked hard to be open, specific and communicative about the project. But the mismatch of experience suggests that, at the local fieldwork area level, problems arose which are largely due to miscommunication. This is an important piece of learning. Future research projects will benefit from noting that terms of reference and good sharing of information is not enough. There is a real need to keep on being explicit about what is being done and will be done, and also about what won't be done, so as to negotiate and maintain a mutual understanding of the expectations and limitations of the research in hand and the intended outputs. They will also work to ensure that these messages are regularly repeated, and that any points of misunderstanding are raised and discussed.*

### **Reflections**

- 23 *The PtP project can be described fairly as an excellent piece of research which has been widely communicated through a vigorous, well executed communications strategy. Ultimately it was a piece of research, and only others can turn it into action. The research team has played their part, and now it is over to others.*



## 1 Introduction to the evaluation

### The starting point

- 1.1 This report documents an independent evaluation of the research project '**Pathways through participation**' (PtP). Research findings are set out in 'Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?'<sup>1</sup> and a number of associated documents (see <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation/resources>). The research was funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) through its research programme.
- 1.2 PtP explored three research questions:
  - How and why does participation begin and continue?
  - Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?
  - What connections, if any, are there between different forms and episodes of participation, and what triggers movement between them?
- 1.3 The project aimed to communicate research findings to public service providers, policy makers and voluntary and community organisations (VCOs). The communication of findings was an integral part of the research process in order to influence policy and practice, thereby encouraging and enabling opportunities for individuals and communities to participate in society.
- 1.4 The project was carried out between April 2009 (when the researchers were appointed) and October 2011 (when the principal events for communication of the findings were complete). Complex issues were explored, and the research had an extended timescale. This created an opportunity to learn about research methodology and communication of findings, as well about the research topic itself.
- 1.5 Evaluation and learning have been part of the project from the outset. To help with the evaluation, an independent external evaluator was appointed (July 2009).

### Framework for the evaluation

- 1.6 The terms of reference for the evaluation were specified by the research project team:
  - 'To gather robust evidence to demonstrate how the project achieved the outcomes specified in the research bid to the Big Lottery Fund'.
  - 'To improve our understanding of what worked and did not work during the project so that future activities are designed and delivered more effectively'. (Source: Brief for Evaluator, NCVO et al, May 2009).
- 1.7 Table 1 shows that the three outcomes specified in the bid to BIG are interlinked. Acquisition of **greater knowledge** (the first outcome) is a first stage in a journey of potential change, leading to **wider participation** (the second outcome). In its turn, wider participation is a precursor to **better services** (the third outcome).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?', Final Report, NCVO, Institute for Volunteering Research and Involve, September 2011..

**Table 1: key outcomes specified in the bid to the Big Lottery Fund**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Additional details in bid</b>
<b>Greater knowledge (of participation)</b>	VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers have a greater understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public attitudes and behaviours towards participation;</li> <li>• people's pathways into participation and the factors that shape these pathways;</li> <li>• the opportunities and risks that public attitudes, behaviours and pathways regarding participation represent for their organisations, civil society and public life.</li> </ul>
<b>Wider participation</b>	VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers provide meaningful support for participation and improve mobilisation, recruitment and retention of supporters/participants, enabling them to strengthen communities.
<b>Better services</b>	VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers engage more effectively with people allowing them to formulate policies, services and activities that meet people's needs and expectations, benefiting individuals and community well-being.

Source: Funding bid to Big Lottery Fund from NCVO et al

- 1.8 The evaluation is about the research process as well as outcomes from it.
- 1.9 Most of the evaluation has been done in the period leading to completion of the final research report and immediately following it. Changes resulting from the project are already evident, particularly relating to greater knowledge. But the linked nature of the outcomes, with one potentially leading to another (see para 1.7), implies longer time-scales for the wider participation and better services outcomes. The time needed for achievement of these outcomes and their level of ambition is discussed in Chapter 7.
- 1.10 The evaluation has looked for intention to make changes as well as changes themselves. Table 2 sets out the types of evidence the evaluation has explored.

**Table 2: indicators of learning and change for use in evaluation**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Scope of relevant indicators</b>
<b>Greater knowledge (of participation)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research stakeholders can access greater knowledge</li> <li>• Research stakeholders demonstrate increased knowledge</li> <li>• Research stakeholders use knowledge within their own organisations</li> <li>• Research stakeholders cascade knowledge to other organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>Greater knowledge (research process)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project team members have extended their research skills</li> <li>• Project team members have worked collaboratively for mutual benefit</li> <li>• Project team members have learned lessons for use in future projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Wider participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research stakeholders understand the factors that encourage/ hinder participation</li> <li>• Research stakeholders can take practical steps to make people's participation easier.</li> </ul>
<b>Better services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research stakeholders understand how improved participation can impact on their policies, services and activities</li> <li>• Research stakeholders can take practical steps to improve participation so as to impact positively on their policies, services and activities.</li> </ul>

## Who are the research stakeholders?

1.11 For the purposes of the evaluation, the research stakeholders are described in the following groups:

- The project team and their organisations: The project team consisted of a researcher and a manager from each of the 'partner organisations' that undertook the research, namely NCVO (the lead partner), Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Involve.
- National stakeholders: A wide range of practitioners, academics, policy makers and commentators with interests in the field of participation, who can be said to be the target group for the research. They include people from public, voluntary and community organisations as well as individuals.
- Local stakeholders in the fieldwork areas: Local stakeholders include the umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector in each fieldwork area, relevant local authority departments, voluntary and community organisations active in the fieldwork area, other service delivery organisations (e.g. health, police), and local community activists. People from these stakeholders were brought together in a Local Stakeholder Group (LSG) to provide advice and information about the area, and help with access to potential interviewees.
- External parties to the research: The research Advisory Group, drawn from academics, practitioners (including the Chair from the LSG in each of the fieldwork areas) and policy makers in the field of participation. The evaluation includes BIG amongst these external parties.

## Evaluation data sources

1.12 The evaluation has used a mix of approaches and data sources. These are:

- Review of progress reports and methodology papers prepared by the project team for the research Advisory Group.
- Findings from self-completion evaluation questionnaires completed by members of the project team (6 in total).
- Findings from evaluation telephone interviews with a sample of stakeholders, made up of:
  - members from the three LSGs (9 in total, with 3 from each)
  - participants at the local workshops from statutory, voluntary and community sectors (10 in total, 7 of whom were also members of the LSG)
  - leaders from organisations involved in the research team (2)
  - members of the research Advisory Group (3)
  - the research funder (Big Lottery Fund).
- Evaluator observations at the local participatory workshop run by the project team in one fieldwork area, plus team write-ups of the workshops in the other two fieldwork areas, and written feedback from by the local workshop participants (72 respondents).
- Written feedback from participants at the national learning events (55 respondents).
- A reflective evaluation workshop held with the project team.

- An on-line Readers' Survey conducted by the project team in autumn 2010, examining use of documents posted on the PtP website, and exploring the value to users of the website itself (53 respondents).
- Monitoring information collected by the project team to supply to the funder.

1.13 The sample sizes for the majority of these sources are small and have therefore been treated with caution. Because quantitative findings are backed up by in-depth, qualitative interviews, considerable confidence can be attached to the conclusions drawn in this report.

### **Evaluation report**

1.14 The report is presented in six further chapters:

- *Chapter 2: background to 'Pathways through participation'* examines key features of the research. It explores the approach adopted and explains the essential links between research components and the communication of findings as the project has progressed, and briefly looks at relevant background issues on the contemporary political scene.
- *Chapter 3: learning from the research process and tasks* takes each of the research tasks undertaken by the team and examines points of interest with respect to relevant learning for future research projects.
- *Chapter 4: learning from stakeholder engagement and the communication process* examines the communications process used with external stakeholders during and after the research and develops learning for future use.
- *Chapter 5: findings on greater knowledge of participation* explores the first outcome set out to BIG, namely that the research will result in greater knowledge relating to the broad spectrum of participation.
- *Chapter 6: actions that will contribute to wider participation and better services* looks at the second and third outcomes set out to BIG, relating to changed practice to promote wider participation, and finally to better policies, services and activities (looked at under the term 'resulting actions').
- *Chapter 7: review and conclusions* which draws together the principal themes emerging from the findings in the earlier chapters, and develops key learning for future research.

## 2 Background to Pathways through participation

### Purpose of the research

- 2.1 The partner organisations in the research identified a gap in knowledge about participation, namely how and why people get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation over time, and of the links and pathways between them.
- 2.2 In the resulting bid to BIG, NCVO outlined the purpose of the research in the following terms:

*'This research project will explore the reasons people do or don't participate in social and civic activities, such as volunteering and public consultations, and how their participation changes and develops over time. This knowledge will improve understanding about the reasons for, and the contexts of, participation and enable VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers to increase and extend participation opportunities.'* (NCVO bid to BIG, page 4).

- 2.3 The research explored the questions from the perspective of the individual participant.

### What is participation?

- 2.4 The project team set out its understanding of participation as follows:

*'In this project, we understand participation in a very broad sense to include taking part in a wide range of social, public and individual activities, such as volunteering in a hospice, being a member of a local community group, purchasing fair trade goods, responding to a local authority consultation, and voting.'* (Pathways through participation Final Report, p6).

- 2.5 This takes the concept of participation beyond the individual silos or compartments that had underpinned much of the earlier thinking on the topic. In the Pathways through participation (PtP) research, the elements are each seen as part of a spread of engagement and activity, all of which can be described as participation. Participation becomes *'the act of taking part in a wide range of social, public and individual activities'* (Pathways through participation Final Report, page 14). This broad concept of participation meant that the researchers looked at activities and influences in a more holistic way than hitherto.

### Overall approach to the research

- 2.6 The PtP research was motivated by the partner organisations' desire to understand personal drivers to participate, how those drivers operate and change through individual lifetimes, and the external factors that shape/ influence the participation.
- 2.7 The unit of analysis for the research was the individual rather than, for example, an organisation or a geographical area. The chosen approach for the primary research was therefore based on gathering a sample of individual stories of participation.
- 2.8 PtP was a research project. The main aim of the project team was 'new knowledge'. It was not an action research project which would have had different objectives and a different design and methodology.

- 2.9 PtP adopted a systematic research methodology. A qualitative approach was used. It involved a literature review to assess knowledge gaps and build a model of the context for participation by individuals (the participation framework). Data collection focused on 101 life stories, done through in-depth qualitative interviews in three contrasting fieldwork areas.
- 2.10 However, answering the research questions was never, of itself, sufficient for the partner organisations. They also aimed to *'influence both practice and policy at local and national levels'* (Advisory Group Paper 6, Communications strategy, June 2009). The project team wanted the findings to be widely understood and relevant. In consequence, a strong emphasis on communications and engagement was built into the project methodology.
- 2.11 A significant feature of the research was, therefore, the involvement of both locally based and national stakeholders so that:
- Relationships could be established which facilitated wide stakeholder input and involvement in the project.
  - Research findings could be communicated in a timely manner as the work proceeded, bringing new insights into the public domain and ensuring that research findings were brought to the attention of relevant audiences (stakeholders).
  - The research findings could be tested and improved through the responses and views of relevant peer groups and audiences for the research.
  - People could think through the implications of the research findings for practice and policy.
- 2.12 Tasks of engagement and communication with stakeholders and participatory involvement, including in the local fieldwork areas, have been integrated into the methodology. This is one of the defining characteristics of the research methodology.

### **A collaborative approach**

- 2.13 The research is a collaboration between three partner organisations, each of which brought their own perspective to the task:
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the largest umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in England. It works in partnership across all sectors on behalf of the VCS and its beneficiaries, and provides a wide range of advice, support and information to the whole sector. It carries out research, responds to and influences emerging policy through wide-ranging consultation with the VCS, and campaigns on issues that affect all voluntary and community based organisations.
  - Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) is a research and consultancy agency specialising in volunteering. It is part of Volunteering England. It conducts research and evaluations, undertakes work across all sectors, provides evidence and disseminates knowledge.
  - Involve is a charity specialising in public engagement, participation and dialogue. It carries out research, undertakes consultancy, and delivers training to inspire citizens, communities and institutions to run and take part in high-quality public participation processes, consultations and community engagement.

## **The Big Society and localism agendas**

2.14 Early developmental thinking about the PtP project began in 2006/7. It reflected the interests of the partners and, at that stage, was independent of any wider political thinking. Since then, the project has become ever more topical, as a result of its relevance to the Coalition Government's Big Society initiative and the linked Localism agenda. These aim, amongst other things, to increase the role of individuals, particularly in their local communities. Participation is at the heart of such changes. At the same time there have been cuts in public sector funding which have affected both voluntary and public sectors. A much fuller discussion of this topic can be found in the PtP Final Report, section 1.3 (p12 ff).

2.15 The relevance to the research is that:

- The findings are of much greater interest and have had much wider resonance than could have been anticipated at the time of the research inception. In the fieldwork areas, for example, employees of some public sector service delivery organisations attended the workshops to learn about volunteering for the first time because use of volunteers is being considered by their employers as a potential route to maintaining and improving service delivery in a time of fiscal rectitude.
- Funding cuts and loss of staff due to redundancies in organisations participating (or expected to participate) in the research process caused some to lose focus on their involvement in the research.

Both have impacted on the way the research has been received by the stakeholders.

## **Reflections**

2.16 A number of factors make this research project one of substantial interest. In summary:

- The research is timely, and pertinent to agendas of the current government, bringing significant opportunities for it to be useful and influential.
- It is looking at participation in a new way, across a wide spread of activities and from the perspective of the individual rather than that of the organisations promoting or enabling the participation.
- It integrates engagement and communication between the researchers and the research stakeholders into the process from the outset rather than just at the end.

### 3 Learning from the research process and tasks

#### Introduction

- 3.1 This is the first of two process chapters. It looks at the overall approach to the project, and the tasks undertaken by the research team. The following chapter then examines the communications and engagement process. These two themes of research and communication are described separately for the practical reason of keeping the chapters to a manageable size. This reflects a separation used by the project team in their final report. The project team, however, has always seen them as interlinked, with each critical to a good research outcome.
- 3.2 The principal components of the research task are set out in Table 3 (following page), with a brief summary of the approach adopted for each. Interested readers can find fuller information on the methodology in Appendix A, Pathways through participation, Final Report, NCVO et al 2011. Annex 1 to this evaluation report provides evidence to underpin the discussions in this chapter.

#### Literature review

- 3.3 The literature review was the first research task, and became the testing ground and development arena for the collaborative approach to team working adopted by the researchers. It reviewed the current state of, and gaps in, knowledge about participation; identified theories to help the project team understand and make sense of the issues to be explored; and developed an analytical framework to help examine people's experience of participation over time. The review was structured around four key themes: the historical and current drivers of participation; the activities of participation; the actors of participation; and the theories relating to participation.
- 3.4 Review outputs were more substantive than had been planned. In addition to the main report on findings, four briefing papers were produced which have been widely disseminated through the Pathways through participation (PtP) website. Opportunities were also taken by the project team to share findings when attending conferences and workshops.
- 3.5 The project team reported a warm welcome for the literature review. For example:
- "I think that Briefing Paper 4 was really interesting - I'm normally turned off by literature reviews, instead wanting to read the source papers, but these concise summaries arranged by theme are really useful. Anyone who is trying to encourage volunteering should read this."* (Comment from on-line readers' survey)
- 3.6 Three of the nine Local Steering Group (LSG) members interviewed for the evaluation said that the literature review was one of the elements encouraging and enabling them to revisit, refresh and extend their existing knowledge of participation as part of their own learning during their involvement in the PtP project.



**Table 3: principal components in the research process**

Tasks and aims	Methodology/ approach
<b>Literature review:</b> Contribute to an understanding of the dimensions of participation. Review of existing knowledge/ gaps, and development of a 'framework of participation'	Explores and links relevant studies to build an understanding of participation. Has three key themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The drivers of participation</li> <li>• How people understand participation</li> <li>• Participation in practice (what, who, how, why).</li> </ul>
<b>Fieldwork area selection:</b> Identification of 3 contrasting areas for data collection – inner city, suburban and rural	Selection based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desk studies using socio-economic and other indicators to identify a spread of potential fieldwork areas (30 in total; 10 per area type)</li> <li>• Review of practicalities e.g. travel distance for researchers and discussions with partner organisations to gather intelligence on the long listed areas.</li> <li>• Long list reduced to 9 (3 per area type)</li> <li>• Assessment of willingness of these areas to participate</li> <li>• Following selection of 3 areas, researchers worked with local stakeholders to select a smaller neighbourhood within each for profiling, participatory mapping workshops and carrying out the interviews.</li> </ul>
<b>Fieldwork area profiling:</b> Collection of data to illuminate the local participation context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collected data for following topics: area story: political structure/story; demographic, social and economic character; physical and environmental character; voluntary and community activity; and informal networks.</li> </ul>
<b>Activity mapping in fieldwork areas:</b> Identification of the range of opportunities for engagement in participatory activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 session was held with the local stakeholder group members and 2 sessions with key local organisations and residents.</li> <li>• A participatory tool was used, facilitated by the researchers, where participants collaboratively created an 'activity map' to describe and illustrate the places/spaces of participation in the fieldwork area and associated organisations and activities.</li> </ul>
<b>In-depth interviews:</b> 101 face-to-face interviews in the field-work areas to explore stories of participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviewees identified with the help of local stakeholders</li> <li>• Purposive sampling to ensure a diversity of participation activities and of demographic characteristics of interviewees (age, gender etc)</li> <li>• Interviews made use of a narrative tool (timeline) to elicit biographical data.</li> </ul>
<b>Data analysis:</b> Analysis of interviews to explore and develop findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of initial policy document, used to structure team thinking and to brief interested parties on initial findings</li> <li>• Creation of short (2-4 page) 'vignettes' on each interview</li> <li>• Creation/refinement of coding framework</li> <li>• First phase of analysis making use of Nvivo software</li> <li>• Second phase: merging of researchers' Nvivo databases and crosscutting thematic analysis of interview transcripts + write up of each code</li> <li>• Exploration of these findings in local participatory workshops (see below)</li> <li>• Final phase of analysis to increase depth on specific areas of interest.</li> </ul>
<b>Local participatory workshops:</b> Presentation of findings and discussions focused on three questions: What? So what? Now what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A facilitated workshop in each of the three fieldwork areas to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- present findings</li> <li>- enable participants to identify implications for their own work</li> <li>- identify specific actions stakeholders want to take following the research</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participants were from diverse potential beneficiaries - the LSG, other local stakeholders and interested individuals/groups</li> <li>• In two fieldwork areas the workshop was a full day; in the remaining one, two half day sessions were held at the suggestion of the LSG.</li> </ul>
<b>Follow up review event:</b> Wound up the project in the fieldwork areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation to workshop participants to join a review session and networking lunch after the final LSG meeting to review what has happened and consider possible next steps.</li> </ul>
<b>Final research report and summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team members produced initial drafts in cross-organisational pairs, then everyone had a chance to comment and re-draft</li> <li>• Considerable attention to report structure in the early stages of drafting</li> <li>• Individual life-stories integrated into report to illustrate findings.</li> </ul>

- 3.7 Overall, it is clear that the literature review created a good knowledge base and research framework for the remainder of the project. Key learning points are in Box 1.

**Box 1: key process learning from the literature review**

- The literature review was a significant learning curve for all members of the team. It enabled them to familiarise themselves with relevant issues and topics beyond their organisational area of expertise, and to develop a common understanding and platform for the research.
- It provided a mechanism for finer definition of the nature and scope of the research.
- The resulting outputs included the analytical framework for the subsequent empirical research.
- The development of thinking resulting from undertaking the literature review increased the quality of the subsequent research work.
- There were challenges in the design and implementation of the review, and these were reinforced by the fact that this was the first task to be done jointly by the team. It became, therefore, in part a team building exercise which was a further reason why the review represented such a learning curve for the team.
- Tighter control of the task could have beneficially reduced the time over-run. It is unclear whether the team building aspects would then have been as substantial.
- Shifting a literature review from a purely internal document to one which is shared with other researchers and practitioners means that core documentation has been made available and used whilst the research has progressed.

**Selection of three fieldwork areas**

- 3.8 A researcher was nominated for each of the fieldwork areas, and selection of the fieldwork areas marked the start of the primary research. They were the location for subsequent activity mapping and for the in-depth interviews with individuals about their experiences of participation. A decision was made at the bid-writing stage to do the interviewing in three contrasting areas (urban, suburban and rural) in order to cover a diverse range of individuals and of types of participation.

- 3.9 Selection was in four stages:

- Stage 1: Desk studies using existing demographic classifications to identify rural, suburban and inner-city areas and produce an initial long list of local authority areas.
- Stage 2: Removal of atypical local authorities to narrow down the long list.
- Stage 3: Further research into the listed authorities. Existing networks and knowledge from within the partner organisations, and from the project Advisory Group, were used to gather local intelligence. Location visits, local interviews and desk based research were used to establish existing participation levels and the nature of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations.
- Stage 4: A collective decision within the project team on the final local authority areas. One of the most important criteria for choice of an area was the willingness of the local VCS infrastructure body and the local authority to work with the project

team. Urban Leeds, suburban Enfield and rural Suffolk became the three broad locations.

- 3.10 Extensive interviews were then carried out with local stakeholders in the broad locations. The aim was to identify smaller fieldwork areas in which the 101 life stories could be taken. The local stakeholders came from umbrella organisations, local authorities, the voluntary sector, people engaged in community development, and service deliverers such as the NHS and police. The systematic and thorough approach provided a selection which the project team found largely satisfactory.
- 3.11 From the evaluation perspective, the discussions with these stakeholders sheds light on the iterative way the whole project developed. The researchers talked to initial contacts, and then used a 'snowballing' approach to gain access to more information and wider contacts. In consequence, the task of area selection also contributed to the fieldwork area profiles discussed in later paragraphs and to the recruitment of people and organisations willing to take part in the activity mapping.
- 3.12 The demands of fieldwork area working led the project team and at least one member of the Advisory Group to reflect on the original decision to have three areas. Could the project have been carried out in only one area, with a benefit of greater depth of research into some of the new findings, such as linkages between different episodes of participation? Resulting discussions during the evaluation showed a consensus view that three areas produced a diversity of interviewees with a consequent breadth and richness of participation experience that could not have been found in just one area.

#### **Fieldwork area profiling**

- 3.13 Fieldwork area profiling followed on from fieldwork area selection. The aim was to collect background information on the chosen areas. It included history, politics, demography, socio-economic structure, environment, and the VCS.
- 3.14 From the project team's perspective, the area profiling was an essential stage, providing a good understanding of the local context for the participation stories collected during the interviews. By equipping the researchers with local intelligence, they were able to interact with credibility with research participants and stakeholders. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the team concluded that the level of detail could have been reduced.

#### **Activity mapping in the fieldwork areas**

- 3.15 'Activity mapping' sessions aimed to identify the range and location of participatory activities in the fieldwork areas and to build relationships. They enabled identification of the important places where people participate locally by creating maps of participation. A participatory approach was used which engaged LSG members, key local organisations, and interested residents in the task, including people who might be recruited for the subsequent interviews.
- 3.16 A number of the local stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation had taken part. They had enjoyed it, and saw it as a valuable way of assembling local information, with surprise expressed about just how much emerged.

*"We worked with a large sheet of paper and post its. Everyone there brought something unique to the table. It was good that we weren't just all local residents or all local authority staff. We got real reflection and debate going, and new information coming forward. I tend to feel a bit cynical about 'tricky approaches', but this one*

*worked well.*" (Local authority member, participant at an activity mapping session in Suffolk)

- 3.17 Local authority employees commented that the tool has potential to be adapted for their own work, for example in consultation work on neighbourhood renewal. A VCS organisation also thought that it could be a valuable means to build up a picture of a local area when they are planning to introduce a new activity/ service or begin work in a new area.
- 3.18 The researchers produced a report on the method used for activity mapping as an additional output from the research in order to share their experiences of a valuable technique with a wider audience.

### **In-depth interviews**

- 3.19 The approach to the interviews was qualitative and in-depth, undertaken with 101 individuals, in order to understand their participation story.
- 3.20 Interviewees were recruited in a number of ways. These included contacts suggested by LSG members, snowballing, contacting organisations and places identified in the activity mapping sessions, and internet research. The focus of the research was participation, but the project team also intended to interview a small number of 'non-participants'. They experienced considerable difficulty in finding such non-participants despite using a range of recruitment techniques, including cold recruitment. This almost certainly relates to the very broad understanding of participation chosen by the project team, and the life story approach which meant that everyone the researchers interviewed had participated in something at some point in their lives.
- 3.21 The sampling approach prioritised a range of participation activities, followed by intensity of participation, and then demographic information (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and employment). Apart from the non-participants, there were no major problems in achieving the right mix of interviewees (though see para 3.27 on some of the practical problems).
- 3.22 A 'life story' or narrative approach to the interviews was adopted. *'Narrative explanations strive to illuminate the subject in question by presenting it in the context of a wider story – in this case, a life story.'* (Understanding impact in social and personal contexts: making a case for life stories in volunteering research, Sarah Miller, IVR, Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference, 2010). Life stories can capture the relationship between the individual and society, the local and the national, the past and the present, and the public and private experiences (adapted from University of Sussex website, [www.sussex.ac/clhlwr](http://www.sussex.ac/clhlwr)).
- 3.23 The interviews made use of 'time lines' which elicit biographical data by reflecting on different episodes in interviewees' life. This resulted in a loosely structured, open approach to the interviews.
- 3.24 The anonymity promised to interviewees meant that they could not be contacted for the evaluation. However, researchers asked about the experience as they were drawing the interviews to a close. Comments varied, and suggest that the interview experience was warm and intimate, and provided valuable opportunities for reflection:

*"I think it's been very nice. It's been very friendly. I felt very comfortable. No, it's been very good..... it's also helped me to think, well, why am I doing what I'm doing, or have*

*I been doing what I've been doing, so it's been actually quite useful. (anonymous interviewee)*

*[reflects on the time line] "But yeah, looking at that, I realise now I've devoted too much of my life to that." (anonymous interviewee)*

*"It's a bit weird talking about myself, but, ..... , it has made me realise as well that I have met and worked with some fantastic people over those years as well, from the swimming club, in guiding, in scouting, at work, and at church, obviously. I have met some fantastic people." (anonymous interviewee)*

- 3.25 Many of the stories were deeply personal and touched the researchers. In the words of one, the interviews were "...a brief window of time, when you have offered your curiosity and they have offered their stories". Rather than simply exploring the life experiences of others, the interviewing period became an important personal journey for the researchers as well.

*"Going out and interviewing people – in their homes, in an allotment shed, or in a theatre - and hearing people's life stories was moving, fascinating, inspiring and humbling, and reconfirmed why I enjoy research." (member of project team)*

- 3.26 In reviewing the interviews for the evaluation, both the approach taken and the achievement of 101 life stories are significant successes for the research. Researchers and external stakeholders (for example members of the Advisory Group) have been quick to say that use has been made of a very good research tool, appropriate to collection of data relevant to personal motivations with respect to participation. *"The life stories approach is great – giving rich, in-depth information from individuals"* (member of Advisory Group).
- 3.27 All parties acknowledged the costs attached to an approach based on 101 life stories. The sampling framework was complex. It needed significant effort to get the required mix of people which was time-consuming and sometimes difficult. The task over-ran on time. Some interviews would have benefitted from much greater length than the 1.5 hours allotted, or could have extended to a follow up discussion. Maybe some could have been shorter. The narrative, open-ended approach generated a large quantity of data for analysis (see later). Notwithstanding this, the team are confident that having this many interviews has given the work credibility and will enable others to trust its findings.
- 3.28 The possibility of a first round of shorter and more structured interviews to collect a consistent set of information on personal participatory activities, followed by a smaller number of in depth interviews has been raised during collection of information for the evaluation. There is no certainty that this would produce better results. What it highlights is the importance of designing an approach which will deliver the breadth, depth and key insights that this type of investigation requires, whilst remaining manageable for the researchers. Notwithstanding the challenges that it presented, in the case of PtP, the team have managed to achieve the results they hoped for with the methodology they adopted for the primary research. Others may tailor a different approach to meet the needs of their own research.
- 3.29 Key learning points are summarised in Box 2 on the following page.

**Box 2: key process learning from the 101 'life story' interviews**

- A life story approach is a good research tool for exploring personal motivations and what influences them. It is, however, a very demanding technique in terms of researcher time and emotional energy, although also very rewarding in terms of quality of information obtained and personal satisfaction for the researchers.
- A complex sampling frame can produce recruitment difficulties and be very time consuming. Care is needed to clearly identify the key factors in the framework and, based on that, to ensure that all the identified groups are penetrated. Too much sample stratification is potentially a barrier to recruitment in small fieldwork areas.
- Combinations of different techniques can yield good results in some research contexts. A large number of shorter and more structured interviews, followed by a smaller number of in-depth life stories is one potential combination. This would be both more manageable in practical terms and would result in reduction of transcribed material for later analysis (see below).
- Creating a timeline during the interview was a helpful aid for both the research and the interviewee because it helped to focus the conversation, identify patterns and periods of inactivity, and helped to create a sense of ownership of their story by the interviewees.

**Data analysis**

- 3.30 Very early in the analysis, the project team prepared a paper on issues emerging from the research ('Strengthening participation: learning from participants', NCVO et al, November 2010). Despite analysis being at an embryonic stage, it was thought appropriate and timely to produce an early output. It was based on an initial scrutiny of key strands surfacing from the interviews. It aimed to contribute first impressions from the research to national and local policy debates, and to raise questions to be further explored in the following stages of the project. In research terms it was very valuable. It created a focus, and helped to shape thinking about the findings during the main phases of analysis. The communication aspects of the decision to publish are discussed in the following chapter.
- 3.31 The scale of data analysis appeared daunting at the outset. Each of the 101 interviews was transcribed, resulting in over 2,500 pages of verbatim transcription to understand and analyse. Analysis began with creation of a short 'vignette' on each interview, summarising its key features. These vignettes added c.30 days to the analysis time. The researchers then identified the themes and topics from the findings, and coded the interviews accordingly. Nvivo software was used to analyse and merge the work of the researchers, with cross cutting thematic analysis of the interviews and write ups on each code, for example 'life stage' and 'challenges to participation'.
- 3.32 A mid-analysis pause resulted from work involved in the participatory workshops (see later in Chapter 3). This planned stage in the research process was used to review initial findings and share them with relevant audiences in the fieldwork areas.
- 3.33 A second phase of analysis then increased the depth of enquiry on specific areas of interest such as the exploration of patterns and links between different episodes of participation and different activities. Researchers found that this was the phase when many of the most interesting findings emerged.
- 3.34 The research team reported that, for them, the data analysis stage was a very successful collaborative task, even though it wasn't easy. The resulting findings have generated substantial interest, and knowledgeable stakeholders such as the Advisory Group report their satisfaction with the results.

*“The most significant research task was the distilling of the data into findings and developing a useful narrative from that. The team have done a fantastic job.”* (member of Advisory Group).

- 3.35 Judged by the evaluation discussions, the project team and the Advisory Group continue to believe that there is more to be learned from the data. Specific mention was made, for example, of individual topics such as motivations for ethical consumerism, geographical dimensions of the findings, and the role of community leaders (lynch pins). *“If nothing more happens with the original research it will be a tragedy – there’s lots more to come out.”* (member of Advisory Group).
- 3.36 The data itself is potentially an enormous research resource. However, interviewees were guaranteed anonymity in accordance with ethical research procedures. This places a constraint on future use of the data, and others will not be able to access it.
- 3.37 Despite its evident successes, this stage in the project tested the project team. Nvivo software was valuable for data management, but fragmented the data and obscured the bigger picture. The number of verbatim transcriptions was very challenging and preparation of the vignettes took a significant amount of time, as did the coding. Resulting timetable over-runs squeezed the period available for developing the findings and drafting final reports. The over-runs ultimately meant that the research was concluded by the project team working beyond the funding period.
- 3.38 From the evaluation perspective, it is clear that analysis of the PtP project has been challenging for the project team and should offer some learning for the team and for others embarking on similar projects. The following bullet points pose questions which need to be considered when the approach to analysis is being developed. They link to the size of the sample and method of interviewing. Assuming a fixed budget, these questions are about prioritising some aspects of the methodology over others.
- The amount of data collected, especially through unstructured or semi-structured interviews, is one of the key determinants of the time needed for analysis. Is the sample size chosen really necessary? Could a mixed approach to structured and semi-structured/unstructured interviews, which could be designed to be less demanding in terms of analysis time, do as good a job?
  - Use of verbatim transcriptions, when it can be afforded, is a ‘gold standard’ in research terms but it is demanding in terms of cost and time. Detailed note taking can be a good substitute when there is audio back up to check quotes. This would have left more time for analysis, thinking and drafting. Would note-taking materially reduce the value of the interviews to the research?
  - Would some compromise lead to reduced pressure on later stages of research, with consequent benefits for overall research outcomes?

### **Participatory workshops in local fieldwork areas**

- 3.39 Local participatory workshops to share emerging findings with the fieldwork areas were an important part of the project. They were aimed at VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers operating in the area. Infrastructure organisations were included that could cascade the research findings and the contents of the workshops to their constituents.
- 3.40 The aim of the workshops was to:

- present and discuss the research results with the local stakeholders
  - enable the researchers to get an initial reaction to the scope and nature of the findings before the analysis was complete
  - provide an opportunity for the stakeholders to identify and explore the implications of the research findings for their own work locally and more widely
  - enable local stakeholders to identify and take ownership of specific actions that they want to take as a result of the research, and actions that are needed more widely.
- 3.41 The team made use of NCVO's Third Sector Foresight programme model, exploring the questions 'what' (are the research findings)?, 'so what' (the implications of the research findings)?, and 'now what' (what should we do about it)?. Throughout, the aim was for people to explore the findings and work on the implications themselves. The role of the project team was to facilitate discussion between participants.
- 3.42 Each workshop had a presentation on emerging research findings, with time for questions and discussion. Participants then worked in groups, coming together for plenary discussions. For the final session, the team developed an exercise called the 'ecosystem of participation'. Each group (working on a chosen opportunity/challenge) was given a paper tree and time to explore the deep causes of the issue (the 'roots'), identify the resources/assets already available (the 'branches' and 'birds') and explore the vision (for example, the 'sky') that they were ultimately aiming for. Each group then filled their tree with actions to achieve their aim, which took the form of green leaves. Towards the end of the exercise, the groups were asked to identify three priority actions (which became their golden leaves), present these to everyone in a plenary session, and group them onto a large composite tree mural. The project team found that groups at all of the workshops used the opportunity to develop ideas for action.
- 3.43 In total, there were 120 participants at workshop sessions, though this figure includes a small element of double counting. More than half came from VCOs (59%), with local authorities (22%) and other public bodies (12%) being the two other significant categories, demonstrating good achievement of the target mix. The people who came were policy shapers and makers, service developers and service deliverers. A small number were there in various individual capacities.
- 3.44 The research team collected feedback from people as they left the workshops, and subsequently evaluation interviews were held with 10 people who had attended them. Both these sources show that the participatory workshops were a valuable way for a substantial majority of the participants to increase their understanding and knowledge about participation. The detail of this is discussed in Chapter 5.
- 3.45 The process aspects of the workshops were also encouraging. Undoubtedly one of the key themes from this is the power of working with others interested in similar issues to think through mutual challenges.

*"This (the workshop) was one of the most active and creative parts of the project. I felt strongly connected to it. The workshop brought people together with the same interest but applied in all sorts of fields. Working together and thinking together was very good. My own role is relatively isolated. A day working with other people was good."*  
 (Participant, Suffolk local participatory workshop)



- 3.46 The workshop feedback invited people to say what they had found most useful and/or enjoyable. In both Suffolk and Leeds the sharing of ideas and experience through group discussion and plenary sessions came top of the list. Typical comments were *"the opportunity to hear other people's comments about the way things are done"*, *"the opportunity to test ideas with people from other perspectives"*, *"just discussing similar experiences"*, and *"hearing how other people deal with participation"*.
- 3.47 In Enfield, the most important thing was networking: *"networking"*, *"meeting people from different organisations"*. Networking was also important in Suffolk, but it is interesting that networking was mentioned by only one participant at the Leeds workshop. Perhaps organisations interested in participation are already better networked in Leeds than in the other two fieldwork area locations.
- 3.48 Workshop feedback forms also asked people about the least useful/enjoyable aspect of the workshop. Of the substantive responses, the most frequently occurring concerns relate to the presentation (14 of the 72 participants who completed forms). Reasons were a lot of information (too much) and not enough time to absorb it, problems getting across the messages, and the findings being insufficiently clear.
- 3.49 Evaluation interviews with people who attended show a similar pattern. Six out of the ten interviewed commented negatively on some aspect of the presentation. Their thoughts included *"too theoretical and not enough detail"*, *"the results were very preliminary and people didn't understand their relevance and how they could be used"*, *"too much indigested information"*, and *"presentation needed to condense findings to increase focus"*. This parallels the concerns of the project team that results were being shared before they were sufficiently digested for clear presentation.
- 3.50 From the research perspective, the project team regard the participatory workshops as *"hugely valuable and interesting"*, and consider that they greatly aided the analysis and development of findings. Not least, preparation for the workshop obliged the team to think through key issues and relevant findings before drafting of the full research report commenced. The timing meant that workshop comments were fed into both the later stages of analysis and the final report.
- 3.51 The team also sees benefits from the process aspect, though they acknowledge that there were difficulties. *"It was a big ask, and people were far more comfortable talking about their own professional experience of participation than our findings"*. Their hope and expectation is that the workshops initiated a process of reflection which will lead to changes in practice.
- 3.52 From the evaluation perspective, the participatory workshops offer some interesting insights. First, participants place a huge value on opportunities for reflection and sharing. They are energised and exhilarated by such events, and by the networking opportunities they present.
- 3.53 Secondly, the material used was still in the early stages of analysis and findings were only part developed. Researchers found it hard to communicate them and participants experienced difficulty in understanding. There is a classic tension here for researchers between sharing ideas when they are still being formulated and can therefore be influenced by comments made, or waiting until they are better formulated, and thus more easily communicated, but less likely to be influenced through explorations with stakeholders.
- 3.54 Thirdly, findings were extensive and complex. It was a challenge for workshop participants to remember them, and think about their applicability, in the course of a

single workshop. This reinforced a tendency for participants to fall back on their own professional experience rather than to make use of the findings during the discussions following the presentation.

- 3.55 Fourthly, the level of experience of shaping, managing and/or undertaking participation was very varied amongst the different participants. This meant that the types of ideas generated varied substantially in terms of how specific and relevant they were.
- 3.56 Finally, such workshops can help create the potential for people and organisations to come together and work for change. But moving from findings to action is a long process, and would need significant local development work for the research to lead directly to practice change at the local level. This project has gone much further than many others do in communicating its findings at the local level. However, as discussed later in the report, it was not an action research project. The project can only leave responsibility for developing new approaches and taking actions with the local VCOs and statutory organisations.
- 3.57 Overall, the workshops represent a significant stage in the work, and an open sharing of findings with local participants. There is a lot of learning for processes used in future projects and key points are contained in Box 3.

**Box 3: key process learning from the local participatory workshops**

- When discussion of complex and nuanced findings is to be an important part of the process (for example at a workshop), prior distribution of a summary of findings would help participants to be prepared before they arrive. Not all would read them in advance, but having a number present who are familiar with the findings can help to improve discussion, and makes participation easier for those who have taken the time to investigate the scope of the findings before coming to the workshop.
- It is easy to be over-optimistic about bringing about organisational change. At best, one workshop can be no more than the beginning of a change process. Whilst the approach showed that some successes can be achieved in this way, much more development work is needed over a longer period of time in order to embed findings and develop local responses.
- If research is to lead directly to local action, a facilitating/enabling process needs resourcing, including relevant development work.

- 3.58 The original intention was to hold a follow up workshop with local stakeholders in each area to review progress on actions identified at the workshops. However, prospects for running these successfully were constrained by:
- Their timing, which would have coincided with a period when many organisations in the local VCS, including the umbrella organisations, were experiencing a drop in funding. There were redundancies in these organisations and in other key stakeholders. Remaining staff had little time for further engagement on PtP and reduced staff/ other resources to take forward the ideas.
  - The project team was very stretched, with pressures due to time over-run and the complexity of the analysis
  - Elapsed time since the participatory workshop meant that there had been an insufficient period for substantive changes to have been implemented.
- 3.59 In discussion with LSG Chairs and the Advisory Group, the project team decided that running such a workshop would not be appropriate in the circumstances. Instead, a

local review event was held following the final LSG meeting. Others who attended the participatory workshop were invited to join the LSG for lunch and a discussion of future priority actions. Despite low turnouts, there was some evidence of actions taken and planned, and the project team left feeling hopeful that fieldwork areas will take some things forward (discussed in Chapter 6).

### **Reporting**

- 3.60 The research process moved from analysis to drafting of the final report. Team members produced initial drafts in cross-organisational pairs, then everyone had a chance to comment and re-draft.
- 3.61 Drafting took much longer than anticipated, and time for examination and review of findings was more limited than anticipated. Some members of the project team would have liked more time for refinement and development of the draft. A senior employee of one of the partner organisations who was interviewed for the evaluation considers that there was insufficient time as the process moved to development of a first draft stage. In particular, there was no opportunity to make use of skills and knowledge within the wider organisational structure (i.e. beyond the research capability) through involvement of senior people able to use their experience to shape the findings. Such involvement could have helped to contribute more for policy makers on questions of 'so what?', and 'now what?'
- 3.62 There is nothing unusual in a research team feeling under pressure over production of the final report. In this case, the situation was exacerbated by time over-runs in earlier stages of the research. The pressure in the period from the end of the analysis to the drafting of the report suggests that there is a need for project design to include an explicit 'review and development' phase for thinking about the results and discussing them within the team and the sponsoring organisations.
- 3.63 Drafting involved collaboration between researchers and managers, and across three organisations. It is difficult to write well together (common style, sticking to agreed structures etc) but this has been achieved. The report and the summary report make good use of individual life stories. There are excellent diagrams which achieve clear and simple illustration of the themes in the text without reducing the quality of the thinking. The findings are therefore well communicated, which is essential for a good research outcome.
- 3.64 Views on the scope of the content, and reactions to it, are in Chapter 5.

### **Overall organisation of the research and the collaboration**

- 3.65 The project team unanimously described the strength and closeness of the working relationships that were established during the research as one of the most important aspects of the experience. These were variously described as open, collaborative, bonded, supportive, trusting, and able to sustain the discussion and exploration of issues, ideas and challenges. All project members could be involved in design and delivery of the research, without a dominant organisation or personality. NCVO was the lead organisation and provided project management, and so took the ultimate responsibility, but managed to work in ways that ensured equality between the lead organisation and the rest.
- 3.66 These effective relationships were established and maintained despite the fact that two of the three research officers left during the course of the project, with only one staying the whole time. Furthermore one of the initial managers was replaced due to her

maternity leave and did not return. Such changes, with consequent building of new relationships, are almost inevitable on such a long project and have to be accommodated. They did cause disruption to the PtP research and analysis, and contributed to some deadlines being missed. However, the impact was minimal, suggesting that the whole process was well managed, with high levels of commitment to PtP from those involved.

- 3.67 Good project management also meant that processes worked well for external partners to the research. One Advisory Group member reported that *'Every meeting had a clear process, clear paperwork and of a high standard. It felt worth my time to come along to meetings.'* (Minutes of Final Advisory Group Meeting, September 2011). Stakeholders in the local areas also mentioned prompt papers, organised meetings, and everything being done on time as characteristic of their dealings with the PtP team.
- 3.68 Whilst collaborative working is valuable, it is hard to achieve and has high costs. It takes time to build a team and the necessary trust for real collaboration. Getting it right has meant that PtP has been able to draw on the skills of all the organisations, with substantial beneficial outcomes for the partners.
- 3.69 Process outcomes benefitting the research partners, many of them unanticipated, include:
- Significantly strengthened relations between the three organisations. They have learned from each other's experience and understanding, and have explored their differing perspectives on common issues.
  - Extension of the research capability of the individual organisations by exposing them to different research approaches.
  - Exposure to the thinking of the other organisations has led to a widening of the perceptions and views of the individual organisations, enabling them to recalibrate their own organisational thinking.
  - Stronger relationships between three organisations that between them focus on different aspects of participation can be expected to be of long term value to all those interested in the question of participation.
  - The research has helped the partner organisations to move in new directions. For example, NCVO has developed a new publication 'Participation: trends, facts and figures' which is being well received and is a quantitative sister to sit alongside the PtP project. Involve is interested in pursuing tool kits, for example to help with dealing with conflicts between groups
- 3.70 The research partners are currently exploring new opportunities for collaboration.
- 3.71 There were also process outcomes for the project team. Most revolved around learning, and can be summarised as follows:
- Extension of research capabilities, for example in handling and analysing large data sets, how to tackle challenging problems ("how to jump in the deep end"), how a big project differs from a smaller one.
  - Understanding the role of communities and organisations as user groups, and how important they are.

- How to get to know and work with a local community.
- Understanding of the importance of not promoting outcomes that cannot be delivered, and being very clear about that up-front.
- Confidence to develop and tailor research methods and tools to suit the requirements of the research being undertaken, and not to be afraid of it.
- Development of website and communication skills.
- Learning how to find and recognise ideas that have mileage for the analysis and presentation of findings, for example looking at linkages and the ideas that need exploring.

### **Reflections and learning**

- 3.72 The research process produced a valuable literature review which included an analytical framework for examination of people's experiences of participation. It identified the three contrasting fieldwork areas and explored the local context for participation in each. 101 interviews provided a picture of a diversity of participatory activity across a wide spread of people, and in a wide variety of personal and organisational situations.
- 3.73 Emerging findings were shared with local stakeholders in participatory workshops in the fieldwork areas. The research process culminated in the production of the findings. At the same time it delivered a number of unanticipated benefits to the researchers and the three research partner organisations alike.
- 3.74 Specific learning points are in Boxes 1 to 3. In addition, it is worth reflecting that:
- A well designed literature review provides many valuable contributions to a research project. The systematic review of relevant material assists with better definition of the research task and can provide the material for development of necessary theoretical underpinning.
  - Life stories are a valuable research tool. They also create challenges for the analysis.
  - Dissemination of findings through workshops is a valuable way to communicate findings at the local level. It requires a very clear focus on the scope of the material to be shared (how wide and how deep to go in presentation of findings), and the key elements to be got across to the audience. Not least, local audiences from service delivery organisations are likely to be most interested in findings that they can apply in their own work.
  - The drafting of a final report can benefit from a reflective pause at the end of the analysis to review and develop the findings, and share them with relevant experienced people from within organisations participating in the research to further enrich the findings and develop the emerging reporting.
  - Turning research findings into applicable changes of practice at the local level is a major task which will often require local development work. Research findings sow seeds, but much needs to be done to turn them into early action.

- Well constructed and managed research brings process benefits to the participating research organisations as well as the expected research outputs.

## 4 Learning from stakeholder engagement and the communications process

### Introduction

- 4.1 From its earliest days, the team identified that 'success of the project will depend on good research methodology and design, but also on its capacity to engage and communicate effectively.' (Communication Strategy, Paper 6 to Advisory Group, June 2009, p1). Good communications are an essential requirement for success in the project's aim to influence policy and practice at national and local levels. This chapter explores the engagement and communications aspect of the project. A summary of evidence for the chapter is in annex 2.
- 4.2 In part, the emphasis on communications was a response to BIG's own desire to ensure that research findings are appropriately disseminated, and that policy and practice is influenced as a result. It was also the consequence of the culture of the three participating organisations. A project which shared findings across voluntary, community and public sectors, and with relevant policy makers, commentators, funders and academics, was an opportunity to use their respective contacts and communicate with the widest practicable audience.
- 4.3 Two main aspects of the stakeholder engagement and communication process can be identified:
- Dialogue with research stakeholders: This was done in the three local areas during and after the research, and was intended, in part, to secure engagement in the project and facilitate sharing of findings. A key element was formation of a Local Stakeholder Group (LSG). Members of the LSGs were also amongst those participating in the processes of area selection, area profiling, activity mapping and local participatory workshops (Chapter 3). Each of these contributed to the participatory nature of the project as well as being essential to the research methodology. Nationally, there was also stakeholder dialogue during the research process through the national Advisory Group.
  - External communications during and after the research: This involved getting in touch and staying in touch with a wider audience (national and beyond) as the research progressed in order to share interim and final research findings, gather views, and build interest in the final report.
- 4.4 The project team identified three main categories of audience for the research: policy makers (e.g. government departments, politicians), policy implementers (e.g. voluntary and community organisations, service providers, local authorities) and policy influencers (e.g. umbrella organisations, advocacy groups, academics, media). In determining relative priorities, a key factor was the capacity of organisations to cascade findings and recommendations to a wider public, for example, their own constituents and networks. Local and national infrastructure organisations were seen as particularly important. (Communication Strategy, Paper 6 to Advisory Group, June 2009, p2-3).
- 4.5 The approaches used for engagement and communications comprise a mix of traditional approaches and newer social media. They are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: principal components in the stakeholder engagement and communications process**

Task and aims	Methodology/ approach
<b>Communications with the three fieldwork areas</b>	
<p><b>Dialogue with fieldwork areas through a local stakeholder group (LSG):</b></p> <p>Aimed to strengthen local engagement in the project and enhance its impact through formation of LSGs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of LSG with representatives from different stakeholder categories; sizes</li> <li>• LSG was 9 in Suffolk, 14 in Leeds and 15 in Enfield</li> <li>• Process of selection began with local umbrella organisation for VCS and spread progressively wider</li> <li>• Involvement of LSG in all aspects of the local research, so they could help inform and advise on the project locally</li> <li>• Use of stakeholder group to facilitate contacts in the area</li> <li>• Use of meetings, website, email to provide feedback/maintain engagement with LSG members</li> <li>• Chiring of LSG by local umbrella group for VCS.</li> </ul>
<b>Local participatory and follow up workshops</b>	See discussion in Chapter 3
<b>External communications with users of the research</b>	
<p><b>External communications during the research</b></p> <p>Aimed to communicate with potential users of the research throughout the research period, and beyond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of a dedicated website</li> <li>• Production of a quarterly newsletter, distributed electronically and available on the website</li> <li>• Preparation of specific briefing papers</li> <li>• Presentation and sharing of work at conferences and workshops</li> <li>• Promotion of research through contacts with relevant organisations</li> <li>• Providing website links to relevant external resources (e.g. Government papers, briefing papers)</li> <li>• Promotion of the research and its findings with appropriate others (e.g. government officials at relevant meetings)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication of final research findings</b></p> <p>Aimed to present and share the findings with the target users for the research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch for policy-makers, practitioners and academics</li> <li>• Press releases</li> <li>• Twitter conversations</li> <li>• Facilitating widespread access to report/ summary through the dedicated website and the sites of each partner organisation</li> <li>• Three national learning workshops and associated briefing papers</li> <li>• Presentations at events organised by other interested parties</li> <li>• Writing of blogs and articles.</li> </ul>

- 4.6 The following sections explore the principal tools and approaches used, and consider the benefits obtained for the project through their use.

#### **Dialogue with fieldwork areas through a local stakeholder group**

- 4.7 An LSG was established for each fieldwork area. This was to provide opportunity for

*'.....stakeholder representatives in each area i.e. policy-makers, public service providers, VCOs and other civil society organisations...to join a stakeholder group, which will follow the project and the research process throughout. The stakeholder groups will advise on the project in its understanding of the areas; facilitate access to interviewees; and refine lines of enquiry. They will also inform the communication and*



*engagement strategy, advising on knowledge transfer and exchange activities.'* (NCVO bid to BIG, page 10).

- 4.8 Terms of reference were given to LSG members at the start of the project (Box 5).

**Box 5: local stakeholder group terms of reference**

- Advise on the local development of the Pathways through participation project
- Enhance the project team's understanding of the local area
- Help facilitate access to potential research respondents
- Ensure that the research is informed by the best available local knowledge
- Act as local advocate for the project
- Help to identify and address potential issues
- Contribute to the design and undertaking of the research at the local area level, as appropriate.

- 4.9 LSGs began with an invitation from the project team to the local umbrella organisation for the VCS to chair the group. The team also ensured that the local authority was part of the emerging LSG. Umbrella organisations then helped to identify further LSG members, whilst others emerged through stakeholder interviews during fieldwork area selection. LSG members helped find recruits to participate in the activity mapping sessions and took part themselves. LSG meetings were held approximately once every three months, and emerging research findings were discussed at them as well as local matters requiring resolution.
- 4.10 LSG members also advised on invitees for the local participatory workshop, and the chair of the LSG spoke at the workshop to welcome people and introduce the day. From the start of the fieldwork through to the end of the research phase, LSG members provided the project team with local intelligence relevant to the execution and communication of the research.
- 4.11 A summary of views about operation of the LSGs from local stakeholder evaluation interviews and the project team is in Table 5.
- 4.12 From the perspective of virtually every LSG member interviewed, the LSGs were characterised by warm relationships and/or admiration and respect for the project team. Team members were described as *"warm"*, *"intelligent"*, and *"committed"*. *"They always delivered what they said they would do, and on time."* Working with them was *"highly enjoyable"* and *"the researchers couldn't have been better – professional, sensitive, fun."* None of these comments were solicited by the evaluator.
- 4.13 Most LSG members found membership of the LSG beneficial. For a large majority (7 out of the 9 interviewed), there were significant points of benefit including good discussions, networking and/or learning. From some (5 out of 9), there was also recognition of the value of the LSG approach to the overall research: *"It was a critical piece of the jigsaw to get buy-in, help with mapping, make linkages and spread the net. It did this very well"*. (Chair, Local Stakeholder Group)

**Table 5: summary of evidence regarding use of a Local Stakeholder Group**

Source	Summary of evidence
<b>LSG members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtually all (8 out of 9) LSG members interviewed for the evaluation thought the LSG process was well run, with good working relationships between the research team and LSG members. The remaining member did not comment on this aspect.</li> <li>• A majority of LSG members interviewed (5 out of 9) said the chosen approach to the LSG was productive overall.</li> <li>• For the majority of LSG members interviewed (7 out of 9), being an LSG member was a valuable personal and/or work experience. Reasons cited were good discussion, some learning (to greater/ lesser extents), networking, and/or the value of exposure to new thinking <i>"it opened our eyes and ears to other peoples' values"</i>. Two LSG members (out of 9 interviewed) felt they learned little from taking part. A number thought their employer benefitted from involvement in a national project.</li> <li>• 3 (out of 9) members interviewed thought that the process made good use of the knowledge and experience of the LSG and was essential to the research. 4 thought that the project team could have made more use of LSG knowledge/ experience.</li> <li>• For several LSG members, staying connected was challenging. Meetings were infrequent and a lot happened between them. Irregular attendance by some members disrupted the flow of meetings for others.</li> <li>• 7 (out of 9) members identified a gap between their expectations of the LSG process/ research and resulting outputs, and what happened in practice. Issues included unmet expectations of local benefit, the extent of local involvement (insufficient), being unclear over the research remit and likely outcomes, and a perception that alternative research methods (e.g. action research) would have yielded better local benefits, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>"I had thought it was going to be action research where there is local change. I hoped it would deliver a problem solving group as an outcome. This neighbourhood needs a community forum and project ideas and approaches that inspire people. Instead we have got a theory report with no impact on the ground."</i></li> <li>- <i>"Our understanding of the point of departure was wrong. I had expected the work to be more locally focussed and to be concerned with improving things locally."</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Project team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers built positive relationships with LSG members (particularly the umbrella organisations, and sometimes also with others).</li> <li>• The LSG was extremely valuable to the researchers in terms of the information and insights they offered and the contacts they were able to suggest.</li> <li>• The timescale of LSG involvement (c.18 months) was protracted, and the team worked hard to maintain involvement.</li> <li>• The current funding environment for the VCS and public bodies meant that it was challenging for some LSG members to maintain their interest.</li> <li>• A concern from one team member that the relationship with the LSG was one where the researchers were calling for responses rather than offering real engagement.</li> </ul>

4.14 LSG members had some concerns. In total, 7 of the 9 interviewed raised issues, which relate to two broad aspects:

- First, the role and operation of the LSG itself, including lack of clarity about role.

- Secondly, the understanding of the LSG about the nature of the research process and its intended outcomes.

4.15 The LSG approach brought challenges for the project team. Working with LSGs was logistically demanding. The necessary administrative work and communications consumed time and effort, and had significant opportunity costs. Despite substantial effort, it was difficult to maintain the interest of all LSG members, not least because of funding cuts which led to redundancies and reduced service levels amongst the organisations represented.

4.16 Notwithstanding such difficulties, the team spoke warmly about the LSG experience. From their perspective, LSGs made working in the local fieldwork areas much easier, providing information, insights and contacts. If the LSG approach had not been adopted, relationships would have had to be developed with key local players in other ways. Project team expectations from the use of an LSG in the research process were realised. It has therefore been a disappointment to the team to learn that LSG members have reservations about the approach. Lessons for future practice are clearly important.

### **Understanding the findings about the local stakeholder group**

4.17 The LSG was to provide a mechanism for local stakeholder engagement in the project; to give the project team access to local knowledge, organisations, and people; and to help communicate research findings to local organisations. It achieved all these things. Overall, the process worked well, was valuable to members and project team alike, and was characterised by excellent relations.

4.18 Despite this positive finding, it is important to consider the reservations expressed by some LSG members (para 4.14). The wider context is the overall success, as indicated in the following quote:

*"It was a productive project..... it has been done well. Therefore what I have to say (in the evaluation) is all in the context that this has been a real success. So my discussion is about learning how to make even more of a good project."* Chair, Local Stakeholders Group.

4.19 Comments on the role and operation of the LSG relate to a perceived lack of clarity about the role of the LSG, and the limited use made of their assembled knowledge and experience. The evaluation, however, showed that terms of reference were given to members, and good relations with the project team should have made it easy for any questions about role and operation to be raised. The project team made substantial efforts to keep the demands placed on LSG members to a minimum in view of their many other commitments. Given the overall satisfaction with the process, this area of reservation is not substantial, and could have been resolved through discussion, had the issues been raised. It points to the need for yet more open communications.

4.20 The comments on the nature of the research process and its outcomes are more complicated, and revolve around an expectation of (or hope for) more locally specific outputs. However, specific findings on or for the fieldwork areas were not intended research outputs. Numerous requests have been made for such differentiation, but the research was not designed to achieve area case studies. The progress report 'Situated practice: initial reflections on the organisation of participation' provided area-specific contents. Where possible, other local outputs were also created, for example write-ups of the participatory workshops. These outputs were posted on the PtP website so as to be available for both local and wider use.

- 4.21 While it was not intended to deliver outputs focused on local areas, it was expected that local stakeholders would benefit individually from learning more about participation and from the opportunity to explore implications of the research for them and their organisations. The project team always hoped that LSG members, in particular, would learn through their involvement in PtP, and would then lead local initiatives to develop local policy and extend local action. Chapters 5 and 6 draw in part on evidence from the fieldwork areas, and show that benefits have been experienced which will reap both individual and organisational longer term rewards. But it remains the case that more was expected by some members of the LSGs from the research outputs and outcomes in the fieldwork areas.
- 4.22 During the evaluation interviews, a number of LSG members attempted to address this issue of expectations by suggesting that the research questions would have been better if defined locally, which would then have led on to locally specific outputs/ outcomes. However, PtP was a national research project answering nationally defined questions.
- 4.23 The message that emerges from this, for all researchers working with local organisations and local communities, is that it is very important to spell out clearly what is intended, and to be prepared to do so many times over. This should involve the external researchers being explicit about what will be done, and also about what won't be done so as to develop a mutual understanding between them and the local stakeholders of the limitation of the process in hand and the intended outputs.
- 4.24 PtP did not have the resources to facilitate further development of the research findings and subsequent action in the fieldwork areas. Where this is to be a part of future research projects, significant additional funding would be required.

**Box 6: key learning regarding engagement and the LSGs**

- Effective working with local partners (in this case the local umbrella organisation and the other LSG members) is a key enabling factor in participation research at the local level which would have been much more difficult without their engagement.
- A process of snowballing, beginning with the umbrella organisation and the local authority, works well in finding effective and appropriate participants for such a group.
- Sustaining engagement at the LSG level is very difficult, particularly if the role is predominantly advisory rather than actively engaging and participatory. More regular contact, for example a monthly email providing key messages on research progress and practice pointers that could be inferred from it might help.
- Even when relationships are good, time needs to be taken to provide an opportunity for people to raise any queries or concerns that they may have.
- Absolute clarity is required over terms of reference, and also about what the nature and extent of local engagement and local research outputs. This should cover both what is to happen and what will not happen.
- Communication, engagement and development work is costly and needs full funding.

**External communications during the research**

- 4.25 External communications focused on raising awareness of the project and its findings across the categories of users identified by the project team (policy makers, policy implementers, policy influencers). Its aim was to influence policy and practice beyond the local engagement achieved through LSGs and participatory activities in the fieldwork areas. A variety of approaches were therefore used to communicate information and findings so as to increase its impact and national reach, and to start the wider process of exploring findings and examining implications.

- 4.26 Use of a dedicated website (<http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/>) has been central, both during and after the research process. It was the mechanism for communicating project progress. It included background to the research; news about current happenings; links to research documentation; opportunities to comment, contribute, and feedback. It had relevant news from other sources, for example updates on survey data and papers produced by other organisations, and links to relevant websites.
- 4.27 The value of the website has been enhanced by the linked use of the websites and newsletters of the three participating organisations who have posted information about the project and the project website, thereby cascading it to their own networks, and hence to a wider spread of organisations.
- 4.28 Data shows that the number of unique visitors to the PtP website has averaged 3,932 per month, and the number of visits averaged 5,356 (January 2011 to October 2011). As would be expected, numbers built up over time and September 2011 had the largest numbers of both unique visitors (6,378) and visits (13,373), coinciding with the launch of the final report.
- 4.29 An on-line readers' survey initiated by the project team (autumn 2010) had respondents from 53 organisations. Of these, 20 came from the voluntary and community sector (38%), eight from universities and other research organisations (15%), eight from local government (15%), plus a wide variety of smaller representations from government agencies, housing associations, lobbyists, the arts and others. This shows a good fit with the target audience for the research and its findings. Four responses came from overseas, suggesting a wider reach than anticipated.
- 4.30 From the evaluation perspective, the numbers of visits are substantial, as is the spread of readers. They demonstrate the value of a good website in a communications strategy. It can be difficult to run a website effectively because it quickly becomes outdated. In contrast, this one has been done well. It is visually interesting, and relatively easy to navigate. It makes use of a simple, but effective, 'identity', consistently applied across the website, and also the newsletter and all other project outputs. The website has been actively maintained during the course of the research, enabling it to retain interest. The difficulty of doing this by a team immersed in an interesting and demanding research project should not be under-estimated. It is an indicator of team commitment to communication of the research findings.
- 4.31 The PtP newsletter is an essential component in the communications strategy. It can be accessed through the website and is also distributed electronically direct to subscribers. Its aim was to keep interested people up-to-date with what was happening in the research. It includes, for example, interviews with local stakeholders in the fieldwork areas, information on the research team, and how to contact them. It also includes news items about relevant work by other organisations.
- 4.32 Seven issues of the newsletter were produced. During the project period, numbers of subscribers increased from 57 for letter 1 in September 2009, to 385 in March 2010, 858 March 2011, and finally to nearly 1,000 for letter 7 in September 2011.
- 4.33 Table 6 sets out findings from an on-line self-completion readers' survey (autumn 2010) on the value of the website and newsletters to the readers. Altogether, 53 readers responded, though they did not all answer each question.

**Table 6: findings on value of website and newsletter to readers**

Value to readers	No of responses website	No of responses newsletter
<i>How clear and easy to use are the website and newsletter?</i>		
Not at all: 1	1	2
2	1	0
3	2	4
4	12	11
Very: 5	8	12
<i>How useful have you found the website and newsletter?</i>		
Not at all: 1	0	0
2	2	1
3	6	6
4	9	17
Very: 5	9	5

4.34 These findings suggest that the great majority of those responding valued the material that they were able to access electronically, and found it easy to use.

*'By and large the material is accessible to the reader. Sometimes it gets a bit convoluted, but it is dealing with complex stuff. Overall I regard it as examples of good practice with respect to communicating ideas.'* (respondent, readers' on-line survey)

4.35 A particular benefit of electronic communication is that dialogue is possible. Use of the site for that purpose was less than the team hoped for, though adoption of twitter in the final year of the research increased interactivity, with the constraint that twittering limits depth of communication.

4.36 Research findings have been communicated as the work has progressed through briefing papers, reports and other papers. Some of this was publicised via the website and the newsletter, as described above. Formal documentation has also had its place (see list of outputs in Box 7). Whilst some of this was planned at the outset, for example the literature review, the great majority has arisen because the team had interesting perspectives about research methods and findings, and wanted to share them.

4.37 These interim findings and briefing papers have attracted considerable attention, and appear to be well thought of. The literature review, for example, has been downloaded 8,073 times (to 31 October, 2011), and has been cited 15 times in other publications. The findings have been extensively quoted and referenced in various publications/websites. Interest has come from local and national organisations, academia, think-tanks and the media.

4.38 Not only is the material well received, but again the value of good visuals is noted. *"Great stuff - keep it up. Reports are also visually very attractive which makes me want to read them!"* (respondent, readers' on-line survey).

**Box 7: examples of communication of findings whilst the research was done**

Interim findings and briefing papers

- Understanding participation: A literature review (January 2010)
- Briefing paper 1: What is participation?
- Briefing paper 2: What are the drivers of participation?
- Briefing paper 3: Who participates? (May 2010)
- Briefing paper 4: Why participate? (May 2010)
- Progress report – Situated practice: initial reflections on the organisation of participation (May 2010)
- Using participatory mapping to explore participation in three communities (June 2010)
- Strengthening participation (November 2010)
- Write-ups for the participatory workshops

Mentions of the literature review

- BBC news magazine (BBC, July 2010)
- Why do some people get involved (Young Foundation, August 2010)
- House of Lords debate on role of civil society (October 2010)
- The coming of the stranger: asylum seekers, trust and hospitality in a British city (UN Refugee Council, November 2010)
- Valuing young voices, strengthening participation (Local Government Association/ National Youth Agency, December 2010)
- The grassroots piece in the jigsaw (Renfrewshire CVS, 2010)
- Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes (Planning Aid, 2010)
- Who is ready for the Big Society? (Consulting Inplace, February 2011)

Conferences, workshops and events

- NCVO/SSN (Voluntary Sector Studies Network) annual research conference (Sept, 2009 and 2010)
- Social Research Annual Conference (December 2010)
- Mayor of London's Interfaith Conference (February 2011)
- People's Voice Conference (Yorkshire and the Humberside Empowerment Partnership (March 2011)
- NCVO and TSRC Big Society evidence seminar (October 2010)
- BIVAR (IVAR and Birkbeck College) seminar (March 2011)

4.39 An interesting point has been made about differentiating findings for different audiences.

*"I think you need to risk spelling (findings) out for different audiences. Some of the material (all of which is attractive) reads as if for a 6<sup>th</sup> former /1<sup>st</sup> year undergrad, and why not? But there are more advanced audiences."* (respondent to on-line readers' survey)

4.40 Project team members have also been active in presenting at conferences, and the events of others, as part of their wider communications strategy.

**Communication of final research findings**

4.41 The end of a project brings a strong emphasis on communications. In this instance, the final report and summary report were promoted to the subscribers of the newsletter and through the three partner organisations. A printed version of the summary report is available, and has been posted to 150+ opinion formers. The excellent quality of the report and its summary as communication tools was discussed in Chapter 3.

4.42 A breakfast launch was held in London. The project team felt that the presentations were well received. Overall, there has been a lot of interest in the reports. 1,702 downloads of the summary report and 1,612 of the full report were recorded during

September 2011. In addition, each partner has used the findings to inform their policy positions and promoted the project to the national policy-makers that it has contact with, including the Cabinet Office and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

- 4.43 As with the communications during the research process, the project team worked to extend the reach of the findings once the report was produced and to start national debate about their implications through an impressive outreach exercise. A number of articles (Social Research Association newsletter; HR and Training Journal Trust and Foundation News) and blog-posts have been written. Three national learning events were held as an extension to the launch. Their aim was to present and discuss research findings with a wide range of audiences, promote a process of thinking through implications of the findings, and enable stakeholders to identify actions they may want to take, plus actions that are needed more widely.
- 4.44 The learning events were:
- 'Volunteering as a participation pathway' which was led by IVR.
  - 'Local engagement in democracy' led by Involve.
  - 'National policy agendas and participation' led by NCVO.
- 4.45 The events were targeted at, and brought together, very specific audiences for the three different topics, so people were able to follow up areas of interest. The volunteering event, for example, invited small, medium and large volunteer involving organisations, as well as volunteer centres and other volunteering infrastructure organisations from local, regional and national levels.
- 4.46 Each event was chaired by the lead organisation. There was a presentation on a small number of relevant findings, followed by reflections on the research from three authoritative speakers from the field e.g. Stella Creasy MP, Justin Davis-Smith from Volunteering England, Hulya Mustafa from DCLG). These speakers were able to bring their own relevant, up-to-date experience to bear on the research findings and/or on the institutions, people and policies that influence participation. Discussions involving the workshop participants extended the thinking even further. These events have been shared with wider audiences through launch event reports posted on the web site, with links to blog sites that are taking the research findings further.
- 4.47 The learning event reports show that group discussions ranged over the challenges that the findings present, and used the findings to explore an extended spread of issues from participatory democracy to capacity building, from support structures for volunteers to empowerment, and from citizenship education to the importance of message and style in communications.
- 4.48 The only substantive negative comment that has been made about communication of the research findings relates to the location of the learning events. All were London based and were therefore not easily accessible to people further afield. The project team tried to remedy this by proposing one more workshop in Leeds in order to reach people from the northern regions, but this was not possible during the research period. It has been agreed that a speaker from one of the research partners will take part in a forthcoming relevant conference there, which will give another audience the opportunity to share the research findings.



- 4.49 Each of the learning workshops was accompanied by a targeted briefing paper which summarised relevant findings and examined their implications. Again, these have been made available to all interested parties through the website.
- 4.50 An unexpected benefit for the three research partner organisations was the opportunity that the learning workshops presented for strengthening their own organisations and raising their profile. It embedded the research findings into the organisations, helped them to reach new stakeholders and build them into their networks, and to extend linkages and opportunities for future working.
- 4.51 The project team has been approached by a number of organisations and institutions wanting to integrate discussion of the findings into their own events or to have face-to-face meetings. Current examples include London Civic Forum, a BIG staff seminar, Community Matters Localism Conference, NUS, UnLtd and NSPCC.
- 4.52 These examples represent the types of activity that the team has engaged in. They show how the team has gone out and offered opportunities, looked for ways to share findings with others, and has been sought out by others. A wide range of approaches and communication channels have been used.

### **Reflections and learning**

- 4.53 The team vigorously pursued its engagement and communications strategy. In consequence, communication of findings happened as research proceeded, as well as at the end. This takes a lot of work to set up and to keep going. It is difficult to do on a consistent and diligent basis when the research makes so many other demands. The team have performed very well, showing clear understanding of the value and importance of communication and engagement, and of appropriate ways to do it.

*"The team valued disseminating to the participation sector – this was good practice and could easily have dropped off if the team had not been really committed. It is a highlight of the work"* (member of national Advisory Group)

- 4.54 Engagement in the project has been achieved through the LSG, through participation in other research activities at the local level (such as the activity mapping and the local workshops), through the extensive range of on-line publications and other material offered, and through the launch events and the associated documentation.
- 4.55 A good mix of conventional and electronic media has been used, with a substantial amount of face-to-face contact. This has enabled the project team to reach a range of audiences, and to give audiences outside London access to the findings and the discussions on them
- 4.56 At the local fieldwork area level, problems arose which appear to be largely due to miscommunication. Future research projects will benefit from noting the importance of being explicit about what will be done, and also about what won't be done, so as to develop a mutual understanding of the limitation of the process in hand and the intended outputs. They will also work to ensure that these messages are regularly repeated, and that any points of misunderstanding are raised and discussed.
- 4.57 Politicians, public servants, practitioners and academics alike, are interested in the topic of participation. As a result of the communications strategy, outputs have been referenced or quoted by a wide range of organisations and institutions from the VCS, academics and policy makers. Evidence, such as PtP newsletter subscribers,

suggests that the project has appealed to a wide variety of stakeholders from government departments to small community groups and individual activists.

- 4.58 The integration of the communications into the whole research process has been a hallmark of the work. The team has offered a challenging invitation to its target stakeholders to engage with the findings. By these means, a debate has been started which they hope will lead on to changes in policy and action.

## 5 Findings on greater knowledge of participation

### Introduction

- 5.1 The previous two chapters looked at the research and communication processes used by the project team. This chapter, and the next, examines results from the research. These results are explored in relation to the intended outcomes set out to BIG when the funding bid was made. Chapter 5 looks at learning that has taken place as a result of the research and its associated communications, and relates it back to the key stakeholders in the research. Chapter 6 then examines impacts flowing from that learning into wider participation and better services.
- 5.2 The relevant outcome from the research for this chapter is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: outcomes relating to greater knowledge**

Outcome	Additional details in bid
<b>Greater knowledge (of participation)</b>	VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers have a greater understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public attitudes and behaviours towards participation</li> <li>• People's pathways into participation and the factors that shape these pathways;</li> <li>• The opportunities and risks that public attitudes, behaviours and pathways regarding participation represent for their organisations, civil society and public life.</li> </ul>

- 5.3 In many senses this chapter is about the core outcome for the research. Unless a research project has led to greater knowledge and understanding, it cannot be said to have added to the sum of relevant learning. Furthermore, in the case of Pathways through participation (PtP), the wider project outcomes (wider participation and better services) can only be achieved if knowledge has been increased, and then successfully shared.
- 5.4 The evidence to explore progress has been collected from a number of the sources listed in Chapter 1. They include quantitative material from the readers' survey, and the questionnaire completed by the local stakeholders at the local participatory workshops. These give a broad spread of views. More nuanced, qualitative findings emerge from the evaluation interviews with local stakeholders, the research organisations and project team, the Advisory Group, and the funder (BIG).
- 5.5 Findings are summarised in Table 8 on the following page.

**Table 8: greater knowledge of participation**

Relevant stakeholders	Evidence of greater knowledge and understanding
<p><b>National stakeholders</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses to the readers' survey show that, of those responding to the question:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 28 out of 32 said the literature review helped develop their understanding/knowledge</li> <li>- 22 out of 29 said the newsletter helped develop their understanding/knowledge</li> <li>- 23 out of 25 said the website helped to develop their understanding/knowledge</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Responses to the readers' survey also show that project communications (e.g. briefing papers, newsletter, website) have encouraged readers to reflect on how they participate, how participation works in their local community, and how their own organisation views participation; a significant number said that it had informed their own research.</li> <li>• Discussions at the three national stakeholder events included wide ranging exploration of the findings, suggesting that the new knowledge set out in the presentation had stimulated a broad spread of thinking and making of new linkages between new knowledge, the implications of the research findings, the experience of the participants, all in a spread of operational circumstances.</li> <li>• Unsolicited comments sent to the project team on the report and summary are positive and supportive.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Local stakeholders</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local surveys of workshop participants showed that the workshop helped develop their understanding and knowledge of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>people's experience of participation?</u> 62 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> <li>- <u>people's motivations to participate?</u> 57 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> <li>- <u>barriers that prevent people from participating?</u> 47 out of 72 said a great deal/quite a lot</li> <li>- <u>what encourages participation?</u> 52 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participatory workshop participants were asked whether the workshop encouraged them to reflect on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>the way you participate?</u> 53 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> <li>- <u>the way participation takes place in your local community?</u> 58 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> <li>- <u>the way participation takes place in your organisation?</u> 58 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> <li>- <u>actions that can help develop and/or sustain participation?</u> 58 out of 72 said a great deal or quite a lot</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Workshop participants were also asked an open question on the key lessons from the research findings. These can be summarised as follows and are listed in order of frequency of mention:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- motivations to participate (more than twice the comments on any other topic)</li> <li>- the importance of direct/personal communication with potential participators</li> <li>- the different types of participation</li> <li>- barriers to participation</li> <li>- shaping factors and forces</li> <li>- the challenges and opportunities of working with volunteers</li> <li>- the research findings were as expected and reinforced understanding</li> <li>- the need for participation</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Evaluation interviews showed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The findings strongly resonate with local stakeholders.</li> <li>• The findings encourage thinking about the need to take action.</li> <li>• Some knowledge stands out in its impact: lifetime patterns of participation; why participation starts/continues/stops; linkages between types of participation.</li> <li>• All but 1 LSG member found great value in reviewing their knowledge and re-examining what they know; plus the value of the opportunity the research findings provide to reflect on own practice re participation at work and personally.</li> <li>• Some stakeholders would have liked findings to go further and develop thinking/ outputs on what the findings mean for different sorts of organisations and groups.</li> </ul>

**Table continued overleaf**

**Table 8: greater knowledge of participation (continued)**

Relevant stakeholders	Evidence of greater knowledge and understanding
<b>The partner research organisations and members of the Advisory Group</b>	<p>The partner research organisations and Advisory Group feel that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The research is rigorous and robust, and has developed a new dialogue around participation</li> <li>• Real value of the research is that it combines looking over time and across different parts of participation, and at the linkages between them</li> <li>• The findings therefore offer new insights; they haven't been brought together in this way before and they are available for practitioner consumption</li> <li>• There is still a lot to learn; analysis and learning to date can and should be developed further in the future</li> <li>• There is a missing depth of analysis in some areas e.g. greater depth on factors shaping participation would help to answer the question of 'what next?'</li> </ul>
<b>Project team</b>	<p>Project team members feel that they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gained a thorough understanding of the different activities within participation, and made the connections between them (eg civic, volunteering, public participation)</li> <li>• Developed an understanding of the factors that influence individuals in their participation journey and of the linkages between them</li> <li>• Deepened understanding of the actors and forces in a local area (the stage) where participation takes place</li> <li>• Developed a strong framework for understanding of participation as 'situated practice' i.e. situated in time/space/place; relating to who does it, how they do it, where they do it, and who they do it with</li> <li>• Learned that practice is far from perfect; people often operate in silos; there is a disconnect between policy-makers, politicians, practitioners, and individuals.</li> </ul>

### Greater knowledge amongst national stakeholders

- 5.6 The principal routes for national stakeholders to access the research findings have been through the website, the newsletter, the launch of the final report, and through the national learning workshops.
- 5.7 Evidence to date demonstrates that these users of the research outputs have developed their understanding and knowledge of participation through the findings. For example, the data from the on-line self completion questionnaire shows that more than four-fifths of respondents found that the literature review helped develop their understanding and knowledge; just under two-thirds said that the newsletter did so; and over nine-tenths said the same for the website.
- 5.8 Just as interestingly, users have found the findings encourage them to reflect on their experience of participation in their personal, own community and work organisations.
- "I was already familiar with aspects of participation and the theories underpinning it. But the material in the literature review and the briefing papers has significantly broadened my understanding and, at times, challenged my attitudes (for the better!)"*  
(Respondent to on-line readers' survey)
- 5.9 Further evidence is available from comments made on evaluation forms at the end of the national learning events. National stakeholders were asked if the workshops had encouraged them to reflect on topics which follow on from the presentation and discussions at the workshop. There was variation between the questions (see Table 9), but overall it can be seen that the very great majority of participants had been encouraged to reflect either a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot'.

**Table 9: responses from the national stakeholder events**

Has the workshop encouraged you to reflect on:	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
<b>'Local engagement in democracy' event</b> (15 respondents)				
The language/ image of local engagement in democracy	2	11	2	0
The practice of local engagement in democracy	3	10	2	0
Accessibility of local engagement in democracy	2	12	1	0
<b>'Volunteering as a participation pathway' event</b> (31 respondents)				
How volunteering relates to participation	7	16	8	0
The way participation takes place in your organisations	5	20	5	1
Actions that can help develop and/or sustain participation	5	19	5	2
<b>'National policy agendas and participation event</b> (9 respondents)				
Giving time and money	2	5	1	0
Decentralisation of power	3	4	1	0
Delivery of public services	1	4	4	0

- 5.10 The quality of the discussion during the national learning events (as shown by the reports posted on the website) also shows that the research findings add to the evidence base on participation and can feed into current debates around the potential for participation to be expanded.
- 5.11 Finally, comments about learning by national audiences came into the project team unsolicited during the course of the research, particularly since the publication of the final report and the summary. These are positive and supportive:

*'I've just been reading the excellent summary report of Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?' I recognised and agreed with every well chosen word! Your range of points .....all rang a bell of Big Ben proportions. Now we have to push this report on to a few others!'* unsolicited email of appreciation, (Neighbourhood Community Development staff member, English local authority).

### **Greater knowledge amongst local stakeholders**

- 5.12 Local stakeholders who attended the participatory workshop were asked to complete a questionnaire about the event. Of the 120 who came to workshops, 72 replied. Some questions were left unanswered by a small number of the respondents. As with the national stakeholders, the picture of learning that emerges is very positive (see table 8). For example, 86% of people responding (62 out of 72) said that their understanding and knowledge of people's experience of participation had developed a great deal or quite a lot. With respect to motivations to participate, the figure was 79% (57 out of 72 respondents).
- 5.13 Workshop findings showed the areas of learning most valued by local stakeholders at the event. They were:

- Motivations to participate and the barriers to participation
- The different types of participation, from volunteering to ethical consumption
- The shaping factors and forces, based on the life stories.

5.14 Several themes emerged from interviewees' comments during the evaluation interviews. All show satisfaction with the findings and the learning:

- Findings are recognisable from, and 'resonate' with, their experiences (both personal and at work) of workshop participants
- Findings are recognisable from, and 'resonate' with their existing knowledge; they reinforce and extend existing knowledge
- Findings, combined with the activities at the workshop, encourage a review of both knowledge and practice which naturally leads into consideration of practical actions which can be taken as a result.

*"For me, it has been more of a revision course. Being reminded of all the things I know, but that are now at the back of the brain. It is a very good reminder that voluntary organisations need to keep remembering why particular individuals get involved and stay involved, and why they react the way they do."* (Chief Executive, VCS umbrella organisation and Chair of an LSG)

*"My own views and understanding of wider participation have been reinforced by what I have learned. I am on the right path. It has helped me to consolidate my thinking, and with how to talk about it to others and ask questions about how we can take it all forward in our work place."* (Local stakeholder present at a participatory workshop)

*"It has backed up and reaffirmed my knowledge relevant to my own sector. That is the need to get the right people to participate; that getting the wrong people is damaging, and that volunteers need regular support and supervision."* (LSG member, present at local participatory workshop)

5.15 The evaluation interviews also suggested that some of the new learning from the research has been of greatest interest. Those getting special mention included the progression of involvement over time (lifetime patterns of participation); the pathways taken; why participation starts, continues or stops; and the linkages between types of participation. They show that the extent of learning and the application of that learning varied from person to person because each brought different life experiences to the workshop.

*"My own knowledge has increased very much – both extending and widening. I have been struck by how out of touch I was with some of this in my professional life. And perhaps most importantly it has reaffirmed why it is important that I do things locally."* (LSG member and community activist)

*"My understanding of participation was already good. But this has provided new insights, particularly that the different levels of participation are fascinating and variable. I am now able to conceptualise and explain it all much better."* (Community Development staff member, English local authority, present at participatory workshop)

5.16 People reported being enriched and challenged by the findings.

*"I used to think that you had to be young and left wing to be effective, and the research has challenged this view very successfully. People participate for different reasons. There is a motivator at each stage for each volunteer. I used to ask 'are you a political animal, a communitarian or what?' But now I know that greens and religious people are just as committed as those with political motivations. The common link is that people want to make a difference."* (LSG member).

- 5.17 It is also notable that there were a number of local authority employees for whom the findings were particularly pertinent. They were from authorities where there is an increased interest in making use of volunteers as a way of maintaining and improving service delivery, and came to the workshop with the specific objective of increasing their knowledge. There were also people at the workshops from local authorities that are responding to the localism agenda by thinking through new ways of working with their local communities. Evaluation interviews suggest that they too hope the findings will influence both policy and actions.

*"I went to find out what the Council can do as an enabler of participation, in particular how we can support our members on the topic of enabling the community with respect to self-help delivery. It was really good and gave me enough information to feel that it had been worth attending. It will influence our work on localism, and the findings will become the basis for working with members about how they work with their community."* (Neighbourhood Development Officer, English local authority, present at a participatory workshop)

### **The partner organisations, the project team and the Advisory Group**

- 5.18 For the partners in the research, and also the Advisory Group, the prime focus was on the research – 'what could be learned?' – and following on from that, 'how can it be applied?' The first priority was the research and how good it is.
- 5.19 There is a high level of confidence in, and satisfaction with, the research findings. They are seen as rigorous and robust. Key components in the knowledge gained include:
- The understanding of the breadth of participation.
  - The centrality of life stories to the findings and the value of basing research on in-depth life stories; this is seen as highly relevant to BIG and to others with an interest in the nature of participation and how it can be harnessed in community engagement and development.
  - The combination of a look across time with a wide spread of participation types, and the linkages between them.
  - The factors that influence individuals in their participation journey, and how these operate at different times in the life-cycle; much of this was new learning and represents one of the key components of the research output.
  - The understanding that underpins the framework of participation as 'situated practice' i.e. situated in time/space/place, relating to who does it, how they do it, where they do it, and who they do it with.
- 5.20 For the project team in particular, the whole project has been an extended learning period, with opportunities to gain new knowledge and understanding both from the research and from the contacts with stakeholders. Each team member brought to the project considerable prior knowledge relating to participation. However, the breadth



attached to the term 'participation' during the research meant that each had the opportunity and the necessity to extend their knowledge in significant ways. In consequence, all team members have a project legacy of a thorough foundation of understanding across the spectrum of participation considered in the research.

- 5.21 It should be noted that a great deal was also learned from the research and communications processes (see Chapters 3 and 4).
- 5.22 The project took a decision to extend learning further through the appointment of an independent evaluator. The evaluation has been valuable in prompting reflection among the team, especially on stakeholder engagement and achievement of agreed outcomes.
- 5.23 The research and its findings largely reflect the assumption that participation is 'good'. However, there are forms of participation which do not contribute to a more just and equitable society, for example gang membership and religious extremism. There is awareness from amongst the research team and the advisory group that it would be valuable to explore the research data to see if information can be assembled about participation outside social norms which can challenge the normative assumptions and further illuminate what participation is achieving in practice.
- 5.24 There are also aspirations to make use of the findings in other ways. One partner in the research suggested that the research report should have gone further towards answering the questions of 'so what?' and 'now what?', and that this would make the findings more directly relevant to a number of the key stakeholders, particularly in government and other policy making organisations. Since this comment was made, the briefing papers produced for the national stakeholder workshops have made some progress towards this.
- 5.25 The question of influence is important. The research timing has been very fortuitous for the three research organisations in terms of helping them to extend and reinforce their area of influence. They have an opportunity to inform and challenge the Big Society and localism agendas, based on a good understanding of participation and robust evidence.

### **Review and reflections on learning**

- 5.26 The project team has produced a convincing set of findings. They have drawn together aspects of participation not previously examined in this way. They have conceptualised the material in a way that is new, and very broad. They have looked at the factors that enable and constrain participation at the individual level – social, cultural, and life-stages. Each individual life story is complex, but they have drawn out the factors and the context to explain participation more generally.
- 5.27 The findings are impressive, and so is the way that they are presented. The link between communications and research results is an important aspect of the success of the PtP project, as is the use of individual life stories. Together, the life stories tell us that participation is different for each individual; grows out of life experiences and skills; is rooted in communities and life-stage; and is often outward looking, interactive and rewarding.
- 5.28 A notable fact in the consideration of learning from the PtP project is the extent to which stakeholders feel at ease with the findings. They recognise at least parts from their own experiences at work or in their personal lives or, indeed, both. The findings contain little that is a complete surprise, but there is a lot that fills in gaps and extends knowledge, and it is available for practitioner consumption.

- 5.29 It has emerged from the evaluation findings that users talk about the value of reflection when they think about new learning. Something which promotes reflection and consideration is valuable in its own right. The PtP findings and the explanatory models illustrated by diagrams, combined with the approaches to sharing the knowledge, have promoted this reflection as well as new learning. They have helped to access and review knowledge already held, and to lead on to thinking about new or improved actions.
- 5.30 The outcome promised to BIG provides a useful framework for a final reflection on learning. As a result of the PtP research, do VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers have a greater knowledge of participation?
- 5.31 The first dimension of this refers to knowledge of public attitudes and behaviours towards participation. Findings on this topic are central to the research. The unit of data collection and analysis was the individual, but findings are presented so that they reveal the patterns and characteristics of participation across the broad spread of people and of activities. Both the presentation of the material and the feedback from stakeholders indicates that knowledge about attitude and behaviours has been significantly enhanced by the PtP project.
- 5.32 The second dimension of the knowledge outcome concerns greater knowledge of people's pathways into participation and the factors that shape these pathways. Again, the value of the research material and its contribution to knowledge is clearly evident.
- 5.33 The third dimension is the opportunities and risks that public attitudes, behaviours and pathways regarding participation represent for their organisations, civil society and public life. The research has offered a new framework of understanding for stakeholders interested in participation. However, more development work will be needed to apply the findings in specific contexts and to particular organisations. The research findings have provided the material to stimulate thinking, and the communications have opened up opportunities for discussion. More on achievement of this outcome can be anticipated as the findings become more widely known and more deeply considered.
- 5.34 In summary, greater knowledge of participation, and a linked stimulus to reviewing present thinking, are demonstrable outcomes from the PtP project. The next chapter looks at the extent to which this has been turned into action.

## 6 Actions that will contribute to 'wider participation' and 'better services'

### Introduction

- 6.1 The task of this chapter is to examine what has happened, or is planned to happen, as a result of greater knowledge about participation. It explores the second and third research outcomes set out to BIG, relating to changed practice to promote wider participation, and to better policies, services and activities. These outcomes are set out in Table 10.

**Table 10: outcomes relating to wider participation and better services**

Outcome	Additional details in bid
<b>Wider participation</b>	VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers provide meaningful support for participation and improve mobilization, recruitment and retention of supporters/participants, enabling them to strengthen communities.
<b>Better services</b>	VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers engage more effectively with people allowing them to formulate policies, services and activities that meet people's needs and expectations, benefiting individuals and community well-being.

- 6.2 They are long term outcomes. They will require time and resources which lie beyond the scope of the research project. Their achievement will build on the new knowledge discussed in chapter 5 but cannot be demonstrated so soon after the lifetime of the research. Contributions to these outcomes are therefore investigated by looking at the available evidence for actions that have been taken or are being considered as a result of the research. The evidence is limited in scale and is often more about expectations than current practice. It is the best available so soon after completion of the research.
- 6.3 Sources of information for this chapter include the on-line readers survey, information gathered from the participatory workshops (both local and national), and information emerging from interviews with LSG members.
- 6.4 Before turning to this evidence, an issue that was raised a number of times needs to be examined. A number of stakeholders in the fieldwork areas, both from the LSGs and from the participatory workshops, have commented that they would have liked the findings to go further and to develop thinking on '*what works best*'. Some of these would have liked digested findings tailored to people working in specific organisations or for specific local application in the fieldwork areas. Typically, they wanted answers to such as "*what does this mean for our area?*", and "*what next to make something happen?*"

*"For me the good bit was looking at the progression of involvement – changes in activities over time and what influenced it. What would have then helped would have been to do work on how other agencies could apply the findings, such as the NHS or VCS organisations. We need both sectoral application and local level application. It is important to take the work forward and apply it in order to make it worthwhile."* (LSG member)

- 6.5 Again, it needs to be recalled that the aim of PtP was always to communicate an understanding of the findings as widely and effectively as the resources permitted, and

to stimulate discussion of 'now what?' amongst research stakeholders. The research could only go so far, and it was for practitioners and policy makers in their various capacities to pick up the research and take it forward. This is returned to in the final chapter.

### **Actions by national stakeholders**

- 6.6 These are the stakeholders who have accessed the research findings through the website, the newsletter, the conferences/seminars the team presented at, and/or the national learning events.
- 6.7 Some information from these stakeholders is available from the on-line readers survey. This survey was undertaken when the only research findings published were derived from the literature review, and little time had elapsed for findings to have fed through into participation policy or practice. What there is, however, is evidence that the findings are valuable and likely to lead to changes. One comment made in the survey provides insights:

*"My use of the material relates to my employment rather than my volunteering life. But it has made me think v hard about the way I am involved in participation, and the new thinking that I have been doing will be used by me and the organisations I am involved with in the future (i.e. it is too soon for it to inform our policies and practices as yet, but it will feed through)." (On-line readers survey)*

- 6.8 A number of organisations have been in touch with the research partners since publication of the findings. They are interested in thinking through the specific implications of the research for their own organisation. For instance, the NSPCC is looking into how the findings can be operationalised and integrated into their volunteering strategy. Other organisations such as Community Matters and London Civic Forum have used the participation framework to inform their own research, and UnLtd is looking to see whether a similar life story methodology could be applied to the area of social entrepreneurship in order to improve their understanding of social entrepreneurs' trajectories and the support they provide.
- 6.9 Additional evidence comes from evaluation forms used at the end of the national learning events. Out of the 55 responses received from participants, 50 also said that they could see opportunities for sharing the findings. The most frequently mentioned were colleagues and partner organisations, but mention was also made of websites, e-bulletins, blogs, through training, funding applications, and peer support groups. Such sharing helps to disseminate the findings more widely, and to prepare the ground for joint implementation of changes to policies or to the way that things get done.

### **Actions by local stakeholders in the fieldwork areas**

- 6.10 The local stakeholders in the fieldwork areas have had the longest and deepest exposure to the findings, and their comments have contributed to the development of the research. This is particularly true for LSG members:

*"Nobody comes to a stakeholder meeting and goes away and says 'that was a waste of time, I haven't learnt anything' because they always feel as though they've come away with something new, and that their work is going to change as a result of that engagement, and I think that's only going to grow as the project moves forward."*

Interview with Richard Jackson, Chair of Leeds Local Stakeholder Group, PtP Newsletter 4, September 2010

- 6.11 In all three fieldwork areas, the umbrella organisations for the VCS chaired the LSG. The evaluation interviews show that there is considerable interest amongst these umbrella organisations, and from their peers on the LSG, for the umbrella organisation to take a lead on moving forward the research at the local area level. It is not yet clear how this will be done, and for all of them there are substantial resource constraints. It can safely be assumed that each area will develop in its own way. Perhaps the most significant point is that there is real hope that the involvement of the areas in the research will lead on to lasting benefits, though currently the outcome is uncertain.
- 6.12 Research findings and implications have attracted significant interest from the local authority partners in the fieldwork areas, both through their participation in the LSG and through attendance at the workshops. One authority has set up an inter-departmental Volunteering Forum linking departments in the authority that use volunteers (sports development, libraries, parks, culture). The Forum had already met three times by mid July 2011. The aim is to share both experiences of volunteering and the material being prepared for use with/by volunteers across the departments so as to avoid duplication of effort, increase understanding of volunteering, and provide a place where ideas about volunteering can be shared.
- 6.13 Others are particularly interested in how the findings fit in with their community involvement work and emerging thinking with respect to the Big Society.
- "In terms of informing policies, it is a little too early to say - but we do wish to take forward the work coming out of the pathways to participation project in (... ) as it fits in very well with a range of other initiatives coming out, for example our residents priority fund, and community capacity fund, as well as our efforts in area regeneration more generally."* (local authority employee and member of LSG)
- 6.14 The evaluation interviews give glimpses of how workshop attendees are using the findings now and intend to use them in the future (see Box 9). They range from renewed personal motivations to participate through to specific actions in voluntary sector organisations.
- 6.15 More information about future action has emerged through the pledge cards completed at local participatory workshops. Analysis in one of the locations shows that the key themes for action are:
- Developing/ extending networking of community organisations and activities
  - Encouraging volunteering, and making it easier and more inclusive
  - Getting more strategic to become more effective
  - Taking actions to apply PtP learning in both the fieldwork area and across the whole local authority area.
- 6.16 Whilst this evidence is scanty, it suggests that the findings are stimulating thought and actions amongst people who have had access to them. There is always a lingering question, however, about how far thinking and planned action turn into something more tangible. At the local participatory workshops, participants were asked to fill in a 'pledge' postcard with a particular action that they wanted to take forward. The project team posted these back two months later. As part of their follow-up to workshops, the research team surveyed workshop participants, and one of the questions asked if they had been able to take the action forward? 20 people responded and, of these, half said yes.

**Box 9: examples of use of findings by local stakeholders**

*"I came away feeling committed and reinforced in the value of what I do, and how worthwhile it is to keep trying."* (attendee at local participatory workshop and local authority employee)

*"It has been helpful to my organisation for me to be at the workshop. It has encouraged us to widen the way we see volunteers – breaking away from fixed roles for volunteers to widening their roles in response to needs, where before we would have said no to requests for help because the needs didn't fit into our neat boxes."* (Local volunteer co-ordinator for a national voluntary sector organisation and attendee at local participatory workshop)

*"It has unlocked thinking and knowledge that I already had so that it can be applied more creatively."* (individual attending local participatory workshop and activist in multiple forms of participation)

*"I am already an activist, but I had burnt out with volunteering. Now I'm toying with getting back involved. It's linked to my own life phase. I can take a less emotional view of where to look for opportunities. I'm hoping to get enjoyment from whatever I choose."* (local authority employee and member of LSG)

*"I have already used the knowledge to persuade (.....) that training is required for volunteers, and also that volunteers are reliable and trustworthy even though they are not paid"* (VCO employee and attendee at local participatory workshop)

*"During the workshop I had a 'light bulb' moment regarding advertising volunteer vacancies. I have moved it on to the powers-that-be in my organisation."* (VCO employee and attendee at local participatory workshop)

*"It has already made me think about how volunteers can be used in..... – addressing what we do, and what we would have to do to go about recruiting them."* (local authority employee and attendee at local participatory workshop)

*"I have already used the learning in my personal volunteering capacity. I adopted the face-to-face 'just ask' approach to recruiting a volunteer and it worked, even though the vacancy had been advertised for quite a while."* (attendee at local participatory workshop, local authority employee, and volunteer governor of local FE college)

6.17 Some respondents explained why action had not happened, for example: *"Changes in organisational priorities have put the exercise on the back burner for the time"*. Others commented on action they had taken, as follows:

- *"I wanted to expand volunteering opportunities within the Borough, and that I have now achieved"*
- *"A Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum has been developed to support council staff with responsibility for/ are working with volunteers. The Forum meets monthly and is attended by an average of 10 staff."*
- *"I made contact with (local VCO umbrella organisation) and have linked this with our Volunteer Manager, and we have recruited volunteers to a new volunteer post that we have created."*
- *"I made a suggestion for volunteer vacancies to be advertised in our national magazine and this will be taken up in due course."*

## Review and reflections

- 6.18 The data on which this chapter is based is inevitably indicative rather than certain, but enough information can be assembled to start to draw conclusions. From the above paragraphs it can be seen that there is every reason to be optimistic about the fact that action will happen as a result of the knowledge produced by the research.
- 6.19 The specific outcomes offered in the research bid relate to wider participation and better services. Much of the material discussed here relates to the wider participation outcome. The early indications are that VCOs, public service providers and some policy makers will use the findings and embark on ways to support participation, with an emphasis to date on volunteering, though this emphasis may change as the impacts of the national workshops start to feed through. It has been a successful approach to link the knowledge outcome and the wider participation outcome, and even in these early days potential changes in thinking and action can be seen which will translate into stronger participation.
- 6.20 The bid makes reference to 'strengthened communities' as a result, but it is too soon to make any comments on relevant achievements. From the evaluation perspective, it would be very challenging to demonstrate a link between changed practices with respect to participation and strengthened communities, not least because the research findings will be one element amongst many operating in areas of change and it is unlikely that benefits could be attributed exclusively to the research.
- 6.21 The final outcome specified in the bid to BIG refers to 'better services'. This is about VCOs, public service providers and policy-makers engaging more effectively with people so that their needs and expectations are met, benefiting individuals and community well being. This requires long term cultural change in a spread of institutions. Whilst it can be hoped that some aspects of the findings ultimately become one of the factors bringing about the changes needed to ensure better services in the way described, it is far too soon to find evidence, and probably over ambitious as an expectation of an outcome from the research.
- 6.22 Finally, it is an important characteristic of the research findings and the way they have been communicated that they lead the reader or the workshop participant on to consider the implications for their own work, organisation or participatory activity. This emerged very strongly through the earlier chapters, particularly in chapter 5, and is demonstrated again here. It is a major success of the PtP project that the findings and the routes to communication and engagement capture the user, who then goes beyond the stage of thinking "very interesting", only to put the findings to one side. Instead, the user is asking powerful questions which lead to action, namely "what next?", "what can I do?", and "how can we make it happen?".

## 7 Review and conclusions

### Introduction

- 7.1 The previous chapters have examined the processes used for the research and identified the outcomes to date. They have provided a summary of the immediate benefits and achievements. Further outcomes can be expected as the research is assimilated and leads through into practice.
- 7.2 The Pathways through participation (PtP) research has been ambitious in its scope, in the way it has linked and interwoven the research with external communications and engagement, and in the achievements it targeted in the outcomes submitted to BIG. The project team has carried out the work in a transparent and exemplary way in the very great majority of respects. The evaluation in the previous chapters shows that this is an outstanding piece of research.
- . *"It is a tremendous job, and they should be very proud."* (member of Advisory Group)
- 7.3 This chapter summarises the key elements in its success and reflects on overall learning points to emerge from the evaluation.

### Clarity of purpose

- 7.4 From the outset, the project team was clear that this was a research project addressing a gap in knowledge about participation. The principal output was new knowledge, which included a framework to enhance understanding of participation.
- 7.5 The team adopted a wide definition of participation, where previously researchers had looked at individual aspects such as volunteering, community development, and public consultation in planning. It covered aspects which many people had not previously thought of as participation, including ethical consumerism and donating to charities. In so doing, it widened the concept of participation into one relating to social and civic engagement. This broad concept of participation meant that the researchers looked at activities and influences in a more holistic way than hitherto.
- 7.6 The findings are impressive, and substantial interest is created through the use of the life story approach. A major strength of the research is that it looks at participation from the individual's perspective.

### The centrality of communications

- 7.7 The PtP project also aimed also to influence policy and practice. There was, therefore, a strong emphasis on communications and engagement throughout the life of the project. Excellent writing and diagrams are characteristic of the written material produced by the project. The research and summary reports, and the targeted briefing papers stand out in terms of how they communicate the findings. Good use has been made of a website, newsletter, and networking opportunities. Local and national events were used to share findings, explore their implications and identify actions that might be taken as a result. Added value came from the way the three research partner organisations were able to draw on own contacts, thereby spreading the reach of the research project.
- 7.8 The communications and engagements aspects of the project were consistently pursued, even when they presented logistical difficulties for the project team. It has



demonstrated that good communications require diligence and persistence, but bring real benefits in initiating processes which will embed findings in target users, and enable people to take ownership of the findings and the actions that they have identified.

- 7.9 The link between communications and research results is an important aspect of the success of the PtP project. This is good practice, and should become standard practice for researchers whose findings have practical application.

### **Findings have links to practice and policy**

- 7.10 The research findings are relevant to organisations promoting participation, from voting through to volunteering. They have practical application. They are already leading on to reassessments of existing practice, and to thinking through the potential for alternative approaches and actions. The value of the findings has been enhanced through the engagement with national and local stakeholders.
- 7.11 There is more work that can usefully be done with the findings in the local fieldwork areas and more widely. This needs to be taken forward but is not part of the PtP project.
- 7.12 The advent of the Big Society and localism agendas means that many service delivery agencies and active organisations in local areas are looking at participation, often particularly volunteering, as a way to deliver their own aspirations. There is therefore substantial interest in the findings from organisations and people seeking to change and extend service delivery in new ways.

### **How participatory was it?**

- 7.13 PtP was a research project, but it was not an action research project which would have had different objectives and demanded a completely different design and methodology. It was, however, set up to work in participatory ways at both national and local levels so that there would be more stakeholder ownership of the findings. Some of the specific research tools chosen by the research team for use in the local fieldwork areas, for example the local activity mapping, were participatory, and the terms of reference for the stakeholder groups suggested a wide range of potential roles.
- 7.14 The stakeholders most involved in the research were the members of the Local Stakeholders Groups (LSG). Despite terms of reference and close working relationships between the project team and the LSGs, a number of members were disappointed that the local implications and application of the research findings were not developed to a greater extent than they were. They had not shared an understanding with the team that local action was a subsequent task for local organisations rather than a part of the PtP project.
- 7.15 The research team have drawn a number of key lessons from this for use in future research framed around clarity of intention and persistence in keeping in touch on a regular basis. This represents a statement of good practice, the majority of which the team worked hard to implement. An alternative to this would involve extended participatory elements, such as researchers (or others) moving to a facilitation role once the findings were published, working with the LSG and other local stakeholders on the implications of the research for the local area, and helping with development of a local action plan. This would help with capacity building in the fieldwork areas and

increase the likelihood of sustainable impacts from the research in the fieldwork areas. Such an approach would require substantial additional funding.

### **Methodology and time over run**

- 7.16 The project was broad in scope and its objectives were very ambitious. It presented many challenges. A group of issues resulted from decisions about the approach to the interviews and the size of the sample. There was a significant time over-run. Analysis then took longer than expected, resulting in reduced time for the development of findings and drafting of the various parts of the reporting process.
- 7.17 In the case of PtP, the approach taken produced very good results, as the evaluation has shown. However, other approaches may also have produced good results through a modified route. Researchers need to be very upfront about recognising the time and financial costs of their chosen methodology and considerate of the opportunity costs of their decisions.

### **Summary on achievement of the outcomes proposed to BIG**

- 7.18 Despite the short timescale since completion of the research, there is already evidence that the PtP project has contributed to increased knowledge in ways described in the outcome proposed to BIG. The other two outcomes are essentially longer term. From the outset of the project, it was apparent that the research would be unlikely to yield significant results in this respect during, and immediately after, the lifetime of the project. However, reach of findings is the first, and necessary, step towards achievement of the outcomes, and in this respect the team has done a great deal to achieve it.
- 7.19 Reflection suggests that the outcomes set out to BIG in the research grant bid were unrealistic. In part this is due to the natural optimism which is common at the outset of research projects. It also relates to the BIG application form which was designed for capital or service delivery projects rather than for a research application, with a consequent emphasis on the outcomes to be achieved. Achievement of the proposed outcomes has also been made harder by the economic context which has seen significant cuts in VCS and other service providers. In the circumstances, the fact that so much has been achieved can be attributed to the determination of the project team and the relevance of the research findings.
- 7.20 BIG are aware of the issues arising from their application form, and a new one is being designed. For researchers, there are messages that it is safer practice to clarify that achievements will be limited, not least by timescale, and that evidence is likely to be in the form of indicators of change rather than demonstrable change itself.

### **Unanticipated outcomes**

- 7.21 The achievements of PtP have only been possible because of the overall approach. It successfully, integrated the research with the communications and engagement aspects of the project. An additional benefit has been that this enabled the three partner organisations to achieve outcomes that were not anticipated:
- Collaborative research has built stronger relations between the three organisations. This has enabled each to explore their differing perspectives on common issues, and to recalibrate their organisational thinking in the light of experience gained.

- The high profile of the research has helped them to raise their organisational profile and move in new directions.
- The contact with a wide range of organisations established through the local and national stakeholder events has enabled the partner organisations to extend their networks of influence.

7.22 Finally, it can also be anticipated that the stronger relationships that have been built across the relevant sectors will be of long term value to all of those interested in the topic of participation.

## ANNEX 1: REVIEW OF STEPS IN RESEARCH PROCESS

Source of data:

- interviews with project team
- interviews with other stakeholders in the research process
- web-based feedback from users

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Literature review:</b></p> <p>Aimed to develop a 'framework of participation' to inform fieldwork and contribute to an understanding of the multiple dimensions of participation.</p> <p>It explores and links relevant studies to build an understanding of participation.</p> <p>The review has three key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the drivers of participation</li> <li>• how people understand participation</li> <li>• participation in practice (what, who, how, why)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• successes more substantive than expected from a literature review</li> <li>• the 3 categories of participation provide a way to look at participation more broadly which positively challenges people's thinking and gives the opportunity for people to look at participation beyond their own professional silos</li> <li>• outputs include a full review plus 4 shorter briefing notes</li> <li>• provides framework for later work as intended</li> <li>• outputs well received by people wanting to make use of a wide spread of information on participation</li> <li>• enabled researchers to familiarise themselves with relevant issues and topics and have a common understanding</li> <li>• approach adopted for collaborative drafting and review set the approach for later stages of work</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• individual members of the LSG valued the contents and used it for personal learning and revision</li> <li>• excellent feedback from website users (see annex 3)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a topic which is very broad in character and not fully defined creates problems in how to approach the task of a literature review</li> <li>• time taken for research and editing exceeded budget</li> <li>• a collaborative approach to a literature review requires significant management time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• literature reviews can be time consuming and challenging and need proper allocation of researcher and management time</li> <li>• the approach to a literature review is not necessarily well understood at the outset and requires careful attention and review in the early stages to ensure that it is set up appropriately</li> <li>• appropriate documentation and dissemination of findings makes interim steps in research available and valuable to other users</li> <li>• the first step in a collaborative research process requires significant effort in team building</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Fieldwork area selection:</b></p> <p>Identification of 3 contrasting areas for data collection – inner city, suburban and rural</p> <p>Approach based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• desk studies using socio-economic and other indicators to identify a spread of potential fieldwork areas (9 in total)</li> <li>• review of practicalities e.g. travel distance for researchers.</li> <li>• assessment of willingness of these areas to participate through discussions with local VCS</li> </ul> <p>Following selection of the 3 areas, researchers worked with a broad range of local stakeholders and, with their help, selected a smaller neighbourhood for activity mapping and in-depth interviews.</p>	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• notwithstanding a number of difficulties, the approach taken to selection worked well, and researchers were satisfied with the areas selected</li> <li>• the choice of three areas gave confidence in the spread of results</li> </ul>	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• choice of a distant fieldwork area led to project management and organisational problems</li> <li>• care to achieve a spread of deprivation and ethnic diversity did not automatically lead to access to the relevant communities</li> <li>• the chosen rural area may not have fully represented rural aspects of participation due to presence of large housing estate</li> <li>• the final reporting was generic (did not distinguish between the 3 areas) and raises the question of whether a similar project could have been carried out in one area</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some concerns that , subsequently, the findings from the three areas were not differentiated, and so were three areas necessary?</li> <li>• there were challenges from stakeholders in one fieldwork area to the detailed choice of location which initially influenced local reception of findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a systematic and transparent approach to area selection reaps real benefits in terms of researcher confidence in locations for the empirical research, and hence in the research itself</li> <li>• even with the greatest care, some issues will emerge about the choice of locations which have to be dealt with on a local basis</li> <li>• three areas with a spread of activities and socio-economic characteristics gave confidence in the reliability of the findings which would have been lessened if the fieldwork was done in one area</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Fieldwork area profiling:</b></p> <p>Produced information to better understand the local context for participation and to prepare for subsequent data collection. It included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• area history</li> <li>• political structure and history</li> <li>• demographic, social and economic character</li> <li>• physical and environmental character</li> <li>• voluntary and community activity</li> <li>• informal networks</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very successful</li> <li>• area profiles provided essential background for the researchers</li> <li>• empowered team with respect to tools for neighbourhood profiling</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in at least one of the three areas, the profiling was strongly welcomed by the local authority because it provided information on an area that had not previously been a focus for local authority activity with local communities</li> <li>• in another, LSG members said they learnt from the project never to start a new project without doing background research on what has gone before.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the decision to keep maintain anonymity for the precise fieldwork locations meant that the results of this stage could not be widely shared</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• purpose of task was not clearly understood by a minority of LSG members who anticipated a more detailed study of the fieldwork area</li> <li>• LSG members would have liked to share the findings more widely but could not due to anonymity issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• useful approach, but could have been less detailed</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Activity mapping in fieldwork areas:</b></p> <p>Aimed to identify the range of local, regional, national and/or international opportunities, locations and activities for engagement in participatory activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a participatory tool was used, facilitated by the researchers, where participants collaboratively create an 'activity map' to describe and illustrate their community area and the activities that go with it</li> <li>• 1 session was held with LSG members and 2 sessions with key local organisations and residents</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interactive method worked well with most participants</li> <li>• results valuable to researchers</li> <li>• participatory approach drew new people into the PtP work, both as LSG members and interviewees</li> <li>• valuable as a sharing/ bonding/ engaging exercise for the LSG members</li> <li>• created opportunity for some researcher visits to other fieldwork areas which helped with understanding, which then led on to helping with the analysis</li> <li>• created the opportunity to do an extra publication to share approach and outcome with other practitioners which was also valuable</li> </ul> <p><u>Local stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a number of the LSG members found the session really valuable as it extended their own local knowledge</li> <li>• both local authority staff and people from VCS saw transferable potential in the tool for application in their own work e.g in neighbourhood renewal work</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there were recruitment difficulties and the recruitment was resource intensive</li> <li>• process still didn't provide a fully comprehensive picture of participation (limited by knowledge of participants) but the coverage very good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it was valuable to experiment with a new research method; it is important, however, to remember that what matters most is the outputs and outcomes</li> <li>• unexpected outputs and outcomes are beneficial results from a participatory exercise</li> <li>• a participatory approach is a valuable way to 'snowball' knowledge about a project in a local neighbourhood, and to make new contacts in project areas</li> <li>• participatory approaches are very resource intensive and require significant effort to achieve good outcomes</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>In-depth interviews:</b></p> <p>The aim was 100+ face-to-face interviews across the case study areas covering both participants and non-participants to explore individuals' stories of participation (i.e. their participation over time).</p> <p>The approach adopted was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• potential interviewees identified with the help of the local umbrella organisation and then snowballing</li> <li>• selection of interviewees by purposive sampling i.e. when taking the sample, rejecting people who do not fit a particular profile</li> <li>• sample stratified to ensure a diversity of interviewees, including age, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, socio-economic status, employment, residency, intensity of participation</li> <li>• sample also stratified to cover the identified categories of participation i.e. public participation; campaigning, advocacy and direct action; service to others and the environment; mutual aid/self-help; fundraising and giving; ethical consumerism; serious leisure</li> <li>• interviews made use of 'time-lines' which are a narrative tool which elicits biographical data by reflecting on different episodes in interviewees' life</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the majority view is that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the interviews worked well</li> <li>- the sampling frame was good; a good mix of interviewees who participate was achieved</li> <li>- the number of interviews provides credibility for the research</li> <li>- the use of time-lines was effective in facilitating conversation about events/ changes in people's lives and activities</li> <li>- the data collected was very rich</li> </ul> </li> <li>• researchers found the contact with the interviewees moving and enriching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "... a brief window of time when you have offered your curiosity and they have offered their stories"</li> <li>- "Going out and interviewing people – in their homes, in an allotment shed, in a theatre (etc) - and hearing people's life stories was moving, fascinating, inspiring and humbling, and reconfirmed why I enjoy research."</li> </ul> </li> <li>• largely seen as an excellent approach and that the research could not have been done so well in any other way</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• substantial support for life stories approach which produced in-depth material for individuals; "a great research method"</li> <li>• seen as appropriate for a piece of research aiming to explore personal motivation re participation</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a complex sampling frame to ensure a diverse range of interviewees; in consequence, recruitment difficult/ time-consuming</li> <li>• recruitment of non-participants almost impossible - none could be found; researchers ended-up cold recruiting</li> <li>• some interviewees focussed on their most recent episodes of participation and had difficulty recalling past experiences despite use of timelines</li> <li>• not all of the identified groups were penetrated (particularly BME and different faith communities)</li> <li>• one team member questioned aspects of the chosen approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- there was too much stratification - and it became secondary to the concern to recruit sufficient interviewees</li> <li>- 101 in-depth qualitative interviews was too many; depth/nuance of data not fully reflected in analysis/ write-up</li> <li>- completion of work delayed by 2 months due to interviewing challenges</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 101 in-depth interviews is demanding on researchers; it also generates a huge quantity of data for analysis</li> <li>• some comments that extent of stratification made the samples too small to be useful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whilst there will always be queries about sample size, having so many has given credibility to the research</li> <li>• loosely structured interviews produce valuable and diverse material; the challenge is to analyse and use this material in ways that do justice to the effort put in by interviewees and researchers</li> <li>• an alternative approach can be to do the full number of shorter interviews on a more structured basis, followed by a relatively small number of loosely structured interviews which can be mined for the insights and depth that they can provide.</li> </ul>



## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Data analysis:</b></p> <p>Analysis of interviews to explore and develop findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preparation of initial policy document to structure team thinking and brief interested parties on emerging findings</li> <li>• recordings of all interviews were transcribed</li> <li>• creation of 2 page vignette on each interview and development of the coding framework and</li> <li>• first phase of analysis making use of Nvivo software for management of qualitative data</li> <li>• second phase of analysis involved merging the researchers Nvivo databases and crosscutting analysis of interview transcripts + write up of each code</li> <li>• a participatory workshop in each fieldwork area to share findings (see following task)</li> <li>• a final phase of analysis which went into greater depth and pulled together findings on areas of specific interest such as linkages.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Project team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the approach worked well as a collaborative task between the researchers</li> <li>• the coding phase ensured that researchers were working to a similar framework of understanding and interpretation</li> <li>• Nvivo good as a data management tool, but some concerns over its role in analysis</li> <li>• production of the initial policy document helped think through the key issues</li> <li>• the analysis enabled us to explore participation in a holistic way even though that wasn't easy</li> </ul> <p><b>External stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"the most significant research task was the distilling of the data into findings and developing a useful narrative from that; team have done a fantastic job"</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Project team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the amount of data, combined with the wide scope/scale of the project made early analysis very challenging,</li> <li>• the process of transcription and vignette writing as a prelude to analysis, combined with use of Nvivo, was very time consuming and substantially increased the volume of analysis</li> <li>• the approach taken to analysis didn't facilitate exploration of the richness of the data gathered during the interviews</li> <li>• it was difficult to know when to stop the analysis because it always felt as though there was more to be learned</li> <li>• at times there was lack of clarity over focus of analysis</li> <li>• concern that insufficient focus was placed on getting out the key findings from the research and expressing them in ways that communicate them clearly</li> <li>• analysis stage over-ran; this squeezed time for developing findings/drafting the final report</li> <li>• confidentiality precludes us from sharing the data with others</li> </ul> <p><b>External stakeholders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the data holds considerably more information that could and should be mined</li> <li>• a number of local stakeholders expressed disappointment that research is national/generic, rather than in part specific to their fieldwork areas; they too would like to see the data mined further</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the extent of sample stratification had proved challenging (see previous task) and the data analysis did not make use of all the identified groups; clear identification of a smaller number of priorities required</li> <li>• verbatim transcriptions are not always useful and take up a lot of time; detailed note taking is a good substitute, leaving more time for analysis, thinking and drafting</li> <li>• preparation of vignettes valuable as way of seeing what is important out of a mass of data from in-depth qualitative research</li> <li>• there is value in stopping at the phase between analysis and drafting to challenge and discuss the emerging findings before drafting commences</li> <li>• analysis tools have limitations, and there is a need for researchers to develop and explore findings in other ways too (e.g. verbal and interactive)</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Local participatory workshops:</b></p> <p>A core part of the project, with the aims of answering three questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presenting research findings (what?)</li> <li>• providing opportunity for workshop participants to identify the implications of the findings for their own work locally and more widely (so what?)</li> <li>• enabling local stakeholders to identify specific actions they want to take as a result of the research (now what?)</li> </ul> <p>The approach was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participants invited from LSG, other local stakeholders and interested individuals and groups with the aim of hearing from a diversity of potential beneficiaries</li> <li>• a presentation was made of emerging findings</li> <li>• workshop participants explored the findings and their implications for their own organisations, working with others from the same local area</li> <li>• participants came from the LSG, other local stakeholders and interested individuals</li> <li>• in two fieldwork areas the workshop was a full day; in the remaining one, two half day sessions were held at the suggestion of the LSG</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hugely valuable and interesting</li> <li>• an effective mechanism for sharing and testing emerging findings which greatly aided analysis/ development of findings</li> <li>• recruitment of participants worked well; resulting participants came primarily from VCO (59%), local authorities (27%) and other public bodies (9%)</li> <li>• workshop structure, size, design and delivery was largely appropriate to the task and feedback from participants was mainly good</li> <li>• an interactive tool for recording and sharing possible actions worked well</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the very great majority of attendees at workshops said that they had increased their knowledge and been encouraged to reflect on participation (see annex 3)</li> <li>• inclusion of a presentation by a local 'participant' gave the concept of participation meaning and depth</li> <li>• starting to share ideas in the workshop sessions was valuable; overall the group work was good and valued highly by the participants</li> <li>• for a significant number of those attending in two workshop locations, the greatest value was in networking with others who are engaged in similar activities</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• original intention (3 workshops per area) was reduced to 1 per area</li> <li>• the findings were still preliminary and insufficiently digested for clear presentation; too much breadth and not enough depth</li> <li>• timing not good for researchers because it interrupted the flow of the analysis;</li> <li>• a gap between the research questions (personal motivations and barriers for participation) and the workshop focus on challenges that organisations face to facilitate and improve participation</li> <li>• the presentation was too wide ranging - not enough focus for participants</li> <li>• a very diverse group present in terms of knowledge, prior experience, and aspirations for the day which produced problems over the 'pitch' of discussions</li> <li>• some of the facilitated discussions were unable to penetrate to the level of specific implications/ actions</li> <li>• doing the workshops took much more time and effort than expected</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the level of the presentation did not suit all participants, and some left half way through the event</li> <li>• for a number of participants, the workshop did not go as far as they would have liked, so the practical questions about 'so what?' and 'now what?' remained unanswered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good techniques help, but they aren't everything</li> <li>• a good fit is required between research findings and the interests of workshop attendees for a participatory workshop to be fully successful</li> <li>• it is challenging to turn findings that are people based into findings that are action focussed and oriented to the practical thinking of many VCOs and public bodies</li> <li>• it is easy to be over-optimistic about bringing about organisational change, and one workshop can't do all that much on its own; however, the approach showed that successes can be achieved in this way, but that much more developmental work was needed over a longer period of time in order to embed findings and develop local responses</li> <li>• introducing participatory elements into a largely non-participatory project creates significant challenges of timing and resources; a participatory approach is resource intensive</li> <li>• if research is to lead to local action, it needs resourcing properly, including significant further engagement</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 1 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Local review event:</b></p> <p>Aimed to wind up the project in the fieldwork areas by discussing actions since the participatory workshop and providing an opportunity for local networking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lunch to thank the LSG for all their inputs</li> <li>• invitation to other workshop participants to join in a later review session</li> </ul>	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• despite low turnouts, there was evidence of action (albeit limited) as a result of the participatory workshop</li> <li>• project team left hopeful that fieldwork areas will be able to take some things forward as a result of their involvement</li> </ul>	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not very celebratory and a bit uncomfortable at one location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an appropriate way to thank the LSG and to discuss local dissemination and legacy was essential; invitation to others needed more local engagement prior to event to enable it to achieve its full potential</li> </ul>
<p><b>Final research report and summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• different sections allocated to different people who worked in pairs across the three organisations for the initial draft, then everyone had a chance to comment</li> <li>• considerable attention paid to the design of the report structure in the early stages of drafting</li> <li>• individual life-stories were integrated into the report to illustrate the findings and the richness of what we had heard</li> </ul>	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drafting was surprisingly painless, with good sharing of the task; ownership of a section was highly motivating</li> <li>• the documents are well written and draw out the main points from a wealth of data</li> <li>• views expressed during consultations (participatory workshops, advisory group) were taken on board and added considerably to the final product</li> </ul> <p>External stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it is a well founded piece of research</li> </ul>	<p>Project team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the amount of time taken in the drafting was much more than expected</li> <li>• the time spent on thinking about the implications of the findings felt too short</li> <li>• insufficient time to review and refine conclusions and recommendations as a whole, rather than as parts of individual chapters</li> <li>• faced the difficult challenge of wanting to say something about a lot of things which ultimately can result in less depth than might have been achieved with a more specific focus on what matters most</li> <li>• no time was built into the process to allow for developmental work with other people from the partner organisations; this could have added value and depth (from someone outside the project team)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (just like every research project) never under-estimate the time required for writing, and always include a contingency for drafting</li> <li>• a separate phase of thinking, after the analysis and before the writing, would create the opportunity to tease out what the research team really wanted to say</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 2: FINDINGS ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Source of data: interviews and questionnaires with project team, interviews with other stakeholders in the research process, web-based feedback from users

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>Dialogue with fieldwork areas through a local stakeholder group (LSG)</b></p> <p>Aimed to strengthen community engagement in the project and to enhance its impact through the formation of LSGs. Approach was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each fieldwork area allocated its own area-dedicated researcher and research manager</li> <li>• groups made up of a representative from each stakeholder category</li> <li>• process of selection began with local umbrella organisation for VCS and spread progressively wider</li> <li>• involvement of LSG in all aspects of the local research, so that they could help inform and steer the project locally</li> <li>• use of stakeholder group to facilitate contact in the area</li> <li>• contact with researcher through meetings, online interaction and email to provide feedback and maintain engagement</li> <li>• chairing of LSG by local umbrella group for VCS</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• area-dedicated researchers able to develop understanding and contacts</li> <li>• researchers found and recruited people from important local organisations</li> <li>• researchers built positive relationships with the LSG members (particularly the umbrella organisation, and sometimes also with others)</li> <li>• the whole team built up significant respect from LSG members – “friendly”, “committed”, “professional”, “fun to work with” and meaningful exchange developed at a personal level</li> <li>• the LSG was extremely valuable to the researchers in terms of the information and insights they offered and the contacts they were able to suggest</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LSG members found the researchers excellent: “warm”, “capable”, “intelligent”, “committed”, “fun”.</li> <li>• project was well run and involved good working relationships</li> <li>• for majority of LSG members (7 out of 9 interviewed), there was good discussion, learning (to greater or lesser extents), and /or networking</li> <li>• 3 out of the 9 members interviewed thought that the process make good use of the knowledge and experience of the LSG and was essential to the research</li> </ul>	<p><u>Project team</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the timescale of LSG involvement was protracted, and it proved hard to always maintain involvement</li> <li>• the current environment for the VCS and for service delivery (financial cuts) meant that it was challenging for some LSG members to maintain their interest</li> <li>• a minority concern that the relationship with the LSG was one where the researchers were calling for responses rather than offering real engagement, and that the LSG should have been involved in formulating the research question.</li> </ul> <p><u>External stakeholders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for LSG members, staying connected was difficult; meetings infrequent and a lot happened between meetings</li> <li>• irregular attendance by some members disrupted flow of meetings</li> <li>• just under half of LSG members (4 out of 9 interviewed) thought that the team didn’t make as much use as they could have done of LSG knowledge/ experience; LSGs didn’t challenge over this and weren’t pro-active.</li> <li>• 7 out of 9 interviewed expressed some concern over the LSG/research process and/ or the outcomes for the local area, ranging from a matter for reflection to a matter of considerable concern.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working with the local umbrella organisation and the other LSG members was a key enabling factor in the research which would have been much more difficult without their engagement</li> <li>• variations in levels of commitment are normal in participatory involvement and were to be expected because different</li> <li>• maintaining engagement of stakeholder groups over such a long time period is difficult to achieve and requires significant input from the person charged with maintaining the dialogue with the area/groups</li> <li>• need for absolute clarity over offer being made when engaging local stakeholders</li> <li>• need for open dialogue to ensure mutual understanding of what is to be done and what will not be done</li> <li>• communication, engagement and development work is costly and needs full funding.</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 2 (continued)

Task and methodology/ approach	Successes	Challenges	Learning for use in future research
<p><b>External communications during research</b></p> <p>Aimed to communicate with potential users of the work throughout the research period, and beyond. The aim was to influence policy and practice. It involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of a dedicated web-site to provide information about the research and give access to emerging documentation</li> <li>• a quarterly newsletter has been published</li> <li>• presentation of work at conferences and seminars</li> <li>• specific briefing papers have been prepared</li> <li>• promotion of research and its findings to relevant others (e.g. government officials)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communications were built into the project from the beginning and have been a distinctive and positive feature</li> <li>• use of a dedicated website was central to the communications; it was well-designed in terms of layout and aesthetics, and was maintained regularly</li> <li>• unique website visitors for the month of Sept 2011 reached 6,378, and total visits for the month were 13,373; this was the month of the launch of the research findings</li> <li>• the great majority of web site users report that it is easy to use and is useful</li> <li>• production of a quarterly newsletter has been successful with almost 1,000 subscribers for the final newsletter (Sept 2011)</li> <li>• briefing papers were posted as they were produced</li> <li>• attending conferences and other events spread the reach and influence of Pip</li> <li>• levels of interest in the project have convinced the team about the success of their approach to communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very time consuming when there were other pressures on the team, and required significant persistence</li> <li>• some problems with interactivity of website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• research is only valuable if people know about it, and widespread communication increases access and therefore impact</li> <li>• good feedback as the research progresses is valuable for team morale, and also at the end</li> </ul>

## ANNEX 2 continued

<p><b>Communication of final findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a breakfast launch for policy-makers, practitioners and academics</li> <li>• press releases</li> <li>• twitter conversations</li> <li>• writing blogs posts and articles</li> <li>• access to report and summary through dedicated website and the sites of each partner organisation</li> <li>• presentation of findings at events organised by other interested parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• launch well attended</li> <li>• lively twitter conversation on day of launch and since</li> <li>• each partner able to promote the findings to their contacts and spheres of influence, thereby extending reach</li> <li>• articles placed in relevant publications, again extending reach</li> <li>• whole process has raised the profile of the partner organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some critical press comment from people who appear not to have read the report</li> <li>• London-centric launch got negative comment from some quarters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need to keep on working at communications to get the findings and message out to a wider audience</li> <li>• positive feedback makes it worthwhile</li> </ul>
<p><b>National learning events</b></p> <p>Three national learning events, each based on an area of interest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• targeted at very specific audiences of people able to follow up on findings.</li> <li>• briefing papers produced relevant to each event.</li> <li>• valuable opportunity to share and discuss findings with knowledgeable users</li> <li>• has enabled the partners organisations to reach new stakeholders and build their networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London-centric focus of workshops got some negative comment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider locating one or more dissemination workshops in the regions in future</li> </ul>

### ANNEX 3: FINDINGS ON 'GREATER KNOWLEDGE' OF PARTICIPATION

#### National stakeholders: findings from on-line self completion questionnaire for users of web-site

1 = not at all; 5 = very		1	2	3	4	5	Response count
<b>How clear and easy are the following materials?</b>							
Understanding participation: a literature review		1	0	5	13	12	31
Newsletter		2	0	4	11	12	29
Website		1	1	2	12	8	24
<b>Have these material helped you develop your understanding and knowledge of participation?</b>							
Understanding participation: a literature review		1	3	10	5	13	32
Newsletter		0	7	10	11	1	29
Website		0	2	10	9	4	25
<b>How useful have you found the following materials?</b>							
Understanding participation: a literature review		1	1	8	6	15	31
Newsletter		0	1	6	17	5	29
Website		0	2	6	9	9	26

Continued overleaf

**ANNEX 3 (continued)**

**National stakeholders: findings from on-line self completion questionnaire for users of web-site (continued)**

	Yes	No	No answer	Response count
<b>Have these materials encouraged you to reflect on...?</b>				
The way you participate	25	5	5	35
The way participation takes place in your local community	29	1	5	35
The way your organisation views participation	26	1	8	35
Informed your organisations policies and practices	11	13	10	34
Informed your own research	28	3	3	34



**ANNEX 3 (continued)**

**National stakeholders: responses from evaluation forms at the end of the national stakeholder events**

<b>Has the workshop encouraged you to reflect on:</b>	<b>A great deal</b>	<b>Quite a lot</b>	<b>Not much</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>'Local engagement in democracy' event (15 respondents)</b>				
The language/ image of local engagement in democracy	2	11	2	0
The practice of local engagement in democracy	3	10	2	0
Accessibility of local engagement in democracy	2	12	1	0
<b>'Volunteering as a participation pathway' event (31 respondents)</b>				
How volunteering relates to participation	7	16	8	0
The way participation takes place in your organisations	5	20	5	1
Actions that can help develop and/or sustain participation	5	19	5	2
<b>'National policy agendas and participation' (9 respondents)</b>				
Giving time and money	2	5	1	0
Decentralisation of power	3	4	1	0
Delivery of public services	1	4	4	0

### ANNEX 3 (continued)

#### Local stakeholders: findings from evaluation forms at end of local participatory workshop

Responses to 'has the workshop...?'	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all	Total number of respondents <sup>1</sup>
<b>Helped you develop your understanding and knowledge of...?</b>					
People's experience of participation	17	45	10	0	72
People's motivation to participate	14	43	13	0	72
The barriers that prevent people from participating	12	35	23	0	72
What encourages participation	11	42	17	0	72
<b>Encouraged you to reflect on...?</b>					
The way you participate	17	36	14	3	72
The way participation takes place in your local community	14	44	13	0	72
The way participation takes place in your organisation	20	38	11	1	72
Actions that can develop and/or sustain participation	26	32	11	0	72

<sup>1</sup> respondents did not answer every question