

## **BSA Climate change study group: report of an informal discussion with DECC**

When the BSA climate change study group was launched there was clear interest in promoting closer interaction with 'policy' and we are grateful to DECC for opening what we hope turns into a long running 'conversation' about the relation between policy, social science and climate change. These notes summarise some of the issues discussed at an informal meeting between members of the BSA climate change study group and DECC (Adam Cooper, Matt Lipson and others) held in October 2012.

The afternoon began with a presentation from Adam Cooper, who explained that his role as 'Head of Social Science Engagement' has only existed for a year. Adam talked us through an organisational chart (see attached powerpoint show), pointing out where 'social science' questions and expertise were located in DECC. This also showed where social scientists were *not* to be found: e.g. despite long history in social studies of science and technology studies, the 'science' areas of DECC are untouched by this literature.

Adam went on to review the policy process with reference to the idea of a policy cycle: including stages like understand the situation, identify options, appraise options, prepare for delivery, etc. This opened the way for wider discussion of what 'policy' is, and who policy-makers really are, as distinct from those who implement policy, or provide analysis/advice. In narrow terms, policy-making is closely related to legislation or regulation. The cabinet office's 'green book' on policy provides one account of what policy making involves.

Adam also spoke about the Government social research service (through which social scientists are often recruited), and explained that economic research was separate. Matt and Adam consistently emphasised the importance of economics and economists who have a key role in evaluation and appraisal and related forms of research agenda setting across the board.

During the discussion after tea we talked about where social scientists have an opportunity to engage with DECC, and when and how these occasions arise. Examples included having sociologists on advisory panels for commissioned research projects (e.g. to advise on approach or method); being participants in social science 'led' events like the ESRC Festival of Social Science event, DAY 22 which was an exhibition, hosted by DECC, on the history and future of the indoor climate (set at 22 degrees C); and being used as sources of 'instant' input and advice, e.g. on estimates of public acceptance for proposed policies/technologies; likely responses to smart meters, etc.

Some of the challenges involved in providing social science input have to do with how questions are defined and framed, and hence with what counts as 'useful' or relevant knowledge for policy. We reflected on the dilemmas and lessons arising from a recent experience in which a selected group of social science experts refused to respond to a series of questions, partly because these were framed in ways that overlooked basic insights from the last few decades of social research. This was a positive experience in that it revealed the

need for longer term interaction and for social science input into how questions are framed in the first place.

As this discussion revealed, the issue was not only one of presenting social science ideas in a simple, easy-to-read form: other deeper challenges concern the ways in which research agendas are framed and the ideas on which they are based. Getting into this sort of detail depends on closer knowledge of policy-for-real: at which point we learned of Tim Chatterton's experience of the fellowship scheme which allowed him to spend time within DECC.

We talked, also, of the difference between short and long term interaction and influence, recognising that there are moments of opportunity, and also moments when pathways and problem-definitions are already set. From the outside of DECC (and perhaps inside too!) it is not always easy to know when the 'window of opportunity' for *ideas* is open, and when it is closed. There is no already established, informal, basis for long term interaction of a kind that would 'set the scene' in which specific debates and discussions/policy initiatives were formulated.

Finally, whilst most of the discussion focused on DECC, we asked about where and how local government fits into the picture, and how social science might contribute at that level. We also took the chance to reflect on the 'impact' agenda in academic research, and what this might mean for DECC.

Thanks again to Adam and others at DECC, and let's hope we can make this an annual event, and thanks also to Michael Kattirtzi (STIS - Edinburgh) for taking notes.

Adam Cooper invited anyone who wants to get in touch for further discussion:

Adam Cooper - Head of Social Science Engagement at DECC.

[Adam.Cooper@decc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Adam.Cooper@decc.gsi.gov.uk).

03000685268.