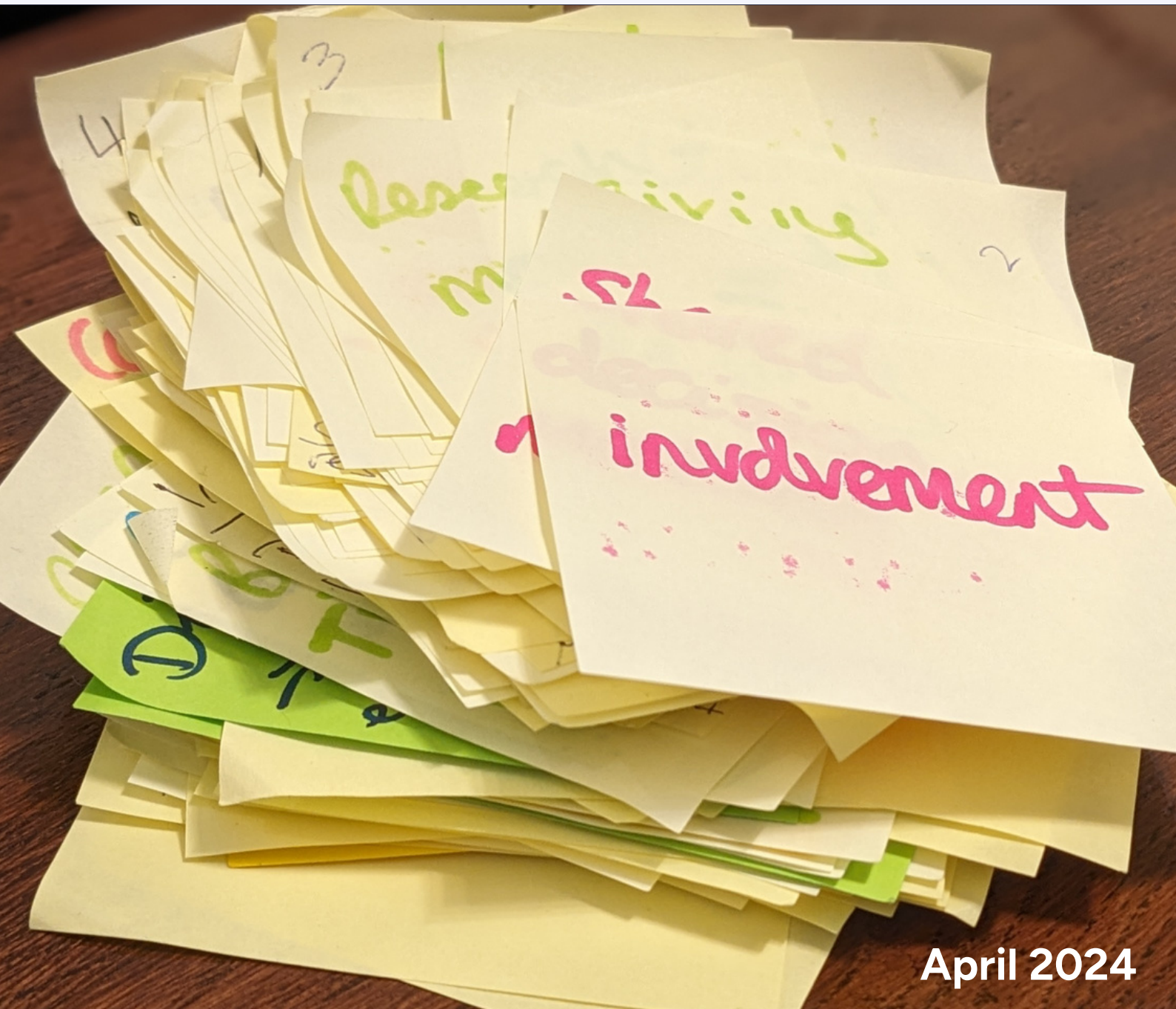# CaSE Campaign for Science and Engineering

People's Vision for R&D: Stakeholder Workshops Report

Introduction

CaSE's Discovery Decade programme is seeking to drive a behaviour change in how the research sector advocates for R&D. Our audience research suggests that if advocates want R&D to be seen as a societal priority then the sector must work towards a society-centred vision for R&D in the UK.

To do this, we must first understand whether UK publics feel they have a stake in the UK's research system, and explore what would need to change to build a greater sense of involvement and ownership among the public.

CaSE has commissioned the National Centre for Social Research's Centre for Deliberation and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement to conduct a public dialogue exercise. This will bring together 40 members of the public, chosen to be reflective of UK society, to explore the extent to which participants feel agency and ownership in the UK's R&D system; what could change to increase that; and how this could contribute to a society-centred vision for R&D.

It is vital that these discussions are informed by the work being carried out across different parts of the research system, that the questions are framed around the sector's realistic abilities, and that the outputs are useful and usable for those working in UK R&D.

To understand stakeholders' perspectives, CaSE hosted five workshops to gather views on the priorities, barriers and solutions that could help build a stronger relationship between the public and the R&D system, as well as collect examples of existing best practice. These reflections will inform materials for the public discussions.

People's Vision for R&D: Timeline

Jan-Feb 2024	Feb-April 2024	May 2024	Summer 2024
Stakeholder engagement	Development of public sessions	Public discussions	Reporting and launch

Workshop locations and approach

CaSE heard from around 50 organisations through the workshop series, which comprised one online workshop for UK-wide organisations and four in-person events, held in London, Glasgow, Manchester and Cardiff, with each having representatives from at least two of the UK's regions.

Organisations were chosen to represent a mix of views from across UK R&D, including funding bodies, industry, academia, learned societies and representative bodies, charities, public engagement and communications professionals, museums and science and discovery centres.

The workshops introduced the Discovery Decade programme, including a summary of the findings of our public attitudes research, and the scope and plans for the public dialogue project. Discussions were framed around three areas that the delivery team, working with CaSE, had identified as areas with potential for greater public ownership.

These were: shared decision-making, such as budget setting or funding awards; public involvement in research, such as co-designed projects or citizen science; and engaging the public in the cause of research.

For each, participants were asked to consider existing examples of how the public have agency or ownership in UK R&D, and discuss the barriers, benefits and solutions, along with inherent trade-offs, in increasing public involvement in R&D.

Participants were also invited to consider the overall approach proposed by CaSE and the delivery team, and what the most useful outputs would be from this piece of work. This report summarises the common themes identified across all workshops.
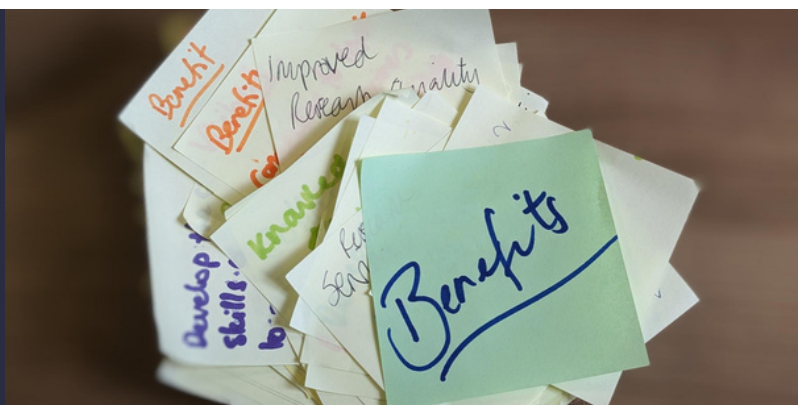
Contact

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Benefits of public agency in R&D

Participants were asked to consider the potential benefits that increasing public agency or ownership in UK R&D could bring to society and to research itself.

Discussions covered broader benefits as well as ones specific to particular types of activities. Throughout there was an agreement that the strongest benefits could only be achieved through well-run and well-resourced involvement and engagement activities that sought to engage diverse audiences. Benefits we heard included:

Identifying new research questions that better serve society
Involving the public will help identify new questions and bring new insights and perspectives that will challenge and improve research. Research is more likely to be sensitive to societal interests and create benefits for diverse groups of people.

New thinking that challenges existing norms
Involving the public will allow research to benefit from knowledge researchers don't have. Because the public may not think in the same silos as those working in R&D, it could also lead to new connections between researchers in different fields.

More motivated researchers and more funding opportunities
Having contact with the potential beneficiaries of research could benefit researchers, while a greater prioritisation of involvement could open up more funding opportunities for different kinds of research.

Stronger public connection to R&D and its outputs
Research that feels more relevant to the public is more likely to bring stronger connections. This could also impact the way an intervention or product is taken up by the public, or how it is supported by people or organisations influenced by public attitudes.

Increased trust between the public and researchers
More, and more consistent, involvement opportunities in R&D could help to build trust through increased transparency or a knowledge that research has been designed in a way that people have more confidence in. This could lead to increased buy-in and further participation in future.

Increased skills, education or employment opportunities

Involvement can help people develop new skills, open up new conversations or lead to a greater understanding of the breadth and depth of career opportunities within the sector. This could impact both participants and their loved ones.

Greater awareness of and pride in UK R&D

Public involvement or engagement can help to bring research to life, tell the stories of people beyond academic staff, demystify complex topics and open the doors of research institutions. Increasing this could lead to greater awareness of R&D throughout society, and help to generate pride in local or UK-wide R&D.

Raising R&D up the political agenda

Demonstrable benefits like those outlined above could generate greater public support for R&D – or even greater public advocacy for R&D – which would help to bolster long-term political support.

Barriers to increased public agency in R&D

Participants were asked to identify barriers that prevent involvement from being carried out effectively or ethically. It was emphasised that these barriers risk leading to approaches that are superficial, tokenistic or extractive. Barriers we heard included:

Perceptions held by both the public and researchers can affect engagement

- **Trust has not always been earned**: A huge range of factors impact trust, and how it is distributed within society. These need to be understood and acknowledged.

- **There can be a sense R&D 'isn't for me':** Some parts of the R&D system feel inaccessible, intimidating or that they are not for or part of a community.

- **The R&D sector's concerns and assumptions impact engagement:** Participants reflected that some researchers can be reluctant to engage with the public, to 'give up' ownership, or express concerns about the impact of greater public involvement.

Time and resource are major barriers, especially if not considered early

- **A lack of time and resource can hamper even those who want to involve the public:** Pressures include a lack of dedicated resources, short-term or piecemeal funding, and colleagues or leadership that don't support or prioritise public engagement.

- **Involvement is not always built in from the start:** The time and resource needed for engagement or involvement, at all stages of a project, is often underestimated or seen as an add-on or afterthought.

- **Actions are limited by who holds power:** Public views aren't always taken as seriously as other inputs and it isn't always clear who holds the power. There is not always clarity about the extent to which and how participants' views will be used.

- **Engaging is time consuming for publics:** Engagement can require significant commitment of time and energy from participants, which is harder for some and risks involvement being skewed towards those who have the time and space to engage.

A lack of consideration of inclusion risks undermining engagement

- **Imbalances in opportunities prevent truly inclusive involvement**: Inequality of access or opportunity was a significant concern throughout. The requirements on the public could lead to opportunities being more accessible to some groups.

- **Language and processes can be unclear**: The language and systems in R&D sector are complicated and can create barriers for participants. Application processes for involvement – including schemes that offer funding to communities – can be hard to interpret, putting them out of reach for some.

- **Historic power imbalances are hard to unpick**: Some public groups don't expect to be involved or don't trust or value the process, creating an inherent systemic barrier.

- **There is a risk of consultation fatigue**: This is especially true in under-served communities that are asked to contribute to multiple projects over periods of time.

Solutions to increase public agency in R&D
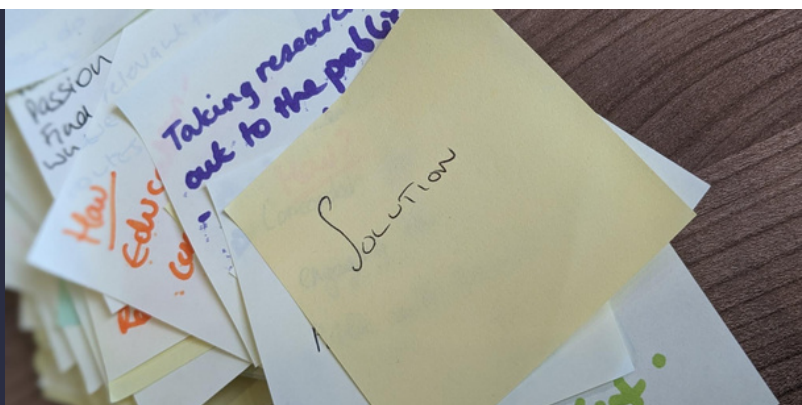
Participants were asked to consider what steps could be taken to increase public agency within the research system. These reflections will inform the conversations we have with public participants, as well as helping CaSE to develop recommendations at the end of the project. We heard that there needs to be:

A fundamental culture change within the R&D sector

If the public are to truly have more agency in the R&D system, the individuals and organisations within it need the time, space and support for a culture change that will require a lot of "unlearning". Participants talked about a need for greater humility within the sector; greater recognition of diverse forms of knowledge; and stronger signals from leadership and decision makers that involvement is a priority.

Greater prioritisation of public involvement from decision makers

Participants often expressed a sense that public involvement or engagement was seen as an 'add-on' and called on all decision makers and funders to demonstrate that it is a priority. This could be done through funding requirements, guidance, concordats and specific grants.

Commitment to long-term funding that is used wisely

Significant investment should include funding for researcher training and incentivisation, for community partners and for involvement activities themselves. All funding must be used effectively, and not wasted on tokenistic or unethical engagement.

Increased involvement at all stages of research

Many felt there should be more public involvement in the earlier stages of the research process. Discovery Decade research suggests that R&D's people, processes and places are often opaque, and so greater involvement could help broaden awareness and understanding of a complex system.

Increased commitment to ethically engage diverse groups

Participants emphasised that imbalances need to be properly and effectively addressed, which includes through increased funding, support for a community partners and commitment to tailor methods and approaches.

Increased honesty and transparency

Conversations with researchers and with the public need to be reframed, with an effort to acknowledge the perceptions that both sides may hold. The sector must recognise power asymmetries when engaging, and ensure it is clear what can and can't be changed with the public's input.

More sharing of best practice and lessons learnt

Many participants noted the relevance of existing principles, such as those in the Research Excellence Framework, but some questioned whether enough had been done to make the most use of these potential links. Similarly, many noted the range of examples of public involvement, but didn't feel that they were as visible to other parts of the sector – or the public – as they could be.
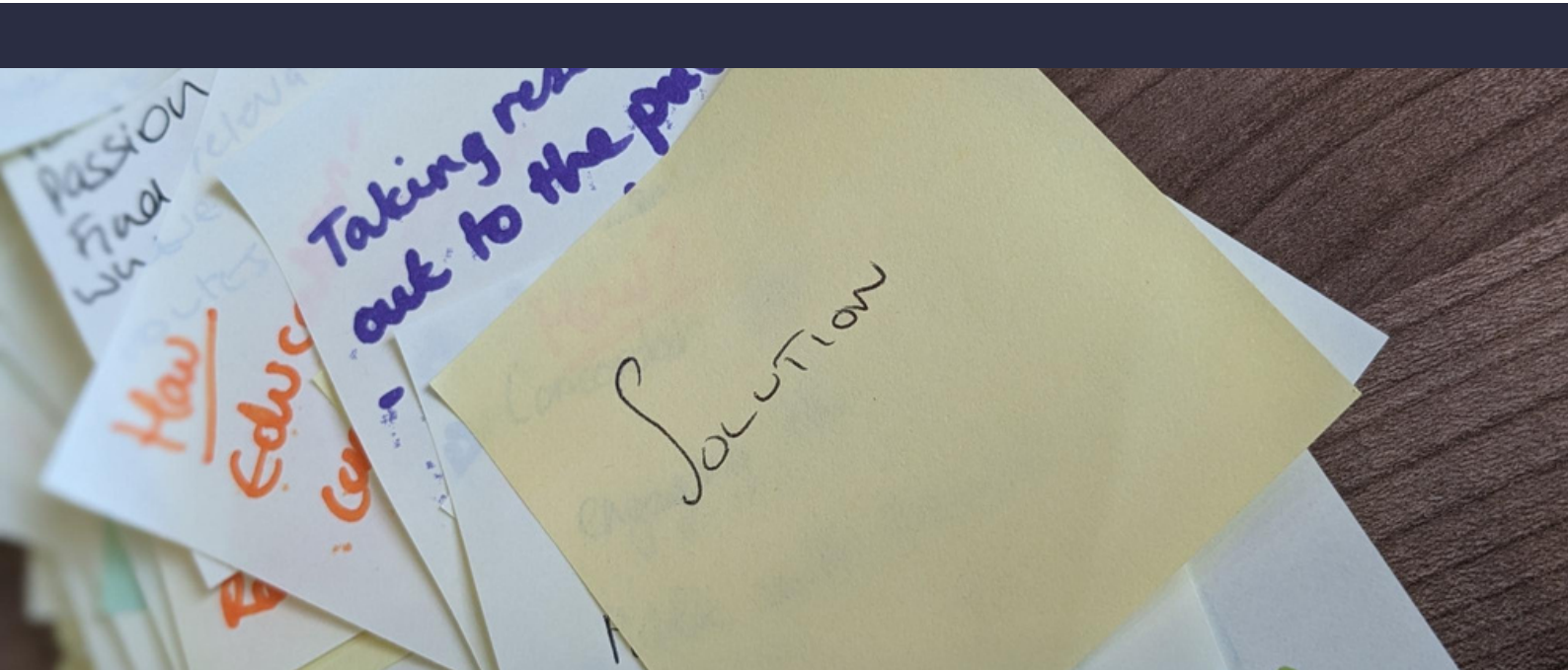
Project scope and outputs

Participants were invited to discuss the challenges of the scope of the project. These included the breadth of the research question, in that it seeks to cover all disciplines and sectors; the complexities of the R&D process that participants will need to grasp in order to have an informed conversation; and how to demonstrate the different scales of opportunities from hyper-local to national or even global scales.

Finally, CaSE sought opinions on the potential outputs of the People's Vision for R&D, to ensure that they are as useful for the sector as possible. Feedback included:

- Overarching principles that are **ambitious and challenge assumptions**, alongside tangible recommendations for increasing public ownership in the research system

- **Tailored recommendations** aimed at specific disciplines, sectors or actors, including for policy-makers

- Recommendations for **further research or next steps** for the whole R&D sector

- **Easy to reference evidence** of attitudes towards, and benefits of, public involvement, including how different methods are received by the public participants

- **Practical resources and advice**, including tips, toolkits and resources informed by public participants and stakeholders

- **A space for continued discussion** and opportunities for the public participants to join conversations with decision-makers or other stakeholders

Examples

Participants at the workshops were invited to share examples of ways in which the public are involved in different parts of the research process. Through these examples we sought to explore the opportunities for engagement at different levels of time and resource commitment and at different scales.

We gathered **200 examples**, including:

- **Shared decision making**, for instance in organisational governance processes or strategy development, participatory budgeting, and in the assessment of individual research proposals

- **Involvement in research**, for instance through co-designed research projects or participation in research, such as clinical trials, contributions to citizen science projects or input into product development

- **Implementation or communication of research**, for instance through contributions to policy-making processes based on research, direct engagement with researchers or involvement in the production of science centre exhibitions

Many examples were strongly place-based, with participants emphasising **local pride or local identities** as a way to connect with the public. This could be tied to historic or current industries or schemes like cities of culture. The increased focus on universities' civic role within their localities was recognised, although this also demonstrates the risk posed by cold spots for R&D or public engagement.

The examples will be used to support public participants to consider the tensions and trade-offs inherent in the different ways in which the public can be increasingly given ownership in R&D.

CaSE is collecting and categorising the examples and will make them available as part of its reporting on the project.

Workshop attendees

CaSE, NatCen and NCCPE are grateful to everyone who provided their perspectives to this part of the project, both our workshop attendees and their colleagues and contacts who provided evidence to support the discussions.

- **Public and funding bodies**: Health Research Authority, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Science Foundation Ireland, Scottish Funding Council, UK Research and Innovation

- **Learned societies and representative bodies**: Academy of Medical Sciences, British Academy, Institute of Physics, Learned Society of Wales, National Farmers Union, Royal Academy of Engineering, Royal Society

- **Charities**: British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, LifeArc, Nesta, Vocal, Wellcome Trust, WWF UK

- **Academia**: Cambridge Zero, Cardiff University, GW4 University Group, Heriot-Watt University, Liverpool John Moores University, Midlands Innovation, Newcastle University, Nottingham Trent University, Queen Mary University of London, UCL, University of Bath, University of Glasgow, University of Nottingham, Universities UK, University of Warwick, Yorkshire Universities

- **Research institutes**: Ada Lovelace Institute, Francis Crick Institute, UK Dementia Research Institute

- **Industry**: Deep Science Ventures, EMBL's European Bioinformatics Institute, Fraunhofer UK, MSD, Turing Innovation Catalyst

- **Communications and engagement**: British Science Association, I'm a Scientist, Royal Institution, Scientia Scripta

- **Museums and discovery centres**: Glasgow Science Centre, Science and Industry Museum Manchester, We The Curious, Bristol

CaSE would also like to thank UCL, Fraunhofer UK, and Cardiff University for hosting the London, Glasgow and Cardiff based workshops, respectively.