Connecting Policy with Practice

Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2014-15

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Executive summary

Policymaking in Whitehall can seem far removed from the reality of services on the ground. In an effort to address this, the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme has, for the last two years, connected policymakers in Whitehall with people who deliver services to support vulnerable groups. A partnership between the Big Lottery Fund and the Institute for Government, the programme came about to learn more from the Big Lottery Fund's innovative investments into creating better services for young people far from the labour market and adults with multiple and complex needs, as well as to explore a new method of open policymaking. Far from being an academic research exercise, the programme has drawn insights from pairs of policymakers and practitioners who worked together to solve problems and explore each other's worlds. A mix of workshops, roundtable events, visits and desk research also informed our conclusions.

In the first year of the programme we identified five 'disconnects' between policy and practice. Two of these disconnects formed the basis for research and learning in the second year of the programme. We set the policymakers and practitioners who took part two challenging questions to guide their work:

- How can we more systematically make better use of the assets, experience and engagement of service users in the design and delivery of services?
- How can we move towards policy and services that operate on the principle that complex problems require 'whole-person' solutions?

On the first question, of how to involve and engage service users, participants identified four pointers for improvement:

- **Match your engagement methods to your aims**. There are many ways of involving service users in policy and in services, from large-scale consultation to full co-production. Policymakers and service designers need to understand this range and pick the model that is most appropriate to their particular goal.
- **Know how to find your service users**. Effective engagement involves upfront effort to identify and reach out to service users – especially those labelled 'hard to reach' – in the most suitable way.
- **Ensure adequate resources and capability**. Ongoing effort is needed to ensure that service user voices are genuinely making a difference. Across different models of engagement this requires certain skills – whether it be the empathy of someone with 'lived experience' of services or the data skills needed by people gathering larger-scale customer insights.
- **Think carefully about your use of language**. Jargon, negative phrasing and labelling can alienate service users. Across all levels of the service delivery chain, professionals need to be aware of the effects of their language and work with service users to adapt and get it right.

On the second question, how to create whole-person solutions, participants also reached four potential answers:

- **Invest in local collaboration.** Joined-up services mean that different organisations must work well together. Establishing and maintaining effective collaboration takes time and skill that is not always accounted for in commissioning processes.
- **Get the central-local 'division of labour' right.** It is an essential part of the modern policymaker's role to understand what happens to their policy on the ground. As central

policymaking becomes more about ‘systems stewardship’ rather than top-down delivery chains, policymakers should become better at recognising the benefits of working at different levels within the system and think strategically about the distribution of powers and functions.

- **Be sensitive to problems around transition and continuity of services.** New national programmes can disrupt existing good practice and partnership on the ground if they are not co-ordinated effectively with local services or do not build in transition periods. Policymakers must be sensitive to existing arrangements.
- **Build the desire for whole-person services into the aims and processes of commissioning.** Commissioning can be an effective tool to encourage more joined-up working. We identified a number of models that could work, but commissioners need the right skills and understanding to use these.

Across both years of the programme we also learned that there is real value in connecting policymakers with the front line and vice versa. It can be a genuine ‘eye opener’ for them to see how different parts of the system operate. Shared problem solving and learning by experience generated different sorts of insights to what we might find in a typical paper-based research exercise. The programme also allowed participants to grow their networks and to deepen their understanding of policy and practice.

Introduction

The Connecting Policy with Practice programme is a partnership between the Big Lottery Fund and the Institute for Government. It brings together a cohort of Whitehall policymakers and voluntary sector practitioners who deliver services, to explore complex public policy issues and participate in learning activities. In this paper we reflect on the second year of the programme, presenting some of the themes and conclusions that programme participants have uncovered and drawing lessons about bringing these two sectors together.

In recent years government has committed to changing the way it makes policy – aiming to open out beyond Whitehall, collaborate with experts and practitioners on the front line, and understand better how policy plays out in the real world. At the same time the voluntary sector, often working with the most vulnerable people, continues to attempt to maximise support for its clients through the difficult period of austerity.

Background to the programme

This partnership between the Big Lottery Fund and the Institute for Government was launched in January 2013.[1] It was prompted by major new funding from the Big Lottery Fund in England – around £600 million (m) on a series of five strategic investments, over periods of between five and 15 years, to address the needs of some of the most vulnerable groups in society.[2]

These strategic investments are united by the principle of 'people powered change' – the belief that policymaking and practice can be radically improved by taking a more collaborative approach, starting from the vantage point of the user and building on people's strengths rather than addressing their weaknesses. The result is a series of highly targeted projects delivered by voluntary-sector-led partnerships of local organisations. The projects aim not just to support individuals but also to improve public service systems, to influence policy and to promote more collaborative ways of working locally. So the Big Lottery Fund is interested in distilling and disseminating lessons from these strategic investments into the policymaking process in Whitehall and beyond. In this programme we have focused on two of these strategic investments:

- *Talent Match* is a strategic investment supporting young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- *Fulfilling Lives* is a strategic investment supporting adults with multiple needs.

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[1] A discussion of the programme and of the Big Lottery Fund investments is available in our previous reports: Hughes, N., *Connecting Policy with Practice: People powered Change*, Institute for Government, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice>; Hughes, N., *Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2013*, Institute for Government, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice-people-powered-change>

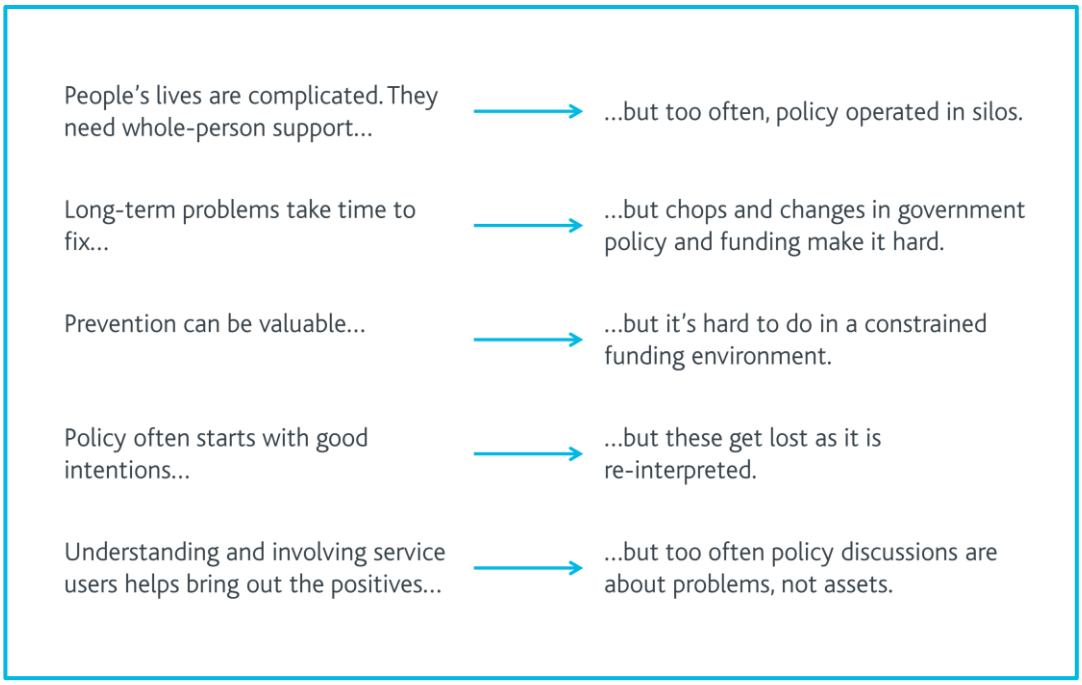
[2] These investments are: Helping young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs); Supporting adults with multiple and complex needs; Improving the life chances of vulnerable under-three year olds; Preventing social isolation among older people; Giving young people support and skills to cope with adversity and do well in school and life

The Institute for Government aims to help make government more effective, including through better policymaking and implementation, and improving commissioning. Working with projects funded by Big Lottery Fund has provided an opportunity to develop this work further, and to understand better the relationship between government policy and the wider delivery landscape.

The programme began at a time when central government was already changing its approach to policymaking. *The Civil Service Reform Plan*[3] committed government to more open forms of policymaking and more interchange between different sectors. These ambitions have since been re-affirmed in the *One Year On* and *Progress Report* documents.[4] At the same time, the open public services agenda has meant that external organisations, including those from the voluntary sector and private sector, are increasingly delivering aspects of government programmes and are expected to work in partnership, with one another and with local government, to deliver services.

The first year of Connecting Policy with Practice concluded in November 2013.[5] Through the work of the first cohort, we identified a series of 'disconnects' between policy and practice (Figure 1).

Figure 1: 'Disconnects' between policy and practice



In May 2014 we recruited a new cohort of participants for a second year of the programme. In this second year, we wished to explore some of these disconnects further and begin to identify how they might be resolved.

[3] HM Government, *The Civil Service Reform Plan*, Cabinet Office website, 2012, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1l2wDbZ>

[4] HM Government, *The Civil Service Reform Plan: One Year On*, Cabinet Office website, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-reform-plan-one-year-on--2>; HM Government, *The Civil Service Reform Plan: Progress Report*, Cabinet Office website, 2014, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-reform-plan-progress-report>

[5] Insights and conclusions from the first year of the programme can be found in Hughes, N., *Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2013*, Institute for Government, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice-people-powered-change>

How the programme works

The programme aims to develop understanding of better ways of making policy and delivering services through facilitating networks and stimulating dialogue between sectors.

At the heart of the programme is a 30-person cohort of Whitehall policymakers from relevant social policy departments,[6] and practitioners from voluntary sector organisations and local authorities who are working to deliver the Big Lottery Fund's strategic investments. A full list of cohort participants can be found in Annex A.

The second cohort took part in four in-depth workshops between June 2014 and February 2015 and was again organised into cross-sector 'learning pairs'. Pairs engaged in exchanges and visits to local services and into Whitehall departments to develop their thinking around two questions, drawn from the 'disconnects' identified in the previous year:

- **How could we more systematically make better use of the assets, experience and engagement of service users in the design and delivery of services?**
- **How can we move towards policy and services that operate on the principle that complex problems require whole-person solutions?**

We will elaborate on these questions and what we have concluded about them in Section 1.

Each pair considered one of these questions from a specific angle, bringing insights both from their day-to-day work and from work they undertook together as part of the programme. To supplement their pair work, we organised a series of three roundtables with senior policymakers and experts from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to explore the questions with a broader audience.

Each pair was tasked with producing an output – such as a case study or short report – that could prove useful to other policymakers and practitioners working together to overcome the policy disconnects. Many of the pairs undertook projects that are now leading towards these outputs, with good practice and 'how-to' guides, videos, case studies and presentations that they will use to share their findings and influence others.

The second year of the programme formally ends in March 2015. The cohort will continue to share their learning within their own organisations and networks, and many are intending to continue working together outside the programme.

This report

This report builds on the *Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2013* report which drew together findings from the first year of the programme. The Connecting Policy with Practice programme is explicitly practically based: it is informed first and foremost by the insights and experiences of people who have been involved with the programme – particularly the core cohort of policymakers and practitioners. We also draw on input from participants and speakers at the workshops and roundtables that formed part of the programme. On occasion, these findings have been supplemented with limited desk research, but the report should not be read as a detailed or quantitative research exercise,

The programme brought together participants, whether cohort members, speakers, or attendees at roundtable events, from a diverse set of roles, backgrounds and perspectives. The conclusions in this report have been tested with the core cohort, but the 'voice' of this report is that of the programme as a whole. We aim to showcase the cohort's work and highlight findings that all partners in the

[6] We did not restrict applications only to these, but the departments we actively targeted for recruitment were: Cabinet Office; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills; Department for Communities & Local Government; Department for Education; Department of Health; Department for Work & Pensions; HM Treasury; Home Office; and Ministry of Justice.

programme – the cohort, the Institute, and the Big Lottery Fund – believe will offer insights that will be useful for policymakers, commissioners and voluntary sector leaders. The learning pairs' own outputs provide greater detail and further insights; some of their early findings are included in this report, and when finished they will be made available via the *Connecting Policy with Practice blog*.[7] Pairs' outputs and case studies represent the conclusions they have drawn through their work together on this programme, and do not necessarily reflect the position of their organisations or departments.

The first section of the report looks at the two 'exam questions' that we set at the beginning of the year about specific ways that policy and services could be improved. It presents four main conclusions for each, which we illustrate with specific case studies and examples drawn from the programme.

In the second section we offer some reflections developed from two years' experience of running the programme. We re-examine the rationale for the programme and explore some of the things that we have learned about bringing together policymakers and practitioners in this way. We hope that this will be useful for others using open policy techniques or developing cross-sector learning programmes.

[7] The blog is hosted by the Institute for Government, and can be found here: *Connecting Policy with Practice blog,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/connecting-policy-with-practice-blog/>

Section 1: What have we learned about the disconnects between policy and practice?

The Connecting Policy with Practice programme has been running for two years. In this section, we recap the conclusions from the first year, which we have characterised as 'disconnects' between policy and practice. We then discuss how we chose to explore those disconnects further in the second year and what we have learned about how to overcome them.

Recapping the first year of the Connecting Policy with Practice programme

The first cohort of the Connecting Policy with Practice programme first met in April 2013. They focused their work over the course of the programme around three themes:

- service design
- funding models
- partnership and collaboration.

By the time the first cohort's work formally concluded, they had uncovered a number of insights within these themes. These, in addition to some high-level reflections on policymaking and dialogue between the sectors, were presented in a report we published in November 2013.[8] This report summarised these findings from the year into five 'disconnects' between policy and practice:

- People's lives, particularly those who are vulnerable and excluded, are messy and complicated. Practice suggests that services work best when they deal with the whole person, start with their needs and collaborate across different agencies. But policy too often operates in silos at both national and local levels and doesn't allow enough time for collaborations to form.
- Long-term policy problems require long-term thinking. But those working in practice find their efforts frustrated by the way policy chops and changes and a lack of stability in the policy and funding environments in which they operate.
- It is widely recognised that services which prevent complex problems from escalating are, in principle, valuable and cost-effective. But finding the space to create such services and to prove the benefits is difficult in a constrained and often siloed funding environment.
- There are plenty of examples of good policy intentions, including making better use of the distinctive skills of the voluntary sector. But these intentions can get lost as they trickle down to the real world through different levels and as policy is re-interpreted.
- Customer insights and in-depth understanding of service users – including a direct role for them in design and delivery of services – can be used to great effect. But too often the policy discussion is about problems rather than assets.

[8] Hughes, N., *Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2013*, Institute for Government, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice-people-powered-change>

Determining the focus of the second year

Through the programme's second year, we aimed to examine in greater depth some of the 'disconnects' identified in the first year, moving on from identifying problems to generating insights and conclusions that could help policymakers and others address the disconnects. We used the following criteria to assess each of the disconnects and establish which areas we should focus on in the second year:

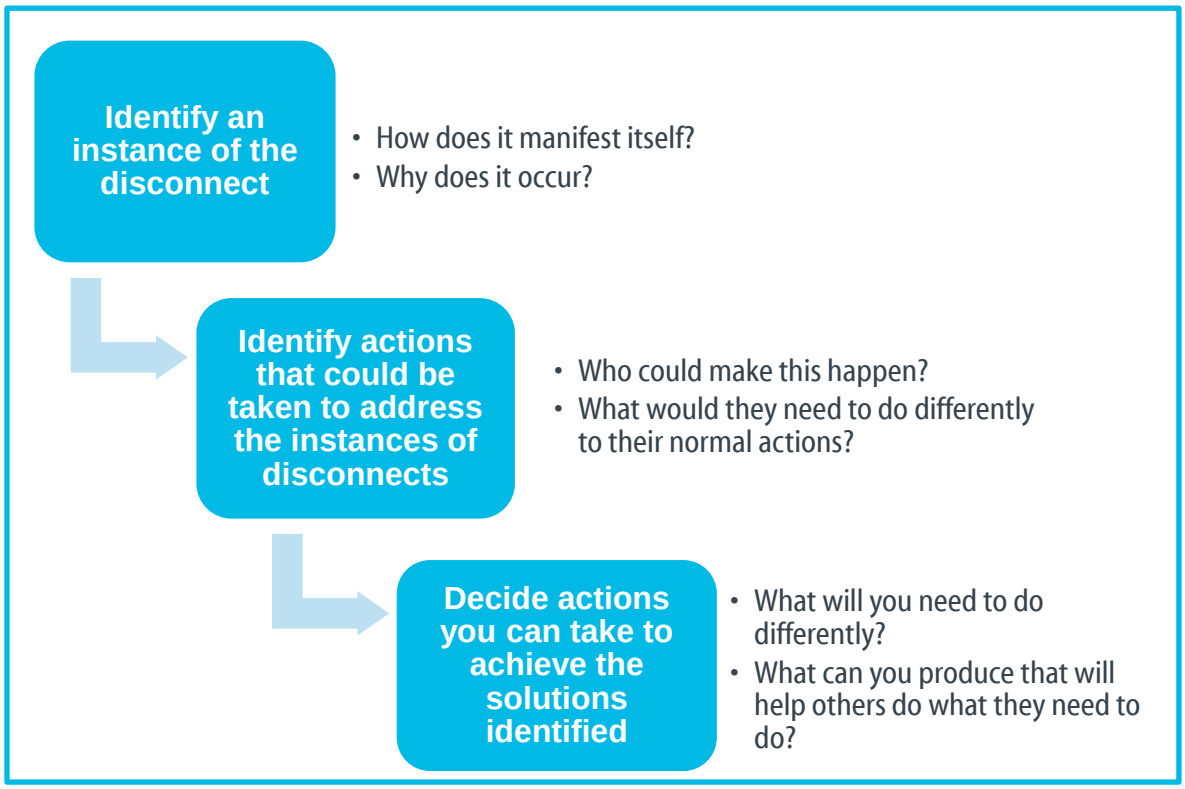
- **Resonance with the first cohort.** Is this disconnect one that the first cohort recommended for further exploration?
- **Likely wider interest.** Is this an ongoing area of concern or interest within Whitehall? Does this disconnect resonate with a broad political audience?
- **Could we reach good insights through the programme?** Is the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme an appropriate vehicle for exploring this disconnect?
- **Relevance to the Institute for Government's mission.** How would making progress on this disconnect further the Institute's aim to produce more effective government? How might further work on this issue complement or add to other Institute work and expertise?
- **Relevance to the Big Lottery Fund's mission.** How closely does addressing this disconnect relate to the policy or the principles behind the Fund's strategic investments? How would further work on this investment add value to the Big Lottery Fund's beneficiaries?

Using these criteria, we focused the second year on just two of the disconnects: whole-person services, and better engagement with service users. From these we derived two 'exam questions' to guide the work:

- How can we more systematically make better use of the assets, experience and engagement of service users in the design and delivery of services?
- How can we move towards policy and services that operate on the principle that complex problems require whole-person solutions?

We recruited the second cohort in May 2014 and paired cohort members up based on their interests. Each pair was asked to begin by identifying an instance from their own practice of where one of these disconnects seemed to be occurring. Pairs then worked these examples up into case studies to understand why they were occurring and who was involved in making them happen. Next, they sought to understand more about the example, exploring ways to address the disconnect. Finally they matched their own skills and resources to these solutions, deciding on actions that they could take themselves, and outputs that they could produce to encourage others to change their behaviour. Throughout this process, the cohort attended workshops that gave pairs additional stimulus and allowed them to compare their work with other pairs, learn from one another, and identify common themes.

Figure 2: 'Refining steps' process for pairs work



Engaging service users in policy and services

How can we more systematically make better use of the assets, experience and engagement of service users in the design and delivery of services?

The second year of the programme has reinforced our finding from the first year: that it is important, at least in services relating to multiple needs and people who are 'NEET', to understand and engage service users to build services that are suited to their needs and likely to produce good outcomes. Here we first explain the 'exam question' we set on service user engagement, and then discuss four themes that summarise some of the cohort's answers to it.

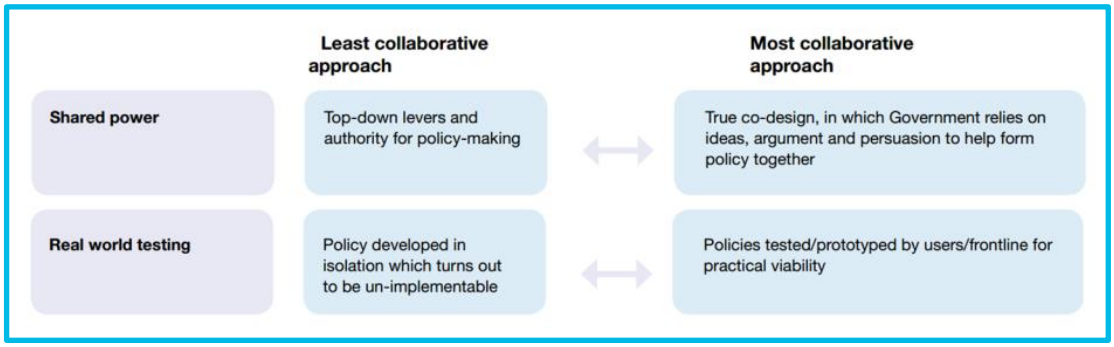
What do we mean by this question?

Involving service users in designing and delivering services is an important feature of the Big Lottery Fund's strategic investments. Participants from the VCS who work to deliver these investments have found that this helps them:

- tailor services to local need
- gather new and different ideas
- understand how service users will react to services
- reach groups who are traditionally 'hard to reach' through peer networks
- encourage professionals to be more focused on service users.

However, government – both local and central – is often criticised for using limited approaches to engaging or consulting with wider groups (including service users) when creating policy or setting service specifications. There are signs of willingness to change – the *Civil Service Reform Plan* talks of 'pushing power away from Whitehall and putting service users and communities in charge', and two of the components of open policymaking in the plan directly relate to engaging service users.[9]

Figure 3: Relevant components of open policymaking



But despite these positive moves, government still lags behind many VCS organisations in the approaches it uses to collaborate with and engage service users, and it has to find ways that are appropriate for making policy at a much larger scale. And although there is excellent practice in areas of the VCS,[10] many organisations in that sector also trail behind – continuing to use outdated delivery

[9] HM Government, *The Civil Service Reform Plan*, Cabinet Office website, 2012, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1l2wDbZ>

[10] More information about how VCS organisations can and do involve their service users in different ways, can be found on the User Involvement in Voluntary Organisations Shared Learning Group website. *User Involvement in Voluntary Organisations Shared Learning Group homepage,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://user-involvement.org.uk/>

models, and not involving service users or offering them a role in reshaping services around their needs.

Participants thought that one reason for this practice not being more widespread is that the cultural barriers to better engagement of service users are high in both sectors. In many areas, people are used to following set procedures or working in particular ways simply because that is 'how things are done'. Changing norms and cultures to reflect the value of engaging service users directly, or going beyond traditional consultation techniques, is hard and takes time.

Answers from the second year

The programme in its second year identified four strands of good practice for policymakers and practitioners who are aiming to be more outward-looking and engage directly with service users:

- match your engagement methods to your aims
- know how to find your service users
- ensure adequate capability and resources
- think carefully about your use of language.

Understand and agree which models of engagement align with your aims

Generally policymakers on the cohort have been surprised at the extent to which service user consultation was used to guide the VCS participants' services. This opened up some productive discussions about how much more open to these methods central policymaking could become. One participant commented at the end of the year that he had discovered through the programme that 'the boundaries can be pushed further than I'd thought when it comes to writing users into policy processes'.[11]

Lessons such as these, as well as the conclusions of some of the pairs' projects has shown that those involved in policymaking and service design need, in the future, to have a better overview of the range of different models that exist for collecting service user insight and using it to improve policy and services. This sounds like an obvious point, but it is an important one. Resources and groups exist to share best practice of user involvement within the VCS,[12] but these are far less developed within the policymaking world.

Understanding and involving service users can mean very different things at different levels of policymaking and service delivery. At one end of this spectrum are high-level insights into how individuals and groups react to different types of service delivery. One innovation in this area has been the creation of the Behavioural Insights Team, which has pioneered the use of academic research in behavioural economics and psychology to influence decision making by the general public.[13]

At the other end of the spectrum is the engagement of service users directly in service design and delivery. Peer-mentoring approaches, for instance, have been used to great effect in rehabilitation services – building on the experiences of former substance users to help others navigate their way through recovery. This is the approach used by the Big Lottery Fund's multiple needs investment in Islington and Camden, which uses specialist link workers alongside a team of peer mentors with lived

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[11] Year 2 policymaker, Workshop 4

[12] For example, User Involvement in Voluntary Organisations Shared Learning Group, *Homepage,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://user-involvement.org.uk/>

[13] The Behavioural Insights Team works across government, applying insights from academic research into behavioural economics and psychology to public policy and services. Originally part of the Cabinet Office, the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) has recently become an independent company, owned jointly by its employees, the Cabinet Office and NESTA. See more at BIT, *BIT website*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://behaviouralinsights.co.uk/>

experience'. Peer mentors and link workers work together to provide flexible support to clients, enabling them to access the right services and 'navigate the pathway to their recovery'.[14]

As discussed in our previous report, the benefits of service user engagement aren't limited to the delivery of services.[15] Having service users at the table when strategic and business decisions are being made can also significantly change the behaviour of professionals. And for service users, being involved in decision making can have positive effects in itself, helping to give them greater choice and power, and sometimes creating a positive feedback loop for other local services.

Better awareness of the different methods and benefits of engagement should be matched with understanding the potential downsides as well. Some participants argued that in some instances, service user involvement could lead to different, locally-responsive but fragmented service models that could easily threaten the economies of scale that more traditional service models produce.

This means that policymakers and service designers need not only to better understand the range of engagement models out there, but also to be able to match the benefits and costs of these to their aims. Where they are designing simpler, transactional services (such as online payment of council tax or renewing a driving licence) some of the more intensive service-user engagement techniques carry the risk of 'gold-plating' and eating into resources that could be better spent elsewhere. However where services are more bespoke, aimed at vulnerable or 'hard to reach' clients, investment in understanding and engaging with service users is likely to produce more responsive and effective services.

The model of service user engagement that is most appropriate is not only about the type of service you are designing, but also where you sit in the system. For local commissioners and policymakers who are setting the specifications of services that will directly interact with service users on the ground, intensive service user engagement is likely to be useful. But for policymakers whose roles are further removed from the ground, or who focus on technical issues or higher-level system stewardship – such as a second year cohort member who worked on fiscal policy – intensive service user engagement on a policy-by-policy basis is likely to be less directly relevant. This policymaker however, recognised the value of a broader contextual understanding of how his policy was likely to impact on other parts of the system. Less intensive service user interactions would be useful in building this contextual awareness.[16]

Finally, for policymakers, the appropriate model of service user engagement will depend on your policymaking process. One policymaker from the second cohort, who uses an 'agile' process to develop policy, reflected that the type of service user panel used by her VCS partner's project worked well with this policymaking methodology.[17] This was because 'agile' policy development allows considerable room for manoeuvre in meeting and adapting to particular requirements. However she thought that policies requiring a single or uniform solution were unlikely to be suitable for this kind of service user engagement as they couldn't be sufficiently flexible.

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[14] Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden, *Homepage*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://fulfillinglives.shp.org.uk/>

[15] Hughes, N., *Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2013*, Institute for Government, 2013, p.32, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice-people-powered-change>

[16] Year 2 policymaker, Workshop 1

[17] 'Agile' refers to a rapid, iterative set of management principles that began as a software development methodology, and are widely used in some areas of UK government such as the Government Digital Service. Recently, there have been attempts to create a better understanding of how 'agile' principles can be applied more widely to the policymaking process. See for example: Ollerhead, L., 'The Limits of Agile: Can we apply it to policy making?', *Cabinet Office Open Policy Making blog*, 2015, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1HAUAzT>

Case Study 1: Comparing two approaches to consultation

One pair used their project to compare and contrast two approaches to consultation. Helen Ryman works for Birmingham Voluntary Services Council where she is the Learning and Evaluation Manger for the Birmingham Changing Futures Together project. Eleri Pengelly is a Deputy Director in the Government Digital Service and is responsible for overseeing the development and delivery of the Government's Digital Inclusion Strategy.

The Birmingham Changing Futures Together project is supported by a group of Experts by Experience. The Experts are people with lived experience of multiple needs – homelessness, poor mental health, offending and substance misuse.

Eleri and Helen were struck by the differences between this approach to consultation and the approaches typically used by Eleri's Digital Inclusion team, such as the use of 'personas' and understanding user needs through demographic data. They wanted to compare and contrast two approaches, asking the question: 'Could bringing policymakers into the same space as the people who are have experienced significant life challenges lead to better policy conclusions?' To this end, they tested Eleri's digital inclusion policies directly with the Birmingham Experts by Experience.

Reflecting on the experience of working with the Experts by Experience, Eleri said:

Since I have been leading the work on digital inclusion, my team has undertaken extensive user research. It has been central to development of the strategy and determining the shape of policies. What the experience of working with the Experts in Birmingham gave me was an opportunity to hear direct from the people whom the policies are aimed at. The direct engagement was critical. It meant I could be sure that the Experts understood the background evidence and policy drivers. I could explore their ideas, set them back on track if they had misinterpreted the policy. We could refine the policy in the light of their feedback and seek their immediate reflections as the proposals evolved through our discussion. It felt as though I was getting many of the benefits of a citizens' jury:[18] as the experts learned more, their thinking (and mine) shifted.

Helen commented:

It confirmed my intuition that, given the right setting and appropriate planning, unique and valuable insights could be shared between policymakers and Experts. The process itself also turned out to be very positive for everyone involved.

Barry Lawes, one of the Birmingham Experts said:

I was pleased that someone from government could find the time to come and see us, listen to our feedback and make changes. Digital is one of those ground-breaking issues, we all know it is coming. It's good to think about including people with complex needs – giving them access to something that they need to know for their everyday life.

Have the ability to identify, reach and talk to users, and the willingness to use their insights

Particularly when the aspiration is to help people who are labelled as 'hard to reach' or even 'hidden', policymakers and service designers need to invest considerable effort upfront into understanding where these users are and how they can engage with them. Many VCS participants have described how their clients tend to have sporadic or poorly co-ordinated contact with statutory services, and

[18] A 'citizens' jury' is a deliberative methodology, where a group of often randomly-selected citizens are brought together to deliberate on an issue. Over the period of usually several days, the 'jury' receive expert input and testimony from credible witnesses, and they deliberate to produce recommendations and conclusions for decision makers. Participedia, *Citizens' Juries*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://participedia.net/en/methods/citizens-jury>

often fall between gaps in services. This can cause problems for engaging service users early on, especially where new services are being designed that don't have a pre-existing client base.

Particularly for policymakers based in Whitehall, service users can feel far removed. One commented: 'I wouldn't know where to begin in trying to contact a service user.' To get around this disconnect, one option would be to invest more formally in 'brokers' who can facilitate central policymakers' access to users of local services. This idea featured heavily in one of our roundtable discussions, and is explored in greater detail in Case Study 2.

Identifying service users to engage with is not the only problem facing policymakers. Effective service user engagement requires ongoing effort and involvement on the part of the service users themselves, who often have only limited incentives to do so. They can be understandably uninterested in activities like consultation and service design, so engagement processes can often be frustrated by service users dropping out or moving on.

Good practice from the VCS stresses the importance of fostering reciprocal relationships with service users in which they feel valued and listened to. However this contrasts with policymakers' stories of some processes which paid lip service to engagement and open policymaking, but where outcomes were effectively predetermined.[19] To do any external engagement, policymakers and service-designers have to have the right intentions, but this is even more important for engagement with service users. Half-hearted engagement, or attempting to engage service users without the right intentions, risks doing greater harm than good by causing service users to disengage and lose interest in the process.

Case Study 2: Better 'brokering'

The idea of 'brokering' featured heavily in discussion at an expert roundtable on 'Engaging service users for better policy'. Participants identified a gap in the market for a 'bringing together' service, provided by a trusted independent organisation, which could facilitate policymakers' access to service users and lessen the information costs involved in identifying willing participants.

VCS organisations are often well placed to do this. Many already work with panels or boards of service users and former service users for the purposes of guiding specific projects. Some also convene ongoing groups who work with politicians and others on specific pieces of work or policy development.[20]

Formalising this into an actual service, however, could be difficult. Policymakers at the roundtable expressed a mix of enthusiasm and nervousness about the role of 'brokers'. One pointed out that policymakers already interact with many large VCS organisations who claim to advise them on behalf of their service users. Others responded that direct interaction with the 'undiluted voice' of service users is very different to this.

Some roundtable participants argued that policymakers avoid 'brokers' due to fears about unrepresentative selection of participants and brokers' own agendas. Policymakers should certainly attempt to get balanced and representative views, and remain aware that brokers will have their own

[19] Year 2, Roundtable 1 participants

[20] Revolving Doors Agency convenes a National Service User Forum, which 'brings together people from different areas of the country who have experience of multiple and complex needs and have had contact with the criminal justice system'. Access to this group is made available to politicians, statutory bodies and policymakers on an ad-hoc basis. See more at: Revolving Doors Agency, *Homepage,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/>

agendas. However, many participants thought the risks would be outweighed by the greater opportunities for direct engagement with service users that such a scheme could create.

Recognise the resources and capability necessary for effective engagement with service users

Many participants in the programme felt that the time and resource pressures facing policymakers and service designers mean that building very deep relationships and engagement with service users is simply not realistic.[21] However, other participants felt that these arguments are often overstated, and that policymakers can be put off by scare stories about the difficulty and cost of what is actually relatively simple practice that should be part of 'business as usual'. As ever, cohort members from both backgrounds agreed that the cost of implementing ill-founded policy will be greater than the cost of doing the right groundwork.

Participants in the cohort, as well as roundtables, made clear that effective service user involvement does require skills and capability not always present in Whitehall policy teams or local commissioning staff. As we argued in a previous report, we know that structural changes like putting service users on VCS management boards only work if softer elements are properly thought through, and the same is likely to be true of similar strategic roles in policymaking or service design.[22] Those designing services or engaging with service users need to be able to accurately judge what service users have to offer; how to structure their engagement in a way that interests them and allows them to contribute effectively; how to explain boundaries and set expectations; and where to provide training to service users to get the best out of them.[23] There is a strong case for investing in staff with the right skills and experience to do this effectively. In many VCS services, these service user co-ordinator roles are occupied by people who are themselves former service users with 'lived experience'.

Capability is another important issue at the other end of the user insight spectrum. Data-driven customer insight approaches also require significant skills and up-front investment of resources. Many councils, government departments and voluntary organisations have set up dedicated customer insight teams. However local practitioners told us that this is highly-specialised work requiring specific capabilities that are not always present in these organisations.

Case Study 3: Creating a service user engagement strategy

The Big Lottery Fund selected Blackpool as one of twelve successful applicants for its multiple and complex needs programme. In order to get the funding, Blackpool was required to demonstrate active service user engagement in the design, delivery and ongoing evaluation of the service delivery model. A member of our second cohort, Dominic Ruffy, worked to create a service user engagement strategy that would do this. Here he describes that process, as well as the resources and features needed to make it a success.

With a VCS organisation (Addaction) leading the bid and ultimately holding the grant it became clear that it was essential that service users were involved from day one, shaping the bid itself and being fully immersed in design of the proposed system. The service user voice needed to remain independent from the VCS organisations they worked with, so that service users felt free to praise and criticise alike.

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[21] Year 2, Workshop 2 cohort participants

[22] Hughes, N., *Insights from the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme in 2013*, Institute for Government, 2013, p.32, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice-people-powered-change>

[23] Russell, P., 'Making Service User Engagement a Reality: Lessons from the Scout Association', *Connecting Policy with Practice blog*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1qiEbuF>

Justin Nield, a former service user, was employed as Service User Lead, and spent six months touring all complex needs services in Blackpool, speaking with service users.

A Service User Board was then created to guide and steer the project. This board worked closely with the lead organisation to design the service and continues to meet quarterly to evaluate project progress, disseminate current service user experiences and to present service delivery suggestions.

The result of this work is that today the Blackpool service user engagement model is held up as the example of service user engagement across the 12 funded complex needs delivery locations.

The success of the project has been based on:

- the service user voice remaining independent of the organisations delivering the complex needs programme
- comprehensive training for all service users involved in the board, which has been sourced free from local partners: the council, local colleges, and VCS organisations
- funding to enable the board to meet frequently, which covers things like travel fares and lunches
- service users seeing evidence that their voice is heard, which in the Blackpool project is clearly demonstrated through their input into the service delivery model and by their continued involvement in the evaluation of the service
- service users seeing evidence that their efforts can lead to real opportunities, which has been demonstrated by the fact that half of the employees now working directly in the Blackpool Fulfilling Lives programme have lived experience.

There have been some tremendous outcomes from this work, including:

- treatment commissioners in Blackpool now employ service users to help design their tender specifications, and to assess and interview treatment providers in the tender process
- people with lived experience are engaging with those still 'out there' and bringing them into services, with great success
- the independent service-user organisation, Empowerment, has been approached by multiple agencies outside Blackpool to advise and guide them on service engagement strategy.

Effective service user engagement may take some time and effort, but as Blackpool shows, the rewards can be great. It can transform treatment systems, transform people's lives, challenge stigma, save lives and ultimately save money. Really, why wouldn't you do it?

Pay attention to language, its effects on the ground, and how this can affect service users' willingness to engage

Words matter. The language that is used by government and by services on the ground can influence service users' behaviour and their willingness to engage with services. For example, when phrases like 'barrier', 'hard to reach' or 'hidden victims' are used, they can alienate the very people they aim to help. On the other hand, participants have found that when language is used thoughtfully, it can contribute to trusting relationships and more effective services.[24]

In a roundtable on the issue of language, several specific problems were highlighted.

- The language used by policymakers and even those on the front line has often 'trickled down' from the media and political lexicon. Words such as 'scroungers' or 'skivers' or terms like 'troubled families' imply particular problems or motivations that those being described wouldn't recognise. Participants feared that the negative connotations of these terms influence the way policymakers view the groups involved. Roundtable participants who work

[24] For discussions of these issues, follow the blogs of our Year 2 cohort member Steph Taylor, on the *Connecting Policy with Practice Blog*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/connecting-policy-with-practice-blog/author/steph-taylor/>

with gang members and young offenders said that the 'us and them' style of some of this language undermines the effectiveness of services for these groups – many of whom wouldn't recognise themselves as gang members or want to engage with services that viewed them in this way.

- Using labels to describe specific groups of people can have unintended consequences. While terms such as 'NEETs' can be useful shorthand for professionals, they can also force individuals into boxes that they don't themselves recognise. Such terms can be disempowering. A cohort member who delivers one of the Talent Match programmes described meeting a young person who said that the reason she had got involved with the programme was that this was the first service that hadn't described her as a 'NEET' to her face.
- Jargon remains a barrier between the service and the service user. One cohort member, who used to be a youth worker, recalled, 'I will never forget trying to explain to a child with autism and his parents why he was having a Section 139a meeting at school and the time it took to translate all the boxes they had been asked to fill in, into plain English.'[25] There have been some recent improvements in making government information more accessible and jargon-free, particularly online, although there is much more work to be done.[26]
- Language doesn't just divide up groups of people, but often also acts as an excuse to cause divides between services. Professionals often treat 'housing', 'welfare', 'mental health' and 'offending' as discrete service categories, but in reality service users feel a lot of overlap between them. Language can reinforce these barriers, and may even affect professionals' own behaviour.

So the choice of language can cause disconnects between policymakers, practitioners and service users which, in turn, hinders service user engagement. Where service users feel those delivering services are speaking a language that they don't understand or recognise, they can feel disempowered and disengaged.

Many of our roundtable participants agreed that consultation and testing with service users is the best option for improving the way language is used in policy and services.[27] Positive examples were cited of service professionals who:

- listened and engaged in two-way conversations
- used open, rather than closed questions
- praised effort rather than capability
- wrote in simple, easy-to-understand language
- asked service users themselves how they would like to be referred to, instead of using labels
- actively focused on how service users communicated their emotional experiences and used this language when responding, so that they felt listened to
- constantly tested and challenged policy by trying to reframe it in positive terms.

These examples, and contributions from the roundtable, will be fed into the work of one of the cohort pairs who aim to produce a guide for policymakers and practitioners on their language use.[28] This

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[25] Taylor, S., 'Mind your language – do the words that policymakers use work?' *Connecting Policy with Practice blog*, 2014, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/connecting-policy-with-practice-blog/language-barriers-how-the-words-we-use-affect-service-users>

[26] For example, the new GOV.UK website claims to be 'the best place to find government services and information', promises to be 'simpler, clearer, faster' and operates a style guide to remove the majority of jargon. HM Government, *Gov.uk content and publishing webpages*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government-digital-guidance/content-publishing>

[27] Year 2, Roundtable 3 participants

[28] To hear the latest from this pair please visit the *Connecting Policy with Practice blog,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/connecting-policy-with-practice-blog/>

work is continuing and they will continue to iterate and develop their ideas, but their initial 'top tips' can be found in Case Study 4.

Case Study 4: 'Top tips' on language use

Steph Taylor is Head of Talent Match London, and is partnered with Jenny Oklikah, who heads up the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme* and related policy at the Home Office. Jenny and Steph have been working to produce a guide for policymakers and practitioners to take a more positive approach to language, and present their initial 'top tips' here:

For government and commissioners

- Understand the powerful impact of language on how service users and vulnerable groups are perceived by the public
- Use language that is transformational and focuses on where you want service users to be, rather than a narrow focus on the challenges or problems they may have today
- Allow for local and regional variation in the language of services

For service providers

- Be mindful of and challenge your own language use
- Understand your end-goal and plan your language use accordingly
- Co-production of services with users is an effective way to test out language use; test different approaches and be willing to respond
- Assume less, check more
- Make a genuine connection seeing the interaction as a conversation, not a process

Steph plans next to explore the possibility of establishing a pilot project as part of her work on Talent Match London. This will involve trying different verbal and written approaches to engaging with people, and tracking the outcomes to determine whether they are changing both the way people feel and the way they act.

General 'top tips' guides are only one way that participants have thought about encouraging change in policymakers and practitioners' language choices. Participants in the programme discussed options such as creating specific guides or rules about words or phrases to use or avoid, however they were generally sceptical about the value of these kinds of intervention. Language is fluid, and it isn't universal. Any hard and fast rules are likely to need constant updating, and tailoring to suit different audiences (age, region, background etc.) and methods (face-to-face, online etc).

So a more practical way forward may be to embed in people's minds that language is powerful, both as a barrier to service user engagement, and as a tool with which to achieve better engagement and wider policy goals. Policymakers and service designers should therefore think of the language they use as part of any intervention, and build user-testing and feedback processes into the way that they interact with service users. With this kind of input, services will be in a better position to make positive changes to language use. One example of this is explored in Case Study 5.

Case Study 5: Changing the language of a service

Andy Meakin is the Director of Voices of Stoke, Big Lottery Fund's multiple needs strategic investment in Stoke-on-Trent. As with all of the strategic investments, Voices of Stoke is designed and delivered in partnership with service users, and they have been consulted on the language used by the service. Here Andy describes one example of that process, how it has worked, and the challenges of getting language right for everyone – professionals and service users.

In our consultation with customers we found a real objection to the word 'referral'; e.g. 'I'm going to make a referral for you to housing services', or 'we've had a referral from your GP'. Service users felt that the word implied something that took place between organisations and felt excluded from decisions. We didn't want to reflect this disempowering language from other services in ours, so we discussed with our service users more positive language that we could use.

After a lot of discussion, they ended up agreeing on the word 'introduction', which was perceived as something that took place between people, rather than organisations, and as such it felt more 'human' and inclusive. We've implemented this decision in our documentation and in the language that we try to use in our service. We've also spent a lot of time explaining the change to staff of other organisations within our partnership.

It is too early to tell if this attempt at change has really made a difference yet. Despite a lot of effort, 'introduction' is not becoming part of the front-line staff lexicon easily. This is a reminder that language choice is often underpinned by long-standing working cultures, which can be understandably hard to shift. Nevertheless, being sensitive to and recognising the impact of language is our responsibility as professionals – so that we can talk with and involve service users in a way that gets the best out of them.

‘Whole-person’ policy and services

How can we move towards policy and services that operate on the principle that complex problems require whole-person solutions?

Through the second year of the programme, participants have worked to understand the barriers to achieving services that respond to the needs of the whole person. In this section we first explain the question, and then we discuss four themes that summarise some of the cohort’s answers to it.

What do we mean by this question?

There is wide agreement that services for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and those for people with multiple needs, should aim for a holistic approach, with co-ordination across public services, relevant private organisations and voluntary agencies. If people get bounced around different services – such as the police, probation services, housing providers, Jobcentre Plus, social services, local GPs and hospitals – the result can be a series of costly interventions and assessments and little continuity of care for the individual.

VCS participants have vividly described how many of their clients fall between the gaps in services completely. One speaker at a roundtable, who runs a homelessness charity and housing association, described the case of one of their clients which had ended in the individual taking their own life. The speaker described the client’s journey, from when he was first made homeless while a private sector tenant, through his interaction with over a dozen local services, which – due to service cutbacks, a lack of joined-up working, and pressure on low-level support services to act in place of specialist interventions – could not provide him with the support he required.

The term ‘whole-person approach’ describes a principle of service design and delivery that seeks to prevent these gaps between services affecting the service user. Providers work with clients to understand their interrelated problems and to address them together, rather than ‘pushing’ discrete, siloed services at them.

Existing service provision across all sectors is often very far from this approach, and the interplay between central government, local government, the voluntary sector and service users is highly complex. There is a frequent and persistent complaint that government tends to work in silos – different parts of the public sector, each with their own budgets, work towards different and sometimes conflicting policy goals. And even where organisational siloes aren’t the problem, services tend to be commissioned around specific life events – such as unemployment or being released from prison – and judge success through single outcomes around these events.

The first cohort sought to understand how policy trickles down through commissioning to local structures and eventually to front-line services. They found that there was a general lack of joined-up thinking, including duplicated or competing targets and mismatched priorities at each of these levels. They also identified the negative effects that this produces for service users, and gave examples of VCS services’ clients who were engaged and interacting with as many as 20 different agencies.

Answers from the second year

The second cohort picked up from where the first cohort left off, and by looking at local examples of these problems, attempted to identify improvements that might lead to more whole-person services.

This work identified four practical areas of change for policymakers and practitioners looking to work in this way:

- understand the potential barriers, and invest in collaboration
- get the central-local division of labour right
- be sensitive to problems around transition and continuity of services
- build the desire for whole-person services into the aims and processes of commissioning.

Participants understood that siloed government and joined-up service delivery are long-standing issues that don't have neat solutions but require whole-system changes, but concluded that these quicker wins could be made nonetheless.

Understand the potential barriers, and invest in collaboration

In the report of the first year of the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme, we set out why collaboration between local partners is vital to achieving whole-person services. Lead partners for the Big Lottery Fund strategic investments have taken three main approaches to promoting better collaboration in their areas. These are:

- acting as service integrators, bringing together local statutory, private and voluntary services into one hub to work around the needs of individuals
- using 'key', 'link' or 'lead worker' models, where a single worker uses their connections to different providers to draw in relevant services and wrap them around the individual or their family
- adopting a 'no wrong door' principle, meaning that no matter how someone comes into contact with a service, they won't just get referred on elsewhere or lost in the system.

Participants in both cohorts have repeatedly stressed that this sort of collaborative working is not straightforward, especially if it is to be genuine rather than a paper exercise. Proper partnership development takes significant time and resources. Identifying and engaging the right partners can be challenging. At the most local level, service providers may know who and where all the relevant agencies are, and most likely already have links to them. But engaging them in a genuinely-shared vision requires more intensive relationship building and negotiation.

Not only do effective collaborative relationships take time to form, they can be difficult to manage and require ongoing investment. Developing mutual trust takes time, and is important because it, as one participant put it, 'acts as the main currency in effective partnerships'.[29]

To move towards whole-person services, policymakers and commissioners need to appreciate better the barriers to collaboration. Practical recommendations mooted by programme participants included:

- longer lead-in times during commissioning
- specific funding lines for partnership development
- more sophisticated methods for assessing the quality of partnerships during the commissioning process.

There were also recommendations for those delivering services. Local delivery partners, it was suggested, need to think through the difficulties ahead and begin with the big issues – establishing common aims and vision, clear partnership protocols, co-design with shared service users – before tackling the more specific problems of implementation.

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[29] Y2 cohort member, Workshop 2

[30] Hallsworth, M. & Rutter, J., *Making Policy Better: Improving Whitehall's Core Business*, Institute for Government, 2011, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/making-policy-better>

Case Study 6: The Big Lottery Fund approach to bringing together organisations

The Big Lottery Fund's Talent Match programme actively assisted embryonic partnerships by placing a broker in each prospective delivery area. The broker's role was to gather organisations involved in delivering interventions to young people, facilitate the formation of the partnership and ensure a robust selection process for the lead organisation.

Based on feedback from a sector advisory panel, a more hands-off approach was taken for developing the Multiple Needs Programme partnerships, using soft launches to initiate the local projects. Prior to the Multiple Needs Programme being formally launched, events were held in prospective delivery areas with organisations involved in supporting people with multiple needs. The key principles and aims of the programme were explained along with the partnership requirements. Each area was asked to choose a VCS organisation to lead the partnership, and locally-agreed selection processes were used to identify the lead organisation.

In both approaches, a small amount of partnership development funding was released to cover administration costs for forming the partnerships and developing an initial approach to how they would deliver the programme. Using the multiple-needs approach, a notable success was how the West Yorkshire partnership overcame the challenges of a large geographical area and the large number of stakeholders involved in the local authority areas of Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Kirklees and Calderdale.

Get the central-local 'division of labour' right

One of the founding assumptions of the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme is that, as the Institute has argued elsewhere, the notion of neat, top-down delivery chains does not work for decentralised services and complex policy problems. Instead when policy reaches the ground, its effects are determined not by policymakers in Whitehall, but the decisions of many different agents working together within a wider system. [30] This necessitates a very different role for policymakers – that of stewarding systems by setting and adapting the overall framework, and intervening where capacity gaps or risks to overall objectives emerge, rather than specifying and enforcing the details of service delivery.[31]

The challenge is to identify the right relationship between central policymakers and those delivering services on the ground for different circumstances. Many participants thought that while there should be broad frameworks and policy direction from central government, those acting locally should be given more space and freedom to be creative, set their own service specifications, and bring together budgets in order to find efficiencies and create services that effectively wrap around users.

Government has attempted to move in this direction through cross-cutting initiatives like the Troubled Families Programme, as well as 'black box' commissioning approaches, which give providers scope to run services in their own way as long as they meet set outcomes.[32]

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[30] Hallsworth, M. & Rutter, J., *Making Policy Better: Improving Whitehall's Core Business*, Institute for Government, 2011, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/making-policy-better>

[31] Hallsworth, M., *System Stewardship: The future of policy making?* Institute for Government, 2011, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/system-stewardship>

[32] The government's Troubled Families Programme started in 2011, with the aim of working with local authorities and their partners to help 120,000 troubled families in England turn their lives around by 2015. These families are described as 'those that have problems and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector'. The programme is run by a cross-Whitehall team based within the Department for Communities and Local Government. HM Government, *Troubled Families Programme*, Gov.uk website, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

System stewardship is a big vision that would require many other aspects of the system to change, so we focus here on two sub-themes that have emerged through the pairs' work and roundtables.

The need to be smarter about culture and how policy will be interpreted

Central government needs to be more sophisticated about how it understands and influences the cultures and incentives at play at the front line and within other organisations. Participants told us that in their experience central policymakers too often assume that others within the system will perfectly understand the intentions behind policy.[33] Policymakers on the cohort had numerous examples of where policy had been implemented on the front line in ways that contradict what they considered to be the logic of the policy.

One pair from the second cohort looked at how young people taking up work-experience opportunities, arranged by a Talent Match project, found their benefit entitlement was affected. People within the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) thought that policy was sufficiently flexible to allow these placements, yet there appeared to be variation in how Jobcentre Plus responded. The pair noticed that, based on the experience of some young people going through the process, different advisers in different Jobcentre Plus branches seemed to be interpreting the same DWP policy in different ways, and this was affecting how the Talent Match project was able to support its clients.

The nature of central and local government services

A strong theme that emerged in one pair's work was the different nature of central and local services when it comes to rules and conditionality. This can be seen across different policy areas where, due to the scale of directly-commissioned central government services and the difficulty of changing service specifications at that level, conditionality is heavily relied on as a way of protecting the public purse. Local services, on the other hand, can respond more quickly to rising costs, and are therefore able to be more flexible in their approaches and less rigid in their definitions of success.

Participants in a roundtable that explored these issues thought that these different characteristics each had merits, but that they are not generally factored into decisions about where powers are located. Participants recommended that those acting centrally think more strategically in the future about the distribution of powers and functions between different levels within the system.

Case Study 7: Different central and local approaches

A roundtable on 'Breaking down silos and joining up services' illustrated some of the differences and tensions between national and local approaches. Attendees at the roundtable were discussing one of the cohort pair's projects, which focused on how improving personal networks and community support could help individuals with mental health problems. Few participants disagreed that this seemed intuitively right. But persuading government – particularly national government – to adopt service models that encourage or incorporate networks and communities would require evidence of the value and outcomes – ideally, hard evidence like randomised control trial data.

To adopt this approach and convince ministers of its benefits, argued one policymaker, central government would want proven delivery models that could be standardised, as well as credible

[33] A big theme within the Institute for Government's work on policy implementation was the need for clarity about objectives from the centre, and ways of connecting the centre to the front line. Norris, E., Kidson, M., Bouchal P., & Rutter., J, *Doing them Justice: Lessons from four case studies of policy implementation*, Institute for Government, 2014, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1wuFn2e>

delivery partners with track records of delivering such services at scale. But to other participants, particularly local service providers, these requirements would diminish the value of the proposed networks approach, which by nature would be local, relational and difficult to measure.

There was also a wider point, of how people feel about interventions that are led by national government versus those that are locally-led. The central government policymaker argued that central government would find it difficult to take a role in assessing and improving individuals' networks as this would be felt to be too 'nanny state' and intrusive. However because individuals often strongly identify with their local area and trust local services more, the same might not be true of a locally-led service.

Be more sensitive to problems around transition and continuity of services

As we have outlined above, effective working relationships that enable whole-person services are built up over a long time. They require real effort to establish and maintain. So it's important that when collaborative services are working well, new arrangements don't suddenly undermine effective collaborations, but instead build in transition time and make best use of existing partnerships.

Specifically, some of our participants found that re-commissioned or new services often cut across existing arrangements or failed to take into account what impact they would have on other projects, as Case Study 8 illustrates. This is complicated when commissioners at different levels (national, sub-national, local) are funding services that are similar but have slightly different conditions or aims. Commissioners must examine, and be sensitive to, what is already happening on the ground before launching new services or requiring new partnerships to form.

This doesn't mean however, that commissioners can simply scale up services that are rooted in effective local collaboration, or they will risk losing the productive local links that make them effective in the first place. One participant in the second year of the programme spoke of their frustration at an attempt by local commissioners to scale up a successful employability service only to find that they had produced a hollow impression of the original.[34]

Commissioners can strike the right balance by planning and allowing for adaptation in service delivery. For example, when a new national scheme that will cause a big change on the ground is being rolled out, central government can work with local organisations to ensure that they provide some continuity and support 'while the dust settles'. Participants at our roundtable suggested that, while this can help to ensure service users see minimal disruption, too often in practice it is unplanned and ad-hoc. Instead it should be built into the policymaking process from the outset.

Case Study 8: Service overlap and transition

Rupert Gill is a policymaker in the Department for Work and Pensions. Through the Connecting Policy with Practice programme he was partnered with Eileen McMullan, Senior Commissioning Manager at Islington London Borough Council. Here they describe their work together.

You and I are both worried about the personal impact and knock-on costs of drug dependency. We both think that work plays an important role in recovery, and we both want to fund programmes to help people in recovery find a job. So you'd think the most sensible thing would be to pool our resources. Yet in Islington, the local authority and the Department for Work and Pensions have funded separate services to help the same people achieve the same outcomes.

[34] Y2 participant, Workshop 1

This looks like the epitome of poor joining-up between central and local government. In fact it looks like a clear duplication. At a time when government budgets are under enormous pressure, how could it be justified?

This is the conundrum that we sought to understand for our project. And, both having experience of the policy area, we started off with two assumptions: firstly, even seemingly perverse policy scenarios tend to have a logic to them; secondly, policymakers and commissioners in both central and local government are not unaware of the challenges in designing services for people whose lives are complex.

This allowed us to set aside some of the most obvious explanations. We knew, for example, that the DWP approach was explicitly designed to permit flexibility to local and individual needs, so it wasn't simply a case of naïve central government policymaking. We also set aside debates about the funding models employed (one uses payment by results, the other a block funded contract with clear outcomes targets). Financing is always going to play a role, but we looked at some less explored explanations.

1. Shared goals aren't always shared goals. Both Islington and DWP want to help people in recovery find work. For DWP, with its responsibilities to safeguard the public purse, work – and moving off benefits – is the ultimate aim. For Islington's Substance Misuse Commissioning team, work is a means to an end (i.e. full recovery from drug dependency) that fits in with their wider health and community safety goals for the borough. These seemingly small differences in aims can make for entirely-different approaches to building employability.
2. What motivates one, won't always motivate another. Participation in DWP employment programmes tends to be linked to benefit receipt. The risk of a reduction in payments is one motivation for people to find work. In others though, the same risk can reduce motivation. A number of recovering addicts told us they were much more motivated to find work when they felt it was their own decision – part of the recovery journey to which they were committed – rather than something expected of them as part of their entitlement to benefits. Working with the grain of this motivation may justify the use of services that are not directly linked to benefit entitlement.
3. Rome wasn't built in a day. Like all relationships, successful local partnerships rely on trust and shared goals. Following the introduction of a major new centrally-driven policy approach, local partnerships can take time to form or adapt and some partnerships will be prioritised ahead of others. During transition periods, stop-gap services can emerge before more joined up, long-term solutions are found.

In fact, our small-scale research suggested that what at first looked like a duplication may in fact turn out to be a successful adaptation. After some initial disruption following the introduction of the new DWP policy approach in 2011, the more mainstream DWP services and the specialist Islington services have developed connections that address each of the above challenges. Both sides now invest resources into employment services for people in recovery that have wider shared goals than the mainstream provision and allow services to be delivered at arms' length (although not fully independent of) the requirements of the benefit system.

A happy ending, but one that wouldn't have been achieved without key components: organisations that have the flexibility to adapt to change, to find subtle ways of providing tailored support for complex cases (the arm's-length approach looks like a clever way to open the door to different motivations), and that pay more than lip service to the importance of partnership; and particularly, the time, energy and ongoing resource that is required to find and pursue goals that are fully shared.

None of this is new, yet all of it is easily sidelined by competing pressures. Policymakers and commissioners need to find systematic ways to stop that happening.

Build the desire for whole-person services into the aims and processes of commissioning

Many of the other themes that the programme has identified as ways to improve whole-person working, are closely related to commissioning practices. Commissioning for collaboration, understanding the inherent differences between nationally- and locally-commissioned services and

building greater sensitivity about the effects of transition into the commissioning process, are all highly important. But cohort discussions have regularly also come back to commissioners themselves, their training and behaviours.

Learning pairs and roundtable participants identified a number of problems with traditional, transactional commissioning and procurement processes.

- Service provision isn't often approached strategically with individual services seen as elements within interrelated systems. This results in overall provision that isn't coherent or reflective of user need, but it ticks the boxes and is safe.
- Service provision at both national and local level tends to be 'sticky' between contracts, and often fails to respond to changing circumstances or evidence of the effectiveness of different service models.
- Relationships between commissioners, providers and service users are often characterised by cynicism and mistrust, leading to unintended consequences such as high staff turnover, gaming behaviours, and unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Many existing service-user involvement and consultation practices have only a narrow impact on the design of services, which can lead to service users feeling that is it tokenistic and disengaging.

Of course, these problems are by no means reflective of all commissioning at local and national levels. And as Case Study 9 demonstrates, cohort members have sought out positive examples of good practice and different models that commissioners could learn from.

Participants in the second year of the programme argued commissioning should be seen as a tool that should be directed explicitly towards the aim of achieving whole-person policy and services, and cited a number of interesting models and techniques to build on.

- Central government can, and in many areas has, used its powers over finance to pool budgets and facilitate more cross-cutting, place-based approaches. Schemes like the Total Place pilots,[35] 'Whole Place' Community Budget pilots[36] and the 'Our Place' Neighbourhood budgets initiative,[37] are all attempts to encourage joint commissioning and more responsive local services that match community needs.
- Social finance techniques such as social impact bonds (SIBs) have been used in a similar way, to align commissioner and provider incentives, and allow for smaller, capital-poor and VCS organisations to deliver joined-up services.[38]
- 'Black box' commissioning approaches – in which outcomes are determined by the commissioner, but service specifications are designed by local delivery partners – have been used in innovative ways to incentivise responsive, joined-up service delivery. One example of this is the Troubled Families Programme, which is led by a cross-Whitehall team, and uses a mixture of incentives (via a payment-by-results mechanism) and campaigning to get local

[35] Leadership Centre for Local Government, *Total Place: Better for Less*, Local Leadership website, retrieved 18 March 2015, <www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace>

[36] Whole Place Community Budgets website, *Homepage,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://communitybudgets.org.uk>

[37] HM Government, *Giving people more power over what happens in their neighbourhood*, Gov.uk website, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-people-more-power-over-what-happens-in-their-neighbourhood/supporting-pages/our-place>

[38] Social Finance, the organisation responsible for designing social impact bonds, defines them as 'a financial mechanism in which investors pay for a set of interventions to improve a social outcome that is of social and/or financial interest to a government commissioner. If the social outcome improves, the government commissioner repays the investors for their initial investment plus a return for the financial risks they took. If the social outcomes are not achieved, the investors stand to lose their investment'. Social Finance, *Services: Social Impact Bonds,* Social Finance website, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/services/social-impact-bonds/>

authorities and other partners to work together to 'turn around' families with a number of different needs.[39]

To spread these kinds of approaches – some of which have not yet been fully tested – more widely, and importantly, to use them in ways that are effective, participants in the programme recognised that additional training and extra capacity may be required. Two areas in particular surfaced repeatedly throughout the year.

- **Increasing awareness and overcoming fears.** Participants recognised that the cultures and incentives facing many commissioners work against innovative new models. At a roundtable on social investment and social impact bonds, commissioners' fear of SIBs and their lack of experience in using them, featured heavily as explanations of why they are not more widely used. There was a recognition among participants that educating commissioners about the model needed to go hand-in-hand with training to build the technical capacity of procurement, finance and legal professionals to use this model.
- **Better understanding the complexity of service users' lives.** A number of pairs in our cohort felt that policymakers and commissioners' understanding of the reality of service users' lives is a barrier to achieving better services and outcomes. Case study 9 shows how involving service users in the commissioning process is an important way to ensure that services reflect users' desires for more seamless, effective, joined-up services.

Case Study 9: 'Competitive dialogue' case study

One learning pair from the second-year cohort used their project to look at an alternative to standard local authority commissioning practices. Andy Meakin is the Director of Voices of Stoke, Big Lottery Fund's multiple needs strategic investment in Stoke-on-Trent. Alex Skinner is a Deputy Director in the Department for Work and Pensions. Here they describe their work.

We identified that too often local authorities use a 'transactional' rather than 'relational' contracting and commissioning processes when tendering for services. This means that both service users and prospective providers are excluded from the process of service design, and that tenders tend to be short term, go to the same contractors, define the same inputs and outputs, and go to the same contractors.

We used our project to examine an alternative commissioning process with the potential to overcome many of these problems. Our case study was the provision of homeless services by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWCC), which was commissioned using a 'competitive dialogue' process. This meant that service users, stakeholders and statutory providers were consulted to create a shared vision for the service, which was then used by the council to define the broad outcomes it was looking for. The council then entered into a 'competitive dialogue' with potential providers, allowing them to talk around solutions, develop ideas and explore options. This process encouraged new providers to put forward alternative approaches, and allowed the council to learn from providers and refine the vision.

We found that this process had many positive consequences including that:

- service users are involved in the design and delivery of the service, and able to affect the definition of what good practice looks like
- it led to a service capable of delivering outcomes, but without the commissioners tightly defining the inputs, and without some of the perils of a completely 'black box' commissioning model
- different providers were able to help refine the payment by results (PBR) mechanism, mitigating the risk of unintended consequences such as gaming behaviour often found in PBR schemes

[39] Norris, E., Kidson, M., Bouchal P., & Rutter., J, *Doing them Justice: Lessons from four case studies of policy implementation*, Institute for Government, 2014, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1wuFn2e>

- the relational, rather than transactional contract helped establish trust and gave the council confidence to award a longer contract (5+1+1 years)
- the resulting service is responsive, and able to evolve over the lifetime of the contract.

We concluded that this process is insufficiently utilised by commissioners who often follow more traditional input-based specification and tender processes. We are now producing a 'how-to' guide for other commissioners, and look forward to sharing this on the *Connecting Policy with Practice blog*.[40]

In this section we have outlined the main themes that have emerged from the work of the second year of the Connecting Policy with Practice programme. Many of these themes overlap, reflecting the fact that programme participants throughout the year have noted the connections and interdependencies between our two 'exam questions'. We hope that by distilling the work of the programme in 2014-15 into eight easily-digested themes, readers will see the practical steps that can be taken to address these disconnects between policy and practice, and begin to take action.

These themes will inform not only the work of the cohort and wider programme participants as they continue beyond the programme. They will also inform the future work of the Institute for Government as it continues to explore local service delivery, policymaking and civil service reform; and of the Big Lottery Fund as their strategic investments develop and mature, and further lessons for policymakers emerge.

As stated above, many of the pairs from the second cohort are producing outputs to share their insights and influence others. All will continue to share their learning through events and presentations to their colleagues and wider networks. For those interested in greater detail and further insights than those included in this report's case studies, most pairs' products will be publicised through the *Connecting Policy with Practice blog* as their work concludes.[41]

[40] The blog is hosted by the Institute for Government, and can be found here: *Connecting Policy with Practice blog,* retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/connecting-policy-with-practice-blog/>

[41] *Ibid.*

Section 2: Bringing together policymakers and practitioners

In this section we look back over two years of the Connecting Policy with Practice programme, and set out some of the main things that we have learned about bringing together policymakers and practitioners.

Why connect policymakers and practitioners?

It is an essential part of the modern policymaker's role to understand what happens when policy is translated into action on the ground. To do this the Big Lottery Fund and the Institute for Government believed it was important to foster meaningful, ongoing dialogue between different people across the policy and delivery system. The Connecting Policy with Practice Programme has been an experiment in putting this belief into practice.

In our first report we outlined several rationales for why connecting policymakers and practitioners could lead to better policymaking.[42] Here we reprise these, testing each against our experience of running the programme, as well as the thoughts and conclusions of our two cohorts.

Helping system stewards to understand their role

At the start of the programme we argued that although policymaking is Whitehall's core function, too often it is seen as a closed activity that is distinct from delivery. However, as the Institute has argued in the past, the notion of neat, top-down delivery chains does not work for decentralised services and complex policy problems. Instead, the effects of policy on the ground depend on the decisions and service design of many different agents working together within a wider system.[43] This necessitates a very different role for policymakers – that of stewarding systems by setting and adapting the overall framework, rather than specifying and enforcing the details of service delivery.[44]

The Connecting Policy with Practice Programme has responded to these developments by offering opportunities to policymakers to network widely, listen to feedback from the front line, and gain experience from beyond Whitehall of the systems in which they operate.

These opportunities have been generally well received by the policymakers on the programme, and policymakers leave the programme better aware of their role within the wider system. All those surveyed at the end of the first year of the programme reported that they felt they were now more aware of the 'real-life consequences' of their policymaking.[45]

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[42] Hughes, N., *Connecting Policy with Practice: People Powered Change*, Institute for Government, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/connecting-policy-practice-people-powered-change>

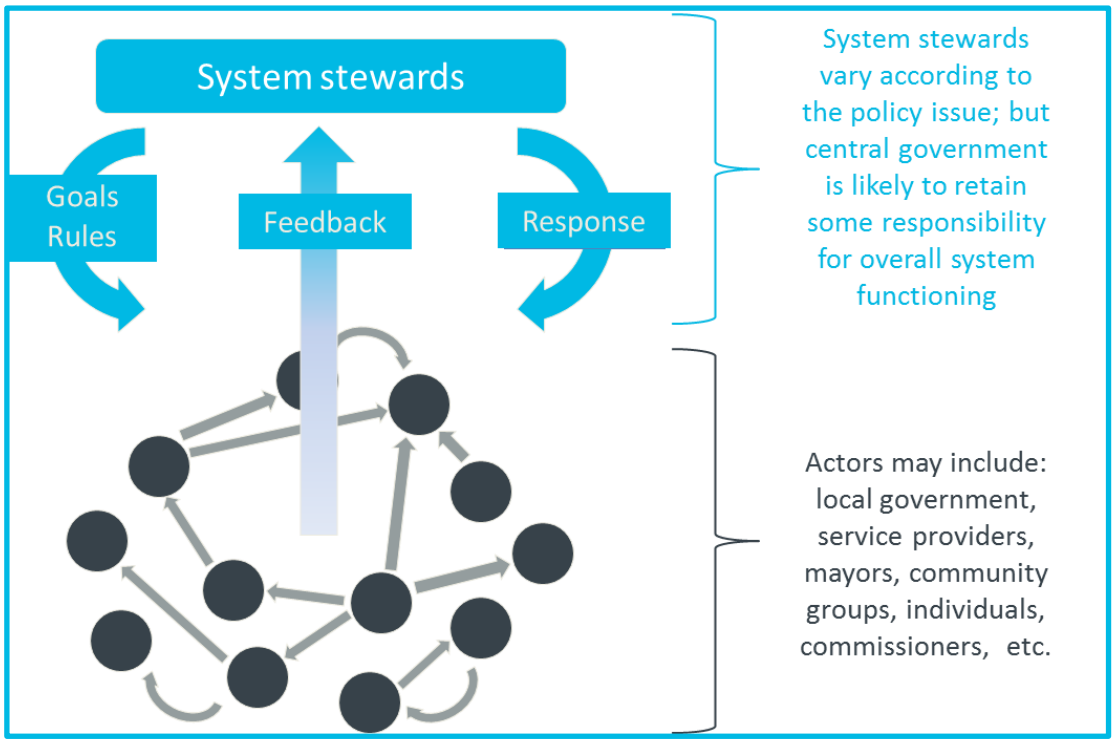
[43] Hallsworth, M. & Rutter, J., *Making Policy Better: Improving Whitehall's core business*, Institute for Government, 2011, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/making-policy-better>

[44] Hallsworth, M., *System Stewardship: The future of policy making?* Institute for Government, 2011, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/system-stewardship>

[45] Sanders, A., *Evaluating the Big Lottery Fund's Partnership with the Institute for Government: Connecting Policy with Practice*, (unpublished), p.9

We are confident that some of this heightened awareness will translate into changes to how these policymakers think about the levers available to them, and the ways in which they will act to affect the wider system. One participant said that because of the programme she would change her approach to policymaking to reflect the lesson that 'policy can be about creating the right conditions for change rather than providing one-size-fits-all solutions'.[46] Another said that he would now 'push back' on colleagues' assumptions about the desirability of 'policy as blueprint', and instead advocate for greater flexibility around implementation.[47] Many of the first-year policymaker participants have since commented on how they more consciously involve the VCS in their work, even if they have since moved on to new roles.

Figure 4: The role of 'system stewards'



Developing policymakers' knowledge and capability

The approach taken through the programme was developed with the idea that interchange with different sectors could contribute both to what civil servants learn, and also to how they learn and they retain knowledge. Psychological studies have noted the cognitive bias people have towards information that is seen and experienced first-hand, and the importance of storytelling.[48] It is likely that storytelling is important both in how civil servants and decision makers learn, but also how they craft 'policy narratives' while making policy.[49] Given this importance of stories and direct experience, the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme has aimed to give policymakers an opportunity to gain their own experiences, and hear from the front line directly.

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[46] Y2 policymaker, Workshop 4

[47] Y2 policymaker, Workshop 4

[48] Kahneman, D., *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Penguin, 2011; Gotschall, J., *The Storytelling Animal*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012

[49] Maybin, J., *Knowledge and Knowing in Policy Work: A Case Study of civil servants in England's Department of Health*, University of Edinburgh, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/8221> ; Stevens, A., 'Telling Policy Stories: An ethnographic study of the use of evidence in policymaking in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy*, 40:2. 2011, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/29907/>

Participants' ability to gain these new experiences has depended, in both years of the programme, on the extent of the activities they conducted in their pairs. In our experience, policymakers found their experiences more memorable and thought provoking where their pair had spent considerable time at the front line, talking to service users and delivery staff. Some of the pairs, for a variety of reasons, had more limited experiences of these kinds of exchanges, and therefore relied more heavily on workshops for their learning.

Case Study 10: What policymakers learned from the programme

One civil servant participating in the programme said:

As a central government policymaker, it's my role to help translate ministerial objectives into innovative and effective services to improve the lives of a range of vulnerable services users. However, the day-to-day reality of mine and many of my colleagues' roles tends to mean that we are not able to see the delivery of those services as often as would be ideal.

Participation in the Connecting Policy and Practice Programme gave me the opportunity to visit a number of front-line services, not directly related to my day job. This included an eye-opening and thought-provoking trip to a youth centre in North London which provides a range of support services, including meals, advice and help finding accommodation for homeless young people. I had already been working to try and understand the challenges around housing for vulnerable young people, reading around the subject and discussing with relevant civil service colleagues. However, it was only after actually witnessing these challenges first hand, and speaking directly to practitioners and service users, that I felt that I was able to really able to claim any reasonable understanding of the issues. It also demonstrated unintended obstacles and hurdles that the most well-intentioned policy initiatives can inflict on those who actually deliver them.

As well proving helpful for the project my partner and I were undertaking as part of the programme, this experience was an invaluable reminder of the importance of understanding front-line delivery. So often the pressure of the day job can make us feel that we don't have the time to get out of the office and down to a Jobcentre Plus, prison, hospital, etc. However it is vital to maintain regular exposure to the reality of policy in practice on the high street rather than Whitehall. Without this there is always the risk that policy development can be seen as something of an academic, esoteric exercise, rather than an integral part of a much wider process stretching well beyond the confines of departmental HQs.

The chance to examine a new policy problem afresh, alongside a colleague from the VCS sector, has reaffirmed my personal commitment to spend as much time as I can on the front line. I have resolved to ensure that I get out of the office at least a day a month, and have organised a programme of rolling visits for my team and wider business area. I am also exploring opportunities to establish a more formal programme to allow departmental staff to spend a longer period of time in the shoes of those public, private and VCS sector colleagues who make actually make policies a reality.

Some participants found the experience of direct engagement with the front line to be an eye opener, but also reflected on how they might use stories and direct experiences to better communicate their policy ideas. One policymaker in the second cohort reflected at the end of the programme that she had learned 'the value of using people's own experiences and perspective to tell a story', and that she saw this as a 'particularly powerful form of evidence' in articulating the case for change.[50]

[50] Y2 policymaker, Workshop 4

Developing specific policies

At the outset of the programme we argued that, in addition to providing policymakers with a general understanding of how policy plays out on the ground, working with delivery experts and service users could also benefit them by helping them to develop specific policies. While it is impossible to point to specific policy outcomes from the programme, the programme has helped participating policymakers to better understand the value of engaging with these groups, and also exposed them to a variety of techniques with which to do this in their everyday jobs.

Engaging service users was made an explicit theme of the second year of the programme, so much of this specific learning is presented below. It is striking that for many policymakers a 'lightbulb moment' inspired by the programme came when they realised the usefulness for their own work of engaging with front-line professionals and service users. This was a common theme in feedback on the programme, with members of the second cohort reflecting that they had learned about 'the need to find ways to consult or involve people at the receiving end',[51] or that 'the boundaries can be pushed further than I'd thought when it comes to writing users into policy processes'.[52] Pat Russell, Head of the Office for Disability Issues and one of the first year's policymakers, has described building on her programme experience in developing new policy around 'entrenched worklessness'. Inspired by the outward-looking nature of the programme, her team ran a series of user-insight events and encouraged local operational staff to design a new service in collaboration with local partners and benefits claimants.[53]

Facilitating mutually-beneficial networks

We know that strong networks can help drive the personal relationships and constituencies of support that are crucial for many policy successes.[54] The Connecting Policy with Practice Programme was designed to bring together policymakers and practitioners for a sustained period (rather than through ad-hoc contact or one-off events) with a view to creating useful, supportive networks of contacts between the sectors.

The experience on this front has been variable. While participants have consistently reported that the highlight of the programme has been their interaction with a diverse group of people from different areas, backgrounds and perspectives, sustaining these networks has been challenging.

While learning pairs have generally been very good at staying in contact, and at times small groups of participants with similar interests have emerged, there are limits to how widely these networks have spread. Cohort-wide interaction beyond physically meeting at programme events has been somewhat limited. Geographical dispersion may explain the lack of cross-cohort physical meetings, but it is less clear why cohort-wide interaction has not been common over email or social media.

Despite this, even without many active cohort-wide conversations, participants have found the one-to-one contacts they have made within their cohorts useful. The evaluation of the first year of the programme noted that most participants saw other members of their cohort as 'a highly valuable resource providing an accessible, knowledgeable and trusted reference group for future advice and information'.[55] As we noted in the year one report, some Whitehall participants found that their

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[51] Y2 practitioner, Workshop 4

[52] Y2 policymaker, Workshop 4

[53] Hughes, N., Drew, C. & Russell, P., 'Connecting Policy with Practice', *Civil Service Quarterly*, April 2014, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://quarterly.blog.gov.uk/2014/04/16/connecting-policy-with-practice/>

[54] Rutter, J., Marshall, E., & Sims, S., *The 'S' Factors: Lessons from IFG's policy success reunions*, Institute for Government website, 2012, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/s-factors>

[55] Sanders, A., *Evaluating the Big Lottery Fund's Partnership with the Institute for Government: Connecting policy with practice*, (unpublished), p.9

partners brought a particularly interesting and new set of perspectives, representing smaller delivery organisations rather than the larger, national, London-based voluntary sector bodies that the policymakers were more used to dealing with.[56]

Enhancing practitioner understanding of policy and government

Creating shared understanding and empathy between the sectors should also prove beneficial to practitioners, who are able to feed in their expertise and policy ideas to the policymaking process, and will understand better the wider context for their work. The Big Lottery Fund wants to maximise the learning from its investments, and building mutual understanding between programme leaders and policymakers is one way of helping to do this. As a result, the programme has sought to help practitioners understand government structures, processes and systems, equipping them with knowledge of how policy is made.

All of the practitioners surveyed in the first year evaluation felt that the programme had given them greater understanding of government structures and insight into policy development.[57] In fact rather than focusing on structures, a particularly-strong theme that has emerged across both years of the programme has been of practitioners gaining a more accurate, nuanced understanding of policymaking culture and motivations. Practitioners reported, with surprise, at the end of both years that the programme had revealed to them significant shared motivations between the sectors, as well as a previously-unseen 'passionate' belief and desire on the part of policymakers for their policies to make a difference.

This process of demystifying and humanising policymakers seems to have been significant, with 85% of practitioner respondents from the first year reporting that the programme had increased their ability to engage with policymakers.

What have we learned about bringing policymakers and practitioners together in this way?

While the previous section dealt with the broader question of whether bringing together policymakers and practitioners had had the effects that we anticipated, here we run through some more specific lessons that we have learned. These lessons will help guide the design of future Institute for Government programmes, and may be useful to those running other learning programmes that aim to bridge the gap between policy and practice. [58]

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[56] Y1 report, p.10

[57] Sanders, A., *Evaluating the Big Lottery Fund's Partnership with the Institute for Government: Connecting policy with practice*, (unpublished), p.8

[58] Although there are other initiatives that attempt to do similar things, we have not attempted here to compare this programme to them. The Whitehall and Industry Group runs a number of exchange and secondment schemes, including 'Charity Next', which connects the private, public and voluntary sectors: Whitehall and Industry Group, *What We Do: Charity Next*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <www.wig.co.uk/charitynext>

NCVO run the 'A Day in the Life' work-shadowing scheme between government organisations and certain voluntary organisations: NCVO, *Practical Support: 'A Day in the Life' work shadow scheme 2014*, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/cross-sector-working/work-shadow-scheme>

The Department of Health operates a 'Connecting' scheme in which senior civil servants spend up to a month in a year understanding patients and health workers at the front line: Department of Health, *Civil servants swap Whitehall corridors for the NHS front line*, Gov.uk website, 2013, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/civil-servants-swap-whitehall-corridors-for-the-nhs-front-line>

And the Cabinet Office Policy Lab team have been leading work with government departments and their partners on the front line to pilot new, collaborative approaches to policymaking and implementation: HM Government, Blog: Open Policymaking: Policy Lab, Gov.uk website, retrieved 18 March 2015, <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/category/policy-lab/>

Lesson 1: Give participants clear tasks and deadlines

The programme was designed with the hypothesis that exchanges between pairs should be undertaken with a specific purpose in mind to avoid 'voluntary-sector tourism' that might result in little learning. In the first year of the programme, although the principle of working in pairs was broadly welcomed,[59] the approach was intentionally light touch and experimental with the hope that a range of different outcomes would result.

In response to feedback that more structure and clearer goals for the pair work would be welcomed, the tasks given to pairs in the second cohort were made much clearer, and we were more prescriptive about the outputs that they should aim to produce. In general this has been a positive step. While the major output from the first cohort was a set of useful insights about the problems of translating policy to the front line, many members of the second cohort have suggested solutions to some of these problems. Members of the second cohort are now in the process of planning and producing quality outputs.

However this greater clarity has also given rise to additional challenges. A more prescriptive set of questions and processes may possibly have lessened the creativity of the cohort. Whether or not this is the case, it certainly meant that greater effort was required to monitor progress and curate the different inputs that were required to keep pairs on track. The additional clarity on process and outputs also meant that variation in the speed at which different pairs progressed was more difficult to manage, and it may also have contributed to perceptions of failure where some pairs were unable keep up with others.

Lesson 2: Focus on the benefits, and understand what such a programme can achieve

The two years of the programme, although similar in concept and overarching structure, focused participants' attention on different types of challenge. In the first year, we set the cohort three broad themes to explore (service design, funding, partnership and collaboration). Within these themes, we asked participants to identify areas where policy didn't seem to translate well through to practice on the ground. As a result, the first year concluded by identifying a series of five 'disconnects' between policy and practice.

In the second year we took two of these 'disconnects' and turned them into more specific questions that we hoped the cohort could help to find answers to. As outlined in Section 1, to guide their attempts we set a series of steps and tasks for each pair to complete throughout the year. This meant that for the second year of the programme we changed the nature of the challenge. We moved from asking participants to identify problems to asking them to start finding solutions to big, cross-cutting issues. This was, no doubt, a daunting task, but while some members didn't progress far beyond analysing problems in greater depth, other pairs have identified insightful, practical changes that could be made. Some participants fed back that learning by 'doing' and actively experiencing things was more effective than theoretical exercises might have been.

The programme has proved successful in both tasks: identifying problems and moving towards solutions. However the primary value of the programme has been in facilitating cross-sector networks and creating new knowledge and experience for participants.

[59] Sanders, A., *Evaluating the Big Lottery Fund's Partnership with the Institute for Government: Connecting Policy with Practice*, (unpublished), p.20

Lesson 3: Weigh up the pros and cons of recruiting participants from a narrow or wide pool

The programme draws on two sets of Big Lottery Fund investments – those working with young people who are far from the labour market, and those working with people with multiple needs. The practitioners who work on these programmes are then matched with policymakers who have some relevant expertise, but who do not necessarily work on these policy areas directly. Overall this means that the policy interests and backgrounds across the whole cohort vary quite considerably.

There is value to this broad scope – participants learn from a wider pool of experience and best practice, and many have reflected back on the programme, noting the unexpected synergies and shared conclusions that emerged from very different angles. This broad scope can also help by leading to more credible and robust conclusions that work for a wider range of policy areas.

There would, however, be value in applying this kind of project to a more refined policy area, and drawing cohort members from a tighter pool of practitioners and policymakers. No doubt this would create different challenges, but it might allow for a tighter, more coherent set of discussions and conclusions, as well as workshops where less time was spent focusing on background issues.

Lesson 4: Plan for not all pairs working out well

One of the core features of the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme has been that the majority of the learning is experiential; done through exchanges, visits, and self-directed research by cross-sector 'learning pairs', rather than through group-training sessions or standard research methods.

But working in pairs carries risks. There have been instances when pairs have not got on well together, or simply not shared enough common ground to find a project that enthused them both. Maintaining pair momentum can be hard if there is a mismatch in the ability or willingness of the members to commit the same amount of time and energy to a project. And if one member of a pair drops out of the programme for any reason, their partner faces the difficult task of integrating themselves into another pair's work.

This is manageable, but has resulted in some instances in a loss of momentum and morale in a small number of cases.

Lesson 5: Remember that participants have day jobs

Although perhaps obvious, it is important for anyone considering building a participation and exchange project such as this to think carefully about the demands that the project will place on participants, and to consider how these will be managed by participants who have time-consuming and often stressful day jobs. In some cases, travel time is a factor too, if events take place in London.

For the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme we recommended that participants should be prepared to commit a minimum of five full days to the programme.[60] However we made clear to prospective participants that to get the most out of the programme, more than this minimum commitment would be necessary.

The experience of both years has been that participants have erred on the side of optimism in committing to these requirements at the outset. With a few exceptions, those who did not complete

[60] Given that workshops alone take up 3.5 days, the majority of participants – particularly those who report having the most out of the programme – have spent considerably longer. Five days, as the minimum commitment is the same as the minimum number of days of continuing professional development expected by the *Civil Service Reform Plan*. HM Government, *The Civil Service Reform Plan*, Cabinet Office website, 2012, retrieved 18 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1l2wDbZ>

the programme dropped out for reasons to do with being overly stretched, unforeseen work demands or personal reasons that necessitated withdrawing from non-essential commitments. For civil servants, these pressures have often been associated with changes of post and predictable peaks in workload (for example around the budget period). For VCS participants, the problems are more commonly associated with organisational staffing pressures or overwork.

Lesson 6: Match aims to methods

The Connecting Policy with Practice Programme is an ambitious project with a complex set of inputs and a complicated theory of change. It cannot easily be explained quickly to third parties as there are many facets to it. These range from the partnership that created it, to the principles and operation of the investments from which participants learn, to the range of inputs and forums that are used to uncover and collect together the overall learning from the programme. As a result the programme operates on many levels. That has delivered a richness of discussion but means that some aspects of it that could have produced great value, such as incorporating more of the emerging learning from the Big Lottery Fund investment projects, have been difficult to achieve.

It is important to match aims to methods, and it is unlikely that the objectives of the programme could have been achieved with a simpler design. It is likely that a simpler shadowing programme would have worked for achieving objectives such as improved networks and awareness, but it would be unlikely to lead to the research outputs of the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme.

The lesson here is that others seeking to work in this way should consider carefully the trade-offs in adding complexity to such a programme: the more ambitious the programme, the more complex the design is likely to be.

Conclusion

It is two years since we first launched the Connecting Policy with Practice Programme. During this time the open policymaking agenda within government has progressed, and public services have continued to develop, including by relying more on third-party contractors. The Big Lottery Fund investments which sparked the programme have begun to show results on the ground. As we reach the end of the programme in its current form and head towards a new parliament in May 2015, many of the rationales for the programme remain valid. Looking across the years we have reached a number of conclusions.

Sharing experiences is a valuable way to learn

When the pairings worked (and the majority did) both sides clearly gained a lot of insight from seeing the world from their counterpart's perspective, whether going into Whitehall to see how departments work or going out to visit front-line services. Participants have found this really valuable, in some cases eye-opening, and much richer than a more conventional one-off visit.

There are real disconnects between policy and practice

We have learned there is still a big gap between policy and practice, but that by working together representatives of both sides were able to learn, to reach consensus and to begin generating solutions to get round the disconnects.

Shared problem solving can generate really useful insights

A particular feature of the programme was working together on a problem. The aim was never to generate 'silver bullets' to solve deep-lying cultural issues at a stroke, but to identify practical advice or tools that will help narrow the policy/practice gap in the future. A number of these have come through. This problem-sharing approach could be used in other sectors with which government engages.

There was value in exposing Whitehall to actual service users

The VCS participants managed to introduce their Whitehall counterparts to people whom the policies they design are meant to help – but with whom they rarely engage. There was value in cutting through the layers to connect policymakers with those on the sharp end of the policies they were trying to implement and we have seen a genuine desire from Whitehall to engage in this way.

Scale will remain a real issue

There will always need to be some intermediaries between high-level policy concepts and what happens on the ground. There remains a big challenge for Whitehall in thinking though how much uniformity it really needs in policy and how best to foster positive adaptation.

More interchange could help but could be difficult to get off the ground

A year-long programme, requiring a commitment of five days on each side, can only scratch the surface of bridging some of the understanding gaps. Ideally, there would be more opportunities for proper interchange between those in central departments and the VCS. Both sides could consider in more depth what they could do to build on some of the more formal links they have already.

As the BIG investments grow and are evaluated, there needs to be a direct route into the policymaking process

The programme took place in the early phase of the BIG investments. There is potential for some very valuable insights from these on how to make policy better in notoriously tricky policy areas. Some will be fed in through the What Works Centres, but BIG will need to make sure that the lessons are captured and fed systematically into Whitehall to ensure maximum impact.

This approach to learning and to making policy more open has proved a valuable experiment. We hope that others can learn from it to continue closing the gaps between policy and practice.

Annex A

Thirty people were accepted onto the core cohort for the programme, although not all were able to complete it. They were:

Jessica Adkins	Cabinet Office
Sam Alexander	Your Consortium
Caroline Allnutt	Department of Health
Jo Bradley-Fortune	Groundwork
Nicholas Campbell-Watts	Certitude
Tim Gardner	Department of Health
Elena Georgiou	Cabinet Office
Rupert Gill	Department for Work and Pensions
Carol Hebden	Freshwinds
Nikki Homewood	Brighton Housing Trust
Indra Joshi	Department for Work and Pensions
Linda Kennedy	Department for Education
Andy Lomas	Plus Dane Housing Group
Kerry MacHale	Department for Communities and Local Government
Eileen McMullan	Islington Council
Andy Meakin	Brighter Futures
Melissa Morse	Ministry of Justice
Amanda Newbold	Talent Match Staffordshire
Matt Nicholas	Ministry of Justice
Rob O'Carroll	Department for Work and Pensions
Jenny Oklikah	Home Office
Paul Pandolfo	Shelter
Eleri Pengelly	Cabinet Office
Dominic Ruffy	Amy Winehouse Foundation
Helen Ryman	Birmingham Voluntary Services Council
Ruth Shelton	Emmanuel House Day Centre
Alex Skinner	Department for Work and Pensions
Steph Taylor	London Youth
Colette Taylor	Merseyside Youth Association
Ed Waller	Department for Communities and Local Government

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The Big Lottery Fund is responsible for distributing 40% of all funds raised for good causes (about 11 pence of every pound spent on a Lottery ticket) by the National Lottery – around £670 million last year. Since June 2004 it has awarded over £6 billion to projects supporting health, education, environment and charitable purposes, from early-years intervention to commemorative travel funding for World War Two veterans.

The Big Lottery Fund supports the aspirations of people who want to make life better for their communities. It delivers funding throughout the UK, mostly through programmes tailored specifically to the needs of communities in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland as well as some programmes that cover the whole UK.

It also distributes non-Lottery funding on behalf of public bodies such as the Department for Education and the Office for Civil Society. It is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Cabinet Office.

The Big Lottery Fund wants to maximise the longer term learning from its investments. Building mutual understanding between programme leaders and policymakers is one way of helping to do this.