

24.06.2021

## **Government has a health and care crisis causing paralysis and myopia Can Deliberative Democracy (DD) provide the cure?**

Deliberative Democracy (DD) is a generic term covering Citizens Assemblies, juries, panels and many other forms adopted in different countries.

The commonality is that government level decisions, recommendations or suggestions are made by a cross section of the demography affected by the decision, through informed deliberation aiming for consensus. It is therefore different to a referendum, consultation or petition and different to representative democracy as we know it.

[Complete instructions on the classical form – Citizens Assemblies.](#)

It is relatively rare in the UK, but has a [substantial track record globally.](#)

[This BBC documentary](#) tracks a 2020 Citizens Assembly on climate policy for the UK. It illustrates what happens at every deliberative democracy event: the participants rise to the occasion, produce balanced but bold proposals and their appetite for civic engagement is permanently improved. It is recommended viewing for insight into the process.

Is it the right approach to resolve some of the knotty problems facing the NHSs?

There are decisions that governments fail to make well. These may be where:

- The public is deeply divided
- The issue is emotive
- Short term sacrifice is needed for long term gain
- Government lacks the expertise and insight.

This is where DD comes into its own.

The challenges facing the NHSs are emotive, government is intimidated and possibly lacks expertise. Should we trial an informal version of DD to test its efficacy? If we should, we need the health professions to shape the process.

The process has a preparatory and follow up phase and three event phases:

Preparatory : Enlisting governmental involvement (even if only an observer), framing the questions to consider, identifying the experts and stake holders and the facilitators, publicity to ensure impact, enrolling participants who reflect the demography impacted.

### Three event phases

Input where the ethos and purpose is introduced. Information from all sides of an issue is presented by stake holders and experts

Deliberation where questioning, listening and discussion build agreement. Usually 80+% agreement is achieved.

Outputs where the decisions, recommendations etc are framed. At a recent assembly in France, the legislators joined to frame the proposals in legal language to lay before parliament to vote into law.

### Follow up

Disseminating the outputs and publicity for the process

Pursuing government commitments and meetings to consider adopting the outputs

Informing and involving event participants to promote learning.

Although proper DD is commissioned by a level of government (local, national, international) there are informal versions which can be valuable.

[Grwp Resilience](#), a Wales based organisation has experience in running informal DD which we call Trafodwn (Welsh for 'Let us discuss') Link to a talk on one - see [Peoples Assembly in Wales](#)

Trafodwn are shorter – 2.5 to 6 hours, have taken place in different counties and cities, without cost or paid staff, are not commissioned by government or part of their formal decision making, and the attendees are self selected from balanced target audiences rather than scientifically stratified and randomly selected. Despite this they had some of the positive outcomes of the proper version. They:

- Brought sectors with conflicting views together to learn from specialists and to build agreement
- Showed people from a variety of backgrounds their own capacity to find creative solutions together
- Had some influence on politicians and Welsh government, providing a mandate for bolder decisions and allowing them to take part in a different democratic process without us and them division.
- Gave participants and others a new appetite for democratic engagement.
- Showed how our current democratic processes are outdated, mired in conflict and dysfunctional, and that there are alternatives that work.

Grwp Resilience offers to help you to set up a Trafodwn or a formal government or health board commissioned DD event such as a citizens jury in Wales.. This would be

your event, we would act as enablers and facilitators but we can ensure it is effective, well publicised and untangles some of the health service's knotty problems.

Cofion cynnes,

Vicky Moller, chair of Grwp Resilience.