

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT
STAFF & STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS FOLLOW UP
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
September – October 2008

Stakeholder Research Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background & Methodology

The Welsh Assembly Government requires comprehensive, reliable and timely intelligence from a range of sources not just on how well local public services are being delivered, but also about how well the organisation itself is performing. To understand what the Assembly Government's strengths and weaknesses are as an organisation, it needs to ascertain the views of staff, customers and citizens and to bring these various perspectives together to provide a rounded picture of performance and to direct improvement.

In 2008 the Office of the Chief Social Research Officer (OCSRO) identified several issues arising from the 2008 Staff Survey and the biennial Stakeholder Survey needing further exploration through qualitative research, namely:

1. Citizen focus (an issue for both staff and stakeholders)
2. Extent to which the Welsh Assembly Government is "joined up" (both staff and stakeholders)
3. Leadership / management (staff only)
4. Obtaining information on WAG (stakeholders only)

Beaufort Research was therefore commissioned by OCSRO to carry out a follow-up qualitative study amongst a sample of staff and stakeholders across Wales. The aim of the study was to explore each of the identified themes in more depth with the relevant audience, in order to supplement the information gained through the quantitative surveys and to aid the Assembly Government's understanding of why those views were expressed.

Views were gathered through a series of 22 mini-focus group discussions, comprising 12 sessions with staff at six Assembly Government offices across Wales, and 10 sessions with stakeholders across Wales. These were supplemented by 3 personal depth interviews (1 with a staff member and 2 with stakeholders). Staff were recruited at random within each region from a database supplied by OCSRO, whilst stakeholders were recruited from a database of those holding positive or negative views on some of the issues in question, taken from those who'd participated in the preceding quantitative survey and who were willing to be re-contacted for further research. Discussions were conducted between 30th September and 9th October 2008.

Key Findings

Relationship with Welsh Assembly Government

- Views on what the Assembly Government was like to deal with overall were mixed.
- The main positive aspect about dealing with the Assembly Government was felt to be the quality of its staff
- Many issues were raised about difficulty in interacting with the Assembly Government, The main ones mentioned spontaneously were:

- lack of joined up working (often referred to as poor communications or fragmentation or silos);
 - a lack of understanding of stakeholder organisations and their needs;
 - a perceived unwillingness, on occasion, to take decisions;
 - a perceived focus on Cardiff and a consequent lack of understanding of rural Wales.
- Stakeholders who dealt mainly or exclusively with the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) were particularly negative about dealing with the Assembly Government and felt the situation had worsened in recent years

Views on Citizen Focus

- Some of the key elements of 'citizen focus' identified by stakeholders were:
 - a focus on the needs of the people (not starting from systems or services);
 - citizens being at the centre of activity – so bottom up, not top down;
 - providing high quality of service;
 - good communication / consultation / engagement with citizens;
 - services need to be accessible.
- Stakeholders were unanimous that it was important for the Welsh Assembly Government to be citizen focused
- Views on the current extent of citizen focus within the Assembly Government were far from positive, although some stakeholders felt that the organisation was seeking to improve in this respect
- Stakeholders found it easier to cite examples of bad citizen focus than good. Whilst the range of examples given by participants was very diverse (reflecting the breadth of backgrounds within the sample), one common theme in terms of bad practice was consultation
- Many of the barriers identified by stakeholders preventing greater citizen focus within the Welsh Assembly Government mirrored the difficulties voiced spontaneously earlier on in the discussion. Key barriers were:
 - lack of communication;
 - bureaucracy;
 - citizens' lack of knowledge / understanding;
 - lack of joined up working;
 - a lack of understanding of regional needs and difficulty in accessing WAG or knowing who to speak to

Views on joined up working

- When stakeholders were asked to define "joined up" working, key common elements emerging from their definitions were

- working together / partnership working (internally within the Assembly Government and externally with stakeholder organisations);
 - having a common goal / aim and good communication with all interested parties, underpinned by an awareness or understanding of what others were doing
- Stakeholder views on the extent of joined up working within the Welsh Assembly Government were almost universally negative. The main barriers to joined up working identified were:
 - silo mentality of departments;
 - poor communications;
 - a 'them and us' culture, with a lack of understanding of stakeholders' organisations or priorities;
 - lack of information and knowledge of departments within Welsh Assembly Government;
 - a perceived Cardiff focus, linked to a loss of regional autonomy; bureaucracy and politics

Views on obtaining information

- When stakeholders were asked what information they wanted from the Assembly Government, a wide variety of information requirements were identified. A few common themes emerged, however:
 - staff contact details / organisational structure;
 - strategy or direction of travel;
 - benchmarking information and:
 - feedback on the outcomes of consultations / reviews
- Stakeholders also called for all information provided to be timely, clear and easy to understand
- The main channel used currently by nearly all stakeholders to obtain information from and about the Assembly Government is the website. Despite this, views of the website were very negative on the whole, mainly because it was considered to have a poor search facility and to be difficult to navigate. Improving the website, which is the main information resource used by stakeholders, therefore appears to be a priority
- When asked how they'd like to obtain information, most were happy with the status quo (although they called for improvements to the website). A significant minority would like more personal contact, however, linking to the desire for more signposting to relevant contacts within the Welsh Assembly Government, should they need help
- There were mixed views on the ease or difficulty of obtaining information from the Welsh Assembly Government and opinions varied according to the level of stakeholder, type of organisation and department / s dealt with. Those at a more senior level tended to have no difficulties, whilst less

senior stakeholders seemed to have more difficulties because their relationships were less personal

- There were no issues with information sent out by the Welsh Assembly Government – difficulties were perceived to arise when stakeholders had queries or needed to initiate contact. In the latter situation the main barriers were perceived to be the website, the civil service culture (not perceived to be very customer focused) and not knowing who to contact if the need arose
- Most stakeholders rated the bilingual information provided by the Assembly Government highly and only a few participants were of the opposite view

Views on Welsh Assembly Government consultation exercises

- There was widespread experience of Welsh Assembly Government consultation across the workshops – every stakeholder had taken part in consultations in some form, most commonly responding to draft papers
- Opinions were mixed on the issue of Welsh Assembly Government consultation with stakeholders – whilst having the opportunity to contribute to policy development was applauded, most stakeholders perceived there to be flaws in the current process
- Weaknesses of Welsh Assembly Government consultation were felt to be:
 - scepticism about its value – is it meaningful or have decisions already been taken?;
 - an absence of feedback to participants;
 - consultation activity not being sufficiently joined up; (for some)
 - consultation overload;
 - timing issues and issues with the content / design / type of language used in documents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In order to develop and deliver an effective public service the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) needs comprehensive, reliable and timely intelligence not just about how well local public services are being delivered, but also about how well the Welsh Assembly Government itself is performing.

To be meaningful, this intelligence must draw on a range of sources and include the views of the people and organisations with whom the Assembly has different types of relationships. To understand what WAG's strengths and weaknesses are as an organisation it needs to ascertain the views of staff, customers and citizens, and it needs to bring these various perspectives together to provide a rounded picture of performance and to direct improvement.

In 2008 the Office of the Chief Social Research Officer (OCSRO) were reporting on the 2008 Staff Survey and the biennial Stakeholder Survey at around the same time, which allowed OCSRO to draw out the common issues on which it needs to focus.

Several issues arising from the surveys were recognised as needing further exploration through qualitative research, namely:

(1) Citizen focus

This emerged as an issue from both the staff and stakeholder surveys. 28% of **staff** did not think WAG puts the citizen at the heart of decision making and 19% of **stakeholders** said WAG rarely or never work with them to engage citizens in public service design and delivery.

(2) Extent to which Welsh Assembly Government is "joined up"

This was highlighted as an area to investigate further for both surveys. 57% of **stakeholders** disagreed with the statement that WAG is joined up, and 39% of **staff** disagreed that the different parts of the organisation work well together.

(3) Leadership/management

Staff scores were lowest for having confidence in the Management Board (25% positive) and the Management Board providing clear leadership and direction to the organisation (27% positive). However, these questions had high neither agree/disagree scores (over 40%), and the proportions of negative and positive responses were roughly equal. This has raised the need to explore the way in which staff are interpreting these questions and review the leadership / management questions for the next staff survey. In order to inform this work, it is necessary to find out what matters to staff in terms of leadership/management.

In addition, the WAG Management Board requires research into whether leaders are equipped to carry out their role. For **stakeholders**, 'providing strategic direction' was one of the poorest areas of performance (38% positive score).

(4) Obtaining information on WAG

This emerged as an issue from the stakeholder survey only. 27% of **stakeholders** said they find it difficult to obtain information about the Welsh Assembly Government.

Beaufort Research were therefore commissioned by OCSRO to conduct follow-up qualitative research amongst both audiences: staff and stakeholders.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

The overall aim of the follow-up study was as follows

To explore relevant issues in more depth with each audience, to supplement the information gained through the quantitative surveys and to aid WAG's understanding of why staff and stakeholders expressed those views

The research was required to answer the following specific research questions, based on the key issues above:

(1) Citizen focus

- How is the term 'citizen focus' defined by staff and stakeholders?
- What type of relationships do staff have with citizens? E.g. are they direct or via agencies?
- In what ways is WAG good at being citizen focused and in what ways is it not?
- What good practice examples exist of where WAG is citizen focused?
- What are the barriers faced by staff with regards to focusing on citizens in their roles?
- How can these barriers be overcome?

(2) Extent to which Welsh Assembly Government is "joined up"

- What does 'joined up working' mean to staff and stakeholders?
- What are the types of joined up working that exist within WAG?
- In what ways is WAG good at being joined up and in what ways is it not?
- What good practice examples exist of where WAG is joined up?
- What barriers exist to WAG in being joined up?
- How can these barriers be overcome?

(3) Leadership / management

- What matters to staff in terms of leadership/management?
- Are leaders enabled and equipped to carry out their leadership role?
- How are team leaders interacting with their staff?
- Are team leaders using the WAG leadership brief?

(4) Difficulty in obtaining information about WAG

- What information about WAG do stakeholders want?
- How do stakeholders go about obtaining the information?
- What information about WAG is easy / difficult to obtain?

- What are the barriers that stakeholders face in obtaining information about WAG?
- How can these barriers be overcome?
- How can WAG make information easier to obtain?
- How would stakeholders like to receive information?

1.3 Research Methodology

1.3.1 Scope of the Research

The scope of the research is summarised below:

		Research Audience	
	Research Theme	Staff	Stakeholders
(1)	Citizen focus	✓	✓
(2)	Extent to which WAG is 'joined up'	✓	✓
(3)	Leadership management /	✓	
(4)	Obtaining information on WAG		✓

This report provides findings from the **stakeholder** element of the study only - staff results are reported on separately. A third report is also available, containing results from both audiences on the common themes and featuring a comparison of staff and stakeholder views.

1.3.2 Overall Approach

A qualitative approach was necessary to provide the in-depth understanding required and to satisfy the objectives above. A series of 22 mini-focus group discussions was therefore conducted amongst a sample of Welsh Assembly Government staff and stakeholders across Wales.

After careful consideration, it was decided to keep each audience separate, rather than combine staff and stakeholders within the same discussions, for the following reasons:

- It was felt that mixing stakeholders with staff might impact on staff's willingness to speak freely, and therefore might affect the quality of data obtained. The presence of 'customers' (even those of other departments, not their own) could constrain employees and make them less willing to speak openly and honestly about problems and issues they face that impact on the service they deliver than if they were discussing these issues in groups containing only their peers.
- Also, combining the two audiences within the same discussions could make for difficult group dynamics, since staff may feel uncomfortable if confronted

by stakeholders with negative views about how the Assembly operates, and they may become defensive as a result.

Mini-groups, comprising a target number of 4-5 participants in each discussion, were chosen as the best data gathering approach, rather than full-sized focus groups of 6-8 individuals. Smaller-sized groups were felt to lend themselves better to a full exploration of the issues amongst stakeholders and staff, where individuals typically have a lot to say (especially when many participants are senior level decision-makers). Also, mini-groups allow every participant more time to contribute their views in full. The second reason related to practical sampling considerations, arising from limited universe sizes and the availability of relevant individuals within the right areas / work groups / etc.

Alongside the mini-groups, a small number of additional personal depth interviews were carried out (3 in total) to cover the following situations: where a respondent wished to participate in a language different to that chosen by the remainder of participants at that location and where a member of staff or stakeholder was very keen to participate but could not make the mini-group time or date.

1.3.3 Sampling

A number of different sample considerations were identified by WAG to be taken into account in the development of the sampling matrix:

Sample consideration	Stakeholders	Staff
Good practice and barriers Relevant to areas (1), (2) and (4)	- Whether stakeholders were positive or negative re citizen focus; joined-up; obtaining information about WAG	- Whether staff come from work areas that were positive or negative about citizen focus; joined-up; -
Grade Relevant to all 4 areas	- Seniority within external organisation	- Grade within WAG
Location Relevant to all 4 areas	- Location of organisation	- Office location
Department Relevant to all 4 areas	- WAG department that stakeholders are most in contact with most often	-Department (including whether former AGSB)
Time working for or dealing with WAG Relevant to all 4 areas	- Length of time that stakeholders have been in contact with WAG	- Length of service (if available)
Leader specific research Only relevant to area (3)	N/A	- Whether participant has staff or is defined as a leader. .

After careful consideration of all these variables identified by WAG and after discussions with OCSRO on commissioning, the following sampling approach was agreed:

- **Staff**

The primary stratification of the qualitative sample for staff was by **region**, with discussions taking place at six different Assembly Government offices across Wales. At each office, two discussions were held; one amongst staff identified as Leaders and one amongst non-Leaders (this distinction was used as a proxy for grade, since Leaders tend to be middle managers and above). Each Leader and non-Leader group was comprised of a mix of staff selected at random from departments represented at that location or (for smaller offices) within the broader region. Thus staff from a range of departments were obtained within the sample (some more or less positive on the themes of citizen focus or joined-up working) as well as a range of employees with shorter or longer periods of service within WAG.

- **Stakeholders**

Sampling for the stakeholder audience was conducted slightly differently. Stakeholders holding positive or negative views on the key themes of citizen focus, joined-up working and obtaining information from WAG (and, importantly, who had given permission to be re-contacted for further research) could be identified from the 2008 Stakeholder Survey data set, so it was possible to target individuals holding particular views. Our approach with this audience was therefore to focus the qualitative research sample on **those with strong positive or negative views on at least two of the three key themes** within each region. This was the primary stratification of the sample.

Stakeholders were selected at random from within the 'positives' and 'negatives' available for re-contact in each region, after further stratification by level of seniority. Individuals were categorised as High / Middle / Low (derived from their job titles captured during the Stakeholder Survey) and care was taken to ensure that no junior level stakeholders (i.e. categorised as 'Low') were invited to participate in discussions involving very senior decision-makers (categorised as 'High') and vice versa, because it was felt this would hinder group dynamics. So each mini-group of stakeholders comprised a broad range of organisation type.

1.3.4 Final sample design

The final sample design for stakeholders is shown below:

Stakeholders			
Group Number	Location	Opinions	Seniority
1	NE Wales (St Asaph)	Positive	Medium / Lower
2		Negative	Higher / Medium
N/A		Negative (Depth Interview)	Higher / Medium
3	NW Wales (Caernarfon)	Positive	Higher / Medium
4		Negative	Higher / Medium
N/A		Negative (Depth Interview)	Medium / Lower
5	Mid Wales (Newtown)	Positive	Higher / Medium
6		Negative	Higher / Medium
7	SW Wales (Carmarthen)	Positive	Medium / Lower
8		Negative	Higher / Medium
9	SE Wales (Cardiff)	Positive	Higher / Medium
10		Negative	Medium / Lower

1.3.5 Recruitment

Following agreement of the sample design with OCRSO, Beaufort identified appropriate individuals from the 2008 Stakeholder Survey sample frame fitting the required specification and who were willing to be re-contacted for future research.

An introductory letter from the Permanent Secretary was prepared and issued by email by Beaufort to all those in the sample frame, as the first stage in recruitment. This letter explained the importance of the follow up research and the research process, and provided a reassurance of confidentiality. The letter is included at Appendix A.

This was followed up with a telephone call by Beaufort to those within the sample frame at each location to establish their willingness to take part, their availability on the selected date and their language preference (all stakeholders were given the opportunity to participate in English or Welsh). Those willing and able to take part were sent a confirmation email with details of the time and venue for the discussion.

1.3.6 Research Details and Structure of Sessions

Groups were held during the working day at WAG offices in each of the six chosen locations across Wales. They were held in the day rather than in the evening to help maximise attendance. Assembly Government offices were selected as the venues for discussions because of their convenience for staff and stakeholders. OCSRO staff kindly made arrangements for room bookings and refreshments.

Sessions lasted for around an hour and a half and were designed to be as interactive as possible, so that respondents at all levels could engage with the process and to help make it stimulating and interesting for participants. Discussions were free-flowing and facilitated by a senior qualitative researcher from Beaufort. They were based around a topic guide designed by Beaufort and agreed with OCSRO (see Appendix B).

Fieldwork for stakeholders was carried out between 1st and 8th October 2008.

2. THE CONTEXT: STAKEHOLDERS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

During the initial part of the discussions, stakeholders' dealings with the Welsh Assembly Government were explored, to provide context to stakeholder's views on the key themes that followed.

In this section of the sessions, stakeholder perceptions of the Assembly Government and what it was like to deal with were discussed, as well as participants' views on any issues that made it difficult to interact with the organisation. Finally, they were invited to put forward suggestions for improving the way the Assembly Government interacts with stakeholders.

2.1 Summary of Key Findings on Relationship with Assembly Government

- When asked what words came to mind when thinking of the Assembly Government, descriptions given by 'positive' stakeholders (i.e. those that expressed positive views in the preceding Stakeholder Survey on some of the key themes being explored in the qualitative study) were on the whole functional and linked to their type of relationship with the organisation, e.g. relating to money / funding or politics. Those of 'negative' stakeholders tended to focus on areas of dissatisfaction. Words such as 'bureaucracy', 'chaotic', 'remote' and 'silos' came to mind.
- Views on what the Assembly Government was like to deal with overall were mixed. Although the 'positive' stakeholders tended to be more satisfied with their interaction with WAG on the whole (with the impression that they had closer personal relationships with officials within the Assembly Government than the 'negatives'), they cited many of the same difficulties as the 'negative' stakeholders
- The main positive aspect about dealing with the Assembly Government was felt to be the quality of its staff, especially at a local level, namely those working in regional offices rather than at Cathays Park
- Many factors emerged that were felt to make it difficult to interact with WAG, of which the main ones mentioned spontaneously were:
 - Lack of joined up working (often referred to as poor communications or fragmentation or silos)
 - Lack of understanding of stakeholder organisations and their needs
 - Unwillingness to take decisions, on occasion
 - Focus on Cardiff and lack of understanding of rural Wales
- Stakeholders who dealt mainly or exclusively with DCELLS were particularly negative about dealing with the Assembly Government and felt the situation had worsened in recent years, following the merger of ELWa into the Assembly Government and the subsequent restructures. The changes for the worse noticed were:

- Shift towards the centre and away from the regions, with less decision-making in the regions
- Staff cuts leading to a loss of experience and expertise and some departments being under-resourced generally
- Cultural changes

2.2 Dealing with the Welsh Assembly Government

To start, stakeholders were asked what words came to mind when they thought of the Welsh Assembly Government. Descriptions given by ‘positive’ stakeholders were on the whole functional, and linked closely to their type of relationship with and the purposes of their contact with the Welsh Assembly Government, whilst those of ‘negative’ stakeholders tended to focus on areas of dissatisfaction.

Descriptors are shown below, grouped into themes:

Theme	Words
Financial	<p>Funding <i>“Because that’s primarily where our income comes from for the college” (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p> <p>Grants ‘Keeper of the Purse’ Money <i>“We have to go through lots of hoops for very small grants” (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p>
Negatives	<p>Bureaucracy <i>“Bureaucracy, regulation, paper, audit, regulation, control” (St Asaph, Negative)</i></p> <p>‘Could do better’ A mess / Chaotic / Difficult <i>“Lots of changes, lack of clarity” (Carmarthen, Negative)</i> <i>“Chaotic because post-ELWa we’ve had permanent changes...it’s had about five names in that time...high turnover of staff” (Cardiff, Negative)</i> <i>“It’s not difficult in the sense that I find them difficult, in terms of the people...things keep on changing. The Assembly keeps on changing the game plan for work based learning ...there’s no period of consultation which you can build a platform on” (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p> <p>Remote / Arms Length <i>“They’re geographically remote and in some respects I’m not convinced that officials within the Assembly fully appreciate the realities of life working in the organisations that they interface with” (Caernarfon, Negative)</i> <i>“I guess it can prove to be a barrier and I would say that you need to understand the workings of the Assembly in order to be able to have an input or to make connections” (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p>

Theme	Words
Negatives (continued)	<p>Dissonance / Silos <i>“One of the problems with the Assembly is there’s this feature called policy dissonance, so you have a lot of policies that go in one direction and then you have another set of policies that actually undercut that and go in opposite directions”</i> <i>“Silos because I don’t think they talk to each other. They share the same offices in some cases but if they’re in different departments to try and get them to actually speak to one another seems to be crazy” (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p>
Politics	<p>Government Devolution Opportunities and problems <i>“Opportunities...with devolution and having more responsibility and powers on a national level...But also problems, because maybe some departments within the Assembly don’t work as effectively as they could” (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p>
Relationship	<p>Contracts <i>“Well, without the contracts I wouldn’t be in business. 95% of my business is through the Welsh Assembly Government” (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p> <p>Consultations <i>“Because they always seem to be sending us stuff that they want an answer to yesterday” (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p>

The level and frequency of contact varied quite considerably across the stakeholder sessions and was closely linked to the nature of the relationship and the type of stakeholder. Frequency of contact varied from daily (email) for some to quarterly or less (for face-to-face contact), with telephone contact somewhere in between. Some had a very arms-length relationship (e.g. Community Council representatives) and therefore little contact, save receiving postal information and consultation papers from the Welsh Assembly Government.

When asked what the Assembly Government was like to deal with overall, views were mixed. Some stakeholders were generally happy with dealing with the Welsh Assembly Government and one person said the reality had exceeded his expectations.

“I’ve been quite impressed to be fair. When I’ve had a query, picked up the phone to the person who wrote this piece of work that had come out, thinking ‘I’ll be going through all sorts of people to track them down’ and got straight through to the person I needed to speak to....I have to say you think you’re going to be dealing with officialdom, get a bit of a run around, and you find them very accessible. They’ve exceeded my expectations” (St Asaph, Positive)

Those stakeholders that were categorised as ‘positive’ for the purposes of sampling for the qualitative study (based on their response to some of the questions relating to the key themes in the Stakeholder Survey) tended to be very positive about the individuals they dealt with on the ground in the Assembly Government, emphasising the importance of personal relationships.

"I find them very good. They're very helpful. Any information that I want, it's forthcoming. They're very supportive" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"I deal mainly with [name] based here in St Asaph and we've got a really good working relationship...I just pick up the phone and she's great...I've worked with [name] now for 10-15 years, so very good" (St Asaph, Positive)

Other stakeholders were less positive however, for reasons which are discussed in full in section 2.3 below.

"It's doing its best and I don't want to sound critical but it can be very frustrating when one has a problem that is quite urgent and needs to be addressed quite quickly, that the mechanisms that have to be worked in order to accomplish that purpose can be very long and drawn out" (Newtown, Negative)

Stakeholders dealing with certain departments, notably DCELLS (Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills), were most negative, even though they still sometimes praised staff locally that they interacted with and acknowledged individuals' helpfulness and efforts. Poor internal communications and lack of joined up working emerged as a particular problem for stakeholders of DCELLS.

"Staff on a local level are good and [have an] understanding of the business that we're in. The biggest issue that I have is a communications problem internally within DCELLS. It is a huge department, so they've got [their own] departments...the communication problem is internally, in that they don't talk to each other, or they don't listen to each other perhaps and so one department will give us one set of rules and the other department doesn't understand what those rules are, especially when you come down to funding; the programme team will tell us something, and the audit team come out and they don't know what perhaps the programme team have told us and then there's a sort of conflict – who do we listen to?... That's probably my biggest gripe really, is internal communications within that department" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"Certainly the openness [is good]. I don't have any problems getting hold of them. I totally agree with the under-capacity...I also think however that there is some tension between different groupings even within the same area... within DCELLS there are certainly tensions between what used to be the Youth end and the Children and Families end" (Cardiff, Positive)

"DCELLS, the Department of Children and Lifelong Learning, that seems to be a division by itself for a long time, very little desire to interact with other divisions. It's beginning to happen but long overdue" (Newtown, Positive)

Other stakeholders in regular contact with DCELLS reinforced this impression of lack of joined up working, attributing some of this to the internal split between regional offices, the merger into the Assembly and the subsequent number of restructures that the department had gone through, leading to people moving around and a loss of personal relationships and mutual understanding.

"You do get one team saying one thing and one team saying another. It's kind of inevitable I suppose. It's not helped by the fact that different teams are geographically located in different places. Like we're dealing with people in Machynlleth and the finance people are in Cardiff or they were, they've moved out now, but I don't know whether they meet at all. But geographical location, when it's as disjointed as it is, doesn't help the communication issue" (Carmarthen, Positive)

“They seem to have restructured...DCELLS....that’s what it is now, last year it was something different and I think that whole restructuring has caused really, quite a lot of anxiety” (Cardiff, Positive)

“The remoteness [is worse]...the emphasis more on centralisation...We would certainly welcome a greater emphasis back into the regional management because...each region in Wales is different, whether we like it or not, the industrial bases are different, people very much are different, their aspirations are different. Prior to this last two or three years, you had that regional focus where people were more flexible...in terms of contracts and priorities” (St Asaph, Negative)

*“I’ve been through a period where FE has dealt with the old TECs and then with ELWa and now with the Assembly itself and I’ve seen a difference in the contact between us and those officials as we went along that journey. Especially since they moved into the Assembly, the unofficial dialogue has disappeared to an extent, which I think is a great pity...we had an unofficial dialogue and a confidence between the colleges and the officials to discuss things openly before they became policy. Now you feel that the walls are up in that they have turned into real civil servants and they have become very reluctant to share any information in case it goes public....Bringing the quangos into the Assembly has changed our basic relationship with officials and in my mind, in a negative way”
“I’d agree with that. One thing we don’t know now is who to contact about different matters, who are our contact points” (Caernarfon, Negative)*

“While you have an officer in post, you’ve built up a relationship with, you can normally get some answers....the changes that have been going on in the last, I suppose 12 months, they’re restructuring and merging and this sort of thing, you can pick up the phone and expect to speak to so and so...Ah, no longer here, gardening leave, in this other department. Ok, well who’s dealing with this? Oh, we haven’t decided. But life goes on for the rest of us”

“I think it’s particularly difficult with Children’s Services moving into DCELLS because....DCELLS was the education / learning bit, which is about colleges and schools, whereas a lot of Children’s Services was about Care and Social Services and the marriage has not actually gelled and I don’t think that the body of what was DCELLS has quite adjusted to the fact that it’s supposed to be about children as well” (Carmarthen, Negative)

Only one stakeholder dealing with DCELLS commented on seeing any improvements in recent years, mentioning a greater emphasis on quality and delivery methods in the department nowadays.

2.3 Perceived Difficulties in Interacting with WAG

Many factors that were felt to make it difficult to interact with the Welsh Assembly Government emerged from the general discussions on dealing with the organisation. Some of these related to key themes of the research, that were intended to be covered later on in discussions.

The main difficulties that were raised spontaneously by stakeholders were as follows:

- Lack of joined up working (often referred to as poor communications or fragmentation or silos)

“One of the things I find with the Assembly Government as a whole is fragmentation between the different Directorates...for example, the Community Section at one time was beavering away with Community Development Cymru, developing a National Framework for Community Development in Wales, including a section on housing, the Housing Directorate was beavering awayproducing a National Tenant Participation Strategy and neither of them know what the other was doing, until I said ‘Excuse me, shouldn’t these be squaring up?’” (Cardiff, Positive)

“They have a Cabinet Committee for Young People where all the Ministers meet and they keep saying ‘Yep, we’re talking to one another’, well, that doesn’t evidence itself by what’s coming out [consultations], so they may be talking but they’re not actually getting down to the next level” (Cardiff, Positive)

“That is a common theme...the lack of communication, not only between Cardiff and St Asaph, but between the different departments within the Assembly. There are a number of programmes and projects being developed from different departments that don’t integrate” (Caernarfon, Negative)

“The method of working doesn’t assist flexibility and in particular, it creates silos...it’s extremely difficult to get any cross-fertilisation” (Newtown, Negative)

“The issue about the policies is that you get policies and strategies from different departments. There’s a silo element of the Assembly Government, it’s very strong...and it would be much better if they worked together” (Carmarthen, Negative)

- Lack of understanding of stakeholder organisations and their needs, especially at a senior level and within DCELLS. This was felt to have got worse over the years, as the Assembly Government became more arms-length, and also with the mergers and restructures, resulting in high staff turnover and a loss of knowledge and expertise.

“Because they don’t understand what we’re doing, they don’t understand the process of how we carry out our business...years ago, staff in the old Welsh Office used to come out and spend time with organisations such as ourselves, to see at grassroots level what we actually do; they could therefore understand the business. If they could understand the business, they knew...when they went back...how that business should go forward... but they haven’t really got a starting point [now] because they’re sitting behind a desk, they’re not out there” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“I don’t think they always understand what’s going on outside....and people moving around....some of the Executive Officers level have changed, but the key people have been pretty static, which has been good, so they’ve developed an understanding, but I think underneath, there’s been less skill and understanding of quite what it all looks like”

“I don’t find that so much in the Housing Directorate [although] there’s a lot of turnover and...they’re on their third restructuring in about two and a half years or something, that doesn’t help...[but] you’ve got relatively inexperienced people trying to understand the policy context and ...the strategies and it’s beyond them, it’s beyond their experience level....and there’s a real shortage of people....with 10, 15 years plus experience” (Cardiff, Positive)

"But what it [working at ELWa] taught me is, to be quite honest, that the people in there don't know what we do and what they ask us for is sometimes totally unrealistic" "Many of the people we deal with don't understand further education, some people have never been inside a further education college...There have been various efforts to try and improve people's knowledge but again, because of the turnover of people and [the fact that] they're moved into different departments, it's soon dissipated" (Cardiff, Negative)

- A perceived unwillingness to make decisions amongst some civil servants, who were sometimes described as 'risk-averse'. Some stakeholders attributed this to politics. It was claimed this prevarication caused real problems on the ground, especially when linked to funding applications which had a finite lifespan

"I think we've got the most risk averse civil service [in Europe] probably" (Newtown, Positive)

"If there's criticism, it's sometimes people [within DCELLS] are reluctant to be decisive. You know, if we have a situation, we need to solve it, we need something to go on and they'll say, 'Well, we'll get back to you'...maybe what should happen is somebody should say, 'Look, do this now and that that responsibility'"

"There's quite a bit of, 'You have to check with the Minister' and see which way the Minister is going to go and that does delay our programmes"

"And...delays in announcement actually shortens the period of time in which you can spend a grant and that is a real issue" (Carmarthen, Positives)

Linked to this point, some were also critical of 'double standards' at the Assembly Government, with information being requested from stakeholders at very short notice, which itself was very slow to turn around an enquiry or decision

"Getting an answer for any particular issue takes a long time, depends on the right person being available and as far as I can see..., there are big difficulties...when something can only be decided or sanctioned by the Minister, then there's a big hold up...On the other hand, the Welsh Assembly Government really does exert pressure...on the bodies it sponsors and works with, to do everything yesterday...It can be very difficult to actually function on a day to day basis, when decisions can't be achieved" (Newtown, Negative)

"If they want something they want it yesterday off you, but to get something back takes a long time" (Cardiff, Negative)

- Focus on Cardiff and a lack of understanding of rural Wales (amongst stakeholders in Mid and North Wales)

"On a national level, I think in rural Wales we've got an issue...it's comforting to know that the Welsh Assembly Government are moving out to Aberystwyth because there is still the feeling I think that people in Cardiff don't necessarily understand some of the issues of rural Wales" (Newtown, Positive)

"There is a feeling in the North that Cardiff and Swansea and that area is certainly more involved with the Welsh Office [Assembly Government] than the northern areas...I think it needs to disperse the resources of the

Assembly and ministers as widely as possible between North and South Wales, and Newtown in Mid Wales too” (Newtown, Positive)

“Distance [makes it difficult to interact]. There is still a considerable reluctance to arrange meetings anywhere other than the M4 corridor, so for those of us in North Wales that is very problematical and there is not a robust and reliable, effective form of video conferencing between the different parts of Wales” (Caernarfon, Negative)

- Inflexibility or reluctance to work together with external stakeholders – paying ‘lip service’?

“There’s some people within the Assembly who are very good and are working to a sort of common end, and in other teams you sense a slight rigidity and inflexibility in terms of what they think should happen and what we think should happen and that does create a bit of friction...the relationship isn’t bad, it’s ok, but it could be a whole lot better if there was a bit of trying to work together in the true spirit of partnership” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“I think they are very focused on their own policy objectives, i.e. the politicians’ policy objectives...they don’t understand what we’re trying to achieve because they’re actually not all that interested” (Cardiff, Positive)

- Another weakness identified by a few local authority representatives was a lack of medium-term planning or unrealistic timescales especially affecting finance or budgets.

“I think their longer term strategies are all in place...The bit that’s missing is the short to medium term, well the medium term really, cause what we get is short term” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“...and sometimes the timescales are unrealistic. I mean, we are waiting on guidance for the grant for next year, we’ve got to have it, in theory, written by the end of this month [October], well, that won’t happen, but we’ve still got to do it by 20th November [and] we haven’t got anything yet” (Cardiff, Positive)

- Not knowing who to contact and the remote relationship generally

“When it comes to specific officers and people employed by them...I have very little contact with anybody of that nature and, if I did, I could not put a face to a name ...If I did want to contact anybody, it would be difficult, I would think” (Caernarfon, Positive)

“At the moment, the points of contact and who we should contact about different things is very confusing” (Caernarfon, Negative)

Some stakeholders commented this had worsened with the merger of ELWa and the WDA into the Assembly Government and that they had lost their ‘way in’ to the Assembly

“Previously, when there was the WDA, we had someone we could go to if we had an idea, go and speak to them, see whether it was feasible. Irrespective of whether they were a specialist in that area, they’d know who to go to but now they’ve introduced something called the Single Investment Grant and it’s increasingly difficult for people to find out where there’s assistance available and to access that assistance...I no longer know who to speak to and I used to know, I used to have somebody” (Caernarfon, Positive)

- Lastly, a few stakeholders in one session commented spontaneously on the inadequacy of the Welsh Assembly Government website – this is discussed in more detail in section 5 below

“To find a point of contact as a result of going through the website’s very, very hard, so I don’t think it’s very good actually” “It’s very difficult to navigate your way round and then if you put a question into their search engine.. it’s a waste of time, you’re sat there and you get frustrated in the end, then you go back to the beginning and kick off again” (Caernarfon, Positive)

When asked if they’d seen any changes in the period in which they’d been dealing with the Assembly Government, most felt that it was now more difficult to interact with the organisation, with many attributing this to the mergers and restructures of recent years.

Those who worked closely with DCELLS had the most to say about the impact of the merger and were most negative about the changes they’d seen. There were fewer participants who’d formerly dealt with the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) within the groups, but of the few that had, the view was expressed that the merger of the WDA into the Assembly Government had made it increasingly difficult from the perspective of business support.

“I don’t think it’s a positive trait. I think it’s going to be much harder for people to do business in Wales, especially people who are new to Wales....[or] a young person wanting to set up [a business], it’s going to be much harder” (Caernarfon, Positive)

Another stakeholder felt that the merger of the WDA into the Assembly Government had been relatively smooth and successful, however.

“About half of the civil servants that I deal with were moved across from the WDA, who were completely customer-focused, so there has been a tension....it’s actually worked out quite well I think” (Newtown, Positive)

The changes noticed were as follows:

- Centralisation of departments and authority away from the regions was one way in which dealing with the Assembly was felt by some to have changed for the worse: firstly, by reducing the level of personal contact and therefore officials’ knowledge of stakeholder organisations; secondly, by lengthening the decision-making chain and making it harder for stakeholders to know who’s ultimately making the decisions

“I’m not sure the centralisation has helped...we have regional offices within South West Wales, but they don’t have the autonomy that we had previously...when we had the TECs...there were staff there who would make a decision and give you a response and we worked much more closely [together]. What’s happened since then is there’s been a gradual reduction in the number of people on the ground and, you’re quite right, people did use to come out....whereas there were 12 people on the patch, then it was 8, then it was 6, now correct me if I’m wrong, it’s down to something like 2 or 3. Well they can’t possibly have the interaction with the end user....they can’t have the understanding of the end user that they did previously, so I think centralisation has made it more difficult....and then you get the bit about who’s going to make a decision. When it was on a regional basis, it was the person

who sat at Orchard House at the end of the day.....now it seems it's much more difficult to find out who will actually say yea or nay and it hasn't helped" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"It's a common theme where regional offices have less influence, with the central office having more influence...I get more out of meetings in Cardiff with officials who are co-ordinating things nationally than I do by going to the regional officials who are not in the loop, and that then makes things difficult for us in the North"

"Having those officials understand the problems we face in North Wales is so difficult...I feel strongly there is a lack of understanding within the Assembly of the problems faced in regions outside of the Valleys or Cardiff and I don't think that civil servants, especially those at senior level, visit these regions enough. There is an expectation that we must go down to Cardiff all the time, but I'd appreciate it if some of these officials who have the budgets and the opportunity to influence would visit the regions to experience the problems and needs of areas like North West Wales" (Caernarfon, Negative)

- Some were fearful that the situation would worsen, as the departmental reorganisations continued and new regional offices opened

"I'm mostly involved with Fisheries and...it was good but they just moved to Aberystwyth and they're losing all their staff, so that makes it a bit difficult" (Caernarfon, Positive)

"There's going to be serious changes now, because one of the people that I've dealt with very regularly is moving across sideways because he doesn't want to move to North Wales and that worries me because that department is going to be split in two....with half of them in North Wales, half of them in South Wales. They don't talk to one another now and they're only across the corridor! I have real concerns for the future and how that will affect [things]. I know they have to have a presence in North Wales....[but] splitting departments with an unnatural split doesn't seem to make much sense to me" (Cardiff, Positive)

- There were comments (particularly in Cardiff) on staff cuts leading to some departments being under-resourced, and resulting in a loss of expertise and experience and, in one person's view, a loss of passion

"I think the cut-backs are too harsh. Whereas at one time, you'd have someone that would manage your contract and manage about 10 people and if you had a problem you'd go to that person for support, they've cut that so back. I think what they've done is distanced themselves...I don't think they've got the staff [any longer]" (Cardiff, Negative)

"What seems to have happened...with all the mergers you've got a lot of career civil servants taking positions that academically they could do...but they don't have the passion...that people in the past had" (Cardiff, Negative)

"I feel sorry for them [departments that have merged into Assembly Government] because they've gone through such a tremendous period of change but I think the hardest thing with those that have gone in is to try and get a decision because they don't know who is going to make that decision" (Cardiff, Negative)

- The merger was also felt to have an impact on the level of customer focus in some departments and to have led to a change in culture, making it harder to get a decision

“Don’t you think they’ve lost a bit of focus? They’re all applying for their own jobs, they’re all cutting down, one minute they’re doing their job, next minute there’s three jobs and five people who’ve got to apply. Now when they’re thinking of their livelihood it’s only natural they’re going to lose focus on us” (Cardiff, Negative)

“I think that civil servant ethos has actually changed the nature of the relationships with them [for the worse]. Because it’s more formal, it’s often characterised by ‘I can’t answer that question’, I will need to ask someone else... They hide behind the fact they’re a civil servant now” (Cardiff, Negative)

- Some felt that consultation was worse now than before. One training provider gave the example of a recent DCELLS consultation event in Mid Wales

“They are less flexible now than they were previously. Years ago...if they were looking at change, then they would introduce a consultation document, as they do now, but there was proper consultation and there would be workshops or meetings right across Wales...and we would have a real input. Well, that doesn’t appear to happen any longer....this particular consultation event that I went to...the presentations came up and everybody had an input and at the....end... the last slide that they actually put up [said] ‘This is what we’re going to do’ so the whole process was [a waste of time]. I was flabbergasted; the whole process as far as I was concerned was done and dusted before ever I went there. That was two days out of my precious time, out of my business, and I’ve never been to one since. Why go when the agenda’s already written up?” (Carmarthen, Positive)

2.4 Suggestions for Improving Interaction with Stakeholders

Stakeholders were also asked whether they had any suggestions for improving the way the Welsh Assembly Government interacted with stakeholder organisations.

Whilst they found it difficult to come up with suggestions to deal with some of the difficulties identified above, a few suggestions were made, which are summarised below. Some of these ideas are dealt with in more detail in other sections of the report:

- Improve communications generally, especially through more personal contact to build relationships. This would help engender a better understanding of stakeholders’ organisations and the issues they face

*“Keeping in touch, yes. Communications, it’s all about communications”
“They should be a little bit more proactive in coming and seeing what people do and how they do it. I mean they’re making the decisions about how this money is spent. They’ve a vested interest really to go down to grassroots level and see, and they need to do it properly. You know, none of this let’s have fanfares and the great and the good and the chains of office and everybody; they need to speak to people on the ground” (Carmarthen, Positive)*

“A point of contact, email is ok, but you’d sooner a telephone number so you can speak to somebody...I think personal contact beats everything, every time” (Caernarfon, Positive)

“I think it’s important that officers right down the line, that they have as much personal contact as possible. In the old days you could go into Carmarthen and Cardiff and you’d meet a particular officer who you’d ask for and now you can’t be sure of that, you’re put in a room and you wait there to see who comes from the pool. That personal relationship in the rural areas is important and the Welsh [language] does come into it as well” (Newtown, Positive)

- More joined up thinking (dealt with in more detail in section 4 below) – examples given were co-ordinated farm inspections, to avoid duplication, and in the Health Service, one body to collect all required information from GP practices

“One thing that could be improved, I think, with various inspections and counts and checks, there’s a lot of duplication there. It has been mooted anyway by ministers that that needs to be checked out, the vets, the health and safety and the movement of animals, all these schemes, different people come round and they’re always checking one thing or another” (Newtown, Positive)

- Improvements to the consultation process (covered more fully in section 6 of the report)

“I’d like to see them go back to informal consultation....there’s a sense with this formal advice that takes place, it’s a process that they go through. The decision has been made so the consultation process becomes cosmetic and I would like to see more informal groups where stakeholders can come together and share their views on policies and I don’t think we get the opportunity to input into setting policy and direction” (Caernarfon, Negative)

3. CITIZEN FOCUS

The next part of the discussions focused on one of the key themes for the study: citizen focus.

3.1 Summary of Key Findings on Citizen Focus

- Some of the key elements of 'citizen focus' identified by stakeholders were:
 - A focus on the needs of the people
 - All about people, not systems or services
 - Citizens being at the centre of activity – so bottom up, not top down
 - Providing high quality of service
 - Requires good communication / consultation / engagement with citizens to be achieved
 - Services need to be accessible
- Stakeholders were unanimous that it was important for the Welsh Assembly Government to be citizen focused
- Views on the current extent of citizen focus within the Assembly Government were far from positive, although some stakeholders felt that the organisation was seeking to improve in this respect
- Stakeholders therefore found it easier to cite examples of bad practice in relation to citizen focus than good practice
- Whilst the range of examples given by participants was very diverse (reflecting the breadth of backgrounds within the sample), one common theme in terms of bad practice was consultation
- Many of the barriers identified to citizen focus within the Welsh Assembly Government mirrored the difficulties voiced spontaneously by stakeholders earlier on in the discussion. Key barriers were:
 - Lack of communication
 - Bureaucracy
 - Citizens' lack of knowledge / understanding
 - Lack of joined up working
 - Lack of understanding of regional needs
 - Difficulty in accessing WAG or knowing who to speak to

3.2 Definitions of Citizen Focus

3.2.1 How is Citizen Focus Defined by Stakeholders?

This stage of the discussions began with facilitators asking participants to define 'citizen focus' and explain what they felt it meant.

A wide range of definitions of the term 'citizen focus' were given spontaneously by stakeholders. A few examples follow (the complete list is included at Appendix B of the report):

"Recognising and responding to needs" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"What the needs of the audience / population are and putting that at the forefront of what you do" (Cardiff, Negative)

"Based on the needs of the people, not on the services themselves" (St Asaph, Negative)

"People at a relatively neighbourhood level are determining needs for services and are integral part of planning and monitoring – high degree of self-determination" (Cardiff, Positive)

"People-centred activity" (St Asaph, Negative)

"Providing the best and most relevant service to the individual" (Caernarfon, Negative)

"Delivering quality services to the public" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"Making services accessible and appropriate to public" (Carmarthen, Negative)

"Involvement with communities" (St Asaph, Positive)

"Communicating effectively with the citizen" (Caernarfon, Negative)

"Listening and understanding" (Caernarfon, Negative)

Some of the common elements shared by many of the definitions given by stakeholders were:

- Focus on the **needs of the people**
- All about **people, not systems or services** (so needs to be demand led and driven by citizens)
- Citizens being **at the centre** of activity – so it needs to be bottom up not top down
- Providing **high quality of service**
- Requires **good communication / consultation/ engagement** with citizens to be achieved
- Services need to be **accessible**

'Citizens' were on the whole defined at a global level, as the people of Wales, although a few stakeholders focused on a lower, community or neighbourhood, level. Others acknowledged that citizen focus needed to take account of

audiences at different levels and the variation in their needs and any resulting differences in approach when seeking to engage them.

“Needs of the individual and aggregated at community level. Appreciating differences at different levels and meaningfully engaging them” (Cardiff, Positive)

3.2.2 What is **Customer Focus** and does it differ to **Citizen Focus**?

Stakeholders’ understanding of the term ‘customer focus’ was also explored during the discussions, by asking participants to define this and to think about whether it differed from ‘citizen focus’.

Many stakeholders perceived ‘citizen’ and ‘customer’ to be interchangeable and therefore felt there to be no difference between ‘citizen focus’ and ‘customer focus’. Some also wondered why one would want to differentiate between the two.

“I don’t think it should [differ] for the Assembly because the citizens of Wales are their customers, aren’t they?” (St Asaph, Negative)

Whilst many staff perceived ‘citizen focus’ and ‘customer focus’ to be one and the same, therefore, others interpreted customer focus as being rather different, for the following reasons:

- Citizen focus implies global (i.e. general population) whilst customer implies narrower / lower-level (i.e. different sectors within the population, such as disabled people)

“Not all citizens may necessarily be customers, but presumably all citizens make a financial contribution” (Carmarthen, Positive)

- Customer focus suggests a focus on direct users of Assembly Government services and therefore more ‘customer care’

“Users of particular services – a provider-centric view” (Cardiff, Positive)

“More of a service / product perspective” (Cardiff, Negative)

“Groups / services who deal with the Assembly. Groups who seek to influence the Assembly” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“Yes, because a customer can walk away, a citizen can’t. A company who isn’t citizen focused, the customer has a choice, they go to Marks & Spencer or Debenhams, [but] if a country isn’t citizen focused...it’s citizens haven’t got a chance of going anywhere, so you could be a rubbish government or you could be a good government but we’re all stuck here anyway” (Caernarfon, Positive)

- The appropriateness of the word ‘customer’ in the context of some stakeholders’ areas of responsibilities was questioned by one or two

“Customer’s a difficult word for my service sometimes because there’s a level of compulsion if it’s child protection...customer isn’t a fair word to use” (St Asaph, Negative)

When shown the Welsh Assembly Government definition, taken from the Making the Connections document (see Appendix C), there were felt to be no surprises on the whole, but some scepticism amongst a minority that it just didn’t happen at the moment.

“Because the strategies they’ve got in place don’t meet that” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“...it doesn’t because I know as a Community Council Clerk that we are the bottom level, nobody listens to us, it cascades down from the top instead of the way it should go, upwards, but it doesn’t” (Caernarfon, Positive)

A handful of stakeholders also had specific criticisms: a couple of stakeholders commented that the Assembly Government definition did not go far enough and was essentially WAG ticking the boxes, rather than starting with citizens’ needs; a few others were critical of the tone and language used.

“The Assembly stance is ‘We are the public statutory services, this is us, this is what we’re thinking of doing, please come over here and get involved with what we’re doing’. And it’s about citizens getting involved in public services, in other words ticking their boxes for consultation and participation and there is not a sense of community self-determination” (Cardiff, Positive)

“Rather than starting with them [citizens] if actually starts with this other body and it’s this vision that brings them into the centre of the way public services are designed. Sorry, they are the centre...it inverts the model...It’s very patronising” (Cardiff, Negative)

“That’s a classic statement of the bureaucrats written by Oxbridge scholars to be audited, managed by Oxbridge scholars, lacking sensitivity, partnership and true understanding” “I think the theory behind it though...about wanting to be citizen focused and having communities and people influencing the way...the services are designed and delivered is right...but whether they’re saying it correctly and whether they’re actually delivering that, may be brought into question” (St Asaph, Negative)

3.3 Perceptions of Level of Citizen Focus within WAG

3.3.1 Importance of Citizen Focus?

It was universally regarded as important that the Welsh Assembly Government should be citizen focused, as firstly, it would not exist without citizens, and, secondly, because their funding came from citizens through taxes.

“The citizens are why they’re there” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“We are the people who are paying their wages and we are the people who look up to them and expect some leadership and guidance. Where else are we going to get it from?” (Caernarfon, Positive)

“Because the theory runs, that those services will be more effective and better value for money because they would be right the first time, and I’d subscribe to that view, provided it’s done well” (Cardiff, Positive)

“They’re spending our money” (Newtown, Positive)

One business owner commented, however, that this was a truism and that it should go without saying.

“...it just sounds silly. ‘We’re going to be citizen focused’ – of course you bloody are! You’re the Welsh Assembly Government, of course you’re going to be focused on us” (Caernarfon, Positive)

One voluntary sector stakeholder expressed the view that the role of the Assembly Government should not be to consult directly with citizens – rather, the organisation should monitor the performance of intermediaries that did deal directly with end-users, and to be quicker to take action in cases of poor performance.

“They actually shouldn’t be talking to citizens very much directly, because they do not work at that level, it is the local authorities and other bodies who are delivering and there’s a real reluctance in the Assembly to actually say ‘You’re not doing it right’...they ought to have stronger levels of enforcement so that, the people who are working at the neighbourhood community level, are actually doing it properly....they pitch themselves often at too detailed a level rather than a strategic level” (Cardiff, Positive)

3.3.2 Perceptions of Performance

Views on the extent of citizen focus within the Welsh Assembly Government were not particularly positive on the whole. Whilst some acknowledged that the Assembly Government was trying to be citizen focused, and attempting to move in the right direction, most stakeholders pointed to the difficulties they experienced in dealing with the organisation, as evidence that there was a long way to go.

“It goes back to the point we were making about communication and consultation” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“I think it needs a lot more work...Ministers and Members are accountable to the public because if they’re not, they’re gone at the next election, but officials don’t seem to be quite so accountable to anyone” (Cardiff, Negative)

“In rhetoric, in theory, it’s excellent....But the actual practice is a long, long way short”

“I think they are trying very hard, but you’re right, I think there’s an awful long way to go” (Cardiff, Positive)

“They aren’t particularly good...the good practice side is they do consult with the field but they consult more with the professional and statutory organisations far more than they do citizens. Maybe that’s appropriate” (Cardiff, Positive)

“I think there is an issue there, for the Welsh Assembly civil servants aren’t renowned for being customer oriented. I’m not sure they recognise that the taxpayer is their customer” (Newtown, Positive)

Again, those dealing with DCELLS felt that this department was worse than other parts of the Assembly in being citizen-focused

“Unfortunately, over the years they’ve lost a lot of staff and they’ve lost a lot of good staff; people that understood the business that we were in, and they just don’t listen any longer. They used to, but not any longer” (Carmarthen, Positive)

Some queried to what extent (if at all) the views of citizens were incorporated into policy development.

“Have they asked the citizens what they want?...at the end of the day it seems to be that the Assembly Government deliver policies which we’re expected to respond to, my organisation’s going to have to introduce food waste recycling shortly because the Assembly have decided it is a good thing. My wife is bending my ear unmercifully about ‘How many bins are we going to have to use to separate all of our waste materials into, I didn’t ask for it, I don’t want it’....I don’t know that the citizens of Wales have ever expressed their view on the delivery of some of these policies” (Caernarfon, Negative)

Engaging with citizens was not necessarily seen as an easy task, however.

“There is a sort of need to educate citizens and bring them on in terms of recognising that there’s value to them in engaging in the whole process, which nobody’s cracked yet” (Carmarthen, Positive)

Another stakeholder commented on the negative impact on the level of citizen focus within the Assembly Government of the mergers of quangos and increased centralisation over recent years.

“There were regional structures and regional committees in the Welsh Office, so the Training and Enterprise Councils had private sector representation to influence the Welsh Office, the WDA had a board, so all that’s been scrapped....So they in effect demolished regional citizen representation” (Newtown, Positive)

3.3.3 Comparison of Welsh Assembly Government with Other Organisations

Not many respondents could comment on how the Assembly Government compared with other organisations in terms of citizen focus.

Of the very small number who could, a few compared the Assembly Government to a business and thought it came out of the comparison badly.

“I don’t think there’s a lot of comparison. [With the private sector] you can walk away, you can go to Marks & Spencer’s if you want or you can go to Debenhams, you can go to B & Q or Homebase, the choice is mine. With this lot there is no choice, they are implanted into our lives. If they handled their business like a money-making organisation I think they would be bust tomorrow, because the customer focus is not there” (Caernarfon, Positive)

“My bottom line is I’d say they were over-staffed and there’s too much government... whenever I chair a meeting these days I have to have a chairman’s brief, I’ve been chairing for 30 years, I think I know how to chair a meeting but nevertheless the executive officer that’s looking after me, has to probably spend a day preparing the chairman’s brief, that’s if he hasn’t spent the last three days preparing a ministerial brief. So I think if it was a private business they would be much leaner and meaner” (Newtown, Positive)

3.4 Examples of Good and Bad Practice re. Citizen Focus

Participants across the group discussions were asked if they could think of any specific examples of good practice and bad practice within the Welsh Assembly Government as far as being citizen focused was concerned.

Many of the stakeholders cited high-profile Assembly Government policies that they thought were good or bad, e.g.:

Good

- smoking ban in public places
- free prescriptions
- free swimming
- free access to museums / Cadw sites for some groups
- improving nutrition and diets of children in
- investment in libraries

Bad

- closure of rural schools

A few stakeholders across some of the groups queried the motive behind some of these ‘more populist’ policies, however.

“What about things like free parking in hospitals? What is the point in that? I know it’s a very populist decision but it’s going to cause a lot of problems. Another one is the....free prescriptions. They’re very populist, but is that’s what’s needed in this country? Is that what our priorities are? We need to get to grips with the causes of poverty....I don’t think that.... things like that are going to have a long-term effect on quality of living in Wales and I think there’s a danger that politicians in Wales are looking to get short term popularity at the expense of looking at long term problems that really need their attention” (Caernarfon, Negative)

“There are things like free prescriptions and free swimming and all the things that they think, ah as I say I don’t have to be cynical, but that are the vote winners, but they think that is being citizen focused” (Carmarthen, Negative)

A very wide and diverse range of examples were given, so a few have been selected and included below to illustrate the range of responses. As can be seen, consultation was one of the examples of bad (and to a much lesser extent, good) practice in terms of citizen focus raised in many of the stakeholder sessions unprompted:

Good practice	Bad practice
<p>Cross-cutting groups (involving internal departments and external stakeholders) eg Local Access Forums (for Countryside) <i>“They’re a good idea in terms of trying to deliver that vision” (Carmarthen, Positive)</i> Participation Group for Children and Young People <i>“They lead on the participation and engagement of children and young people and...have designated leads in each department responsible for their work around involving children and young people” (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p> <p>Children and Young People’s Partnerships</p>	<p>Policy sometimes weighted towards South Wales / urban issues <i>“South Wales is a massive population across the bottom and North Wales is far more rural in comparison. So there can be different concerns...things like trafficking children, yes, we need to be aware of it, but as of yet I’m not aware of any referrals in North Wales...something you just think [I’d like] more of what’s relevant to us” (St Asaph, Positive)</i> <i>“Civil servants....mainly working in Cardiff and having a Cardiff outlook on life” (Newtown, Positive)</i></p>
<p>Good qualifications / work (e.g. Modern Apprenticeships, Modern Skills Diploma) Apprentice of Year</p>	<p>But poor marketing of them (and other programmes / services) – perhaps because demand would outstrip supply was perceived rationale? <i>“I don’t think they’re effective in ...marketing their services and marketing the products of Wales...there’s some wonderful qualifications out there for people. They do market them to a certain extent but it’s at quite a low level....There’s some good stuff going on, but we’re not...shouting about it” (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p>

Good practice	Bad practice
<p>Consultations, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They try to consult! - Reasonably well-written for a professional audience 	<p>But issues with consultations:</p> <p>1. no feedback <i>"[I've] been involved in several consultation and never heard anything back" (Caernarfon, Positive)</i> <i>"I never get any feedback from the process and that's what's frustrating for me in all of this, is that it's a very one-way, one-sided dialogue" (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p> <p>2. impression it's a fait accompli <i>"...the consultation document comes down to our level, we fill it in, we put our opinion in and send it off, we don't know, we don't get any feedback... do they consider our input into this consultation? You don't know whether in fact anybody take any notice of it anyway or whether it's a fait accompli... I think they may have made their minds up anyway..." (Caernarfon, Positive)</i> <i>"Rubberstamping is not consultation" (St Asaph, Negative)</i> <i>"You can get consultations in and you can think 'Well, at the end of the day they've made their minds up, how far is this going to actually have an impact?' and you put the response together and it's submitted...but the feedback from that is very little" (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p> <p>3. consultation period too short <i>"The Assembly has defined that the minimum consultation period [for housing] is 12 weeks. You will not find a single example anywhere over the past three and a half years of the Assembly using a consultation period other than 12 weeks, despite the fact we say 'If you want us to go out to tenants and give you feedback, if you want to get young people involved, if you want to get disabled people involved, the black minority...it will take longer' and it doesn't wash" "We've just had a major piece of work through and they've given us 8 weeks to consult...of which 4 were through August. So you've got no teachers, lots of people on holiday, so the chances of getting a good response...is almost impossible" (Cardiff, Positives)</i></p>

Good practice	Bad practice
<p>Consultations (continued):</p>	<p>4. no co-ordination or joined up thinking with timings <i>"I think the other thing is the sheer number...you almost get clogged up by the number of things they are asking us to consult on, at more or less the same time. We had 3 major pieces, one finished on 26th September, one finished on 3rd October and there's another one that finishes on 9th October. All will have been targeted at the same people by and large...And that's about different departments producing something rather similar without looking at the other departments, so one being led by the Health Minister, one being led by Brian Gibbons, one being led by Jane Hutt, all actually talking about very, very similar citizen focused programmes"</i> (Cardiff, Positive)</p> <p>5. documents too long / not clear or easy to understand for general public <i>"I think most of their documents are reasonably well-written for a professional audience [although] they're still a bit waffly in 'officialese' but the bad practice is they're nowhere when it comes to writing in a way, and at a length, that will engage ordinary people"</i> (Cardiff, Positive)</p> <p>6.too many consultations and not necessarily on right issues <i>"They didn't consult us when they abolished the WDA, when they abolished ELWa, when they abolished the Tourist Authority, but we're consulted on very, very minor issues which actually a brave politician and with a supportive Welsh Assembly Government civil service should be making. So I think it's all very well having active participation, citizens, communities and businesses, but actually we're looking for government to show some sort of leadership so we're not constantly being consulted on relatively minor issues and consultations which seem to add another 12 months or so to delivering something that's urgently needed"</i> (Newtown, Positive)</p>
<p>Promoting innovation and enterprise – encouraging business start-ups <i>"Enterprise is coming through the schools, which is great cause we don't have massive industries, at least not many in Wales"</i> (Carmarthen, Positive)</p>	<p>But eligibility for funding for individuals starting a business has now been raised to Level 4 – considered out of some people's reach and likely to lead to stifling of enterprise</p>

Good practice	Bad practice
<p>Education: - abolishing SATS <i>"The fact they're abolished SATS and they're actually looking at the child [again] as opposed to tables"</i> (Carmarthen, Positive) - prioritising Basic Skills needs of young people and adults across Wales</p>	<p>Welsh Assembly Government website <i>"It's abysmal"</i> (Carmarthen, Negative) Also poor at providing information generally to citizens about its role and remit</p>
<p>Publish strategies</p>	<p>But not accountable enough <i>"See the bad aspect of that is, they're not clearly accountable...Effective services will be designed and delivered, but...where's the action plan to deal with that, where's the timescale and where are the targets?...And we are driven by action plans and we're measured by action plans, but they're not. If you look at their strategy documents, they're vague...it's where we want to go, but they don't say how they're going to get there"</i> (Carmarthen, Positive)</p>
	<p>Policy sometimes weighted towards South Wales / urban issues <i>"South Wales is a massive population across the bottom and North Wales is far more rural in comparison. So there can be different concerns...things like trafficking children, yes, we need to be aware of it, but as of yet I'm not aware of any referrals in North Wales...something you just think [I'd like] more of what's relevant to us"</i> (St Asaph, Positive) <i>"Civil servants....mainly working in Cardiff and having a Cardiff outlook on life"</i> (Newtown, Positive)</p>
	<p>Lack of understanding of real people on issues outside their own experience <i>"There's an element of disbelief that people have been shunted from one doctor's surgery to another, because in their experience as civil servants their family goes in, no problem...we have problems in Cardiff, as it happens, in Newport Road, where nobody wants to take on any more patients because of money issues. Try and explain that to the civil servants and they don't have empathy on occasion with what's going on in the real world"</i> (Cardiff, Positive)</p>

3.5 Barriers to Citizen Focus within WAG and Possible Solutions

Stakeholders were then asked what barriers prevented the Welsh Assembly Government being citizen focused or being more citizen focused.

Participants felt that many of the themes discussed were interlinked and therefore most of the barriers identified were those already raised as difficulties they themselves experienced in interacting with the Assembly Government, discussed in section 2.2 above.

Some of the main barriers identified, together with possible solutions suggested, are outlined below:

Barrier to customer focus	Suggested solution / s?
<p>Lack of communications</p> <p><i>“Civil servants, basically, they always have traditionally been the worst to consult with anybody and communicate with anybody, they’re bad enough communicating inside their own offices” (Caernarfon, Positive)</i></p>	<p>Dialogue</p> <p><i>“Communication. How else are you going to find out what your citizen wants if you don’t ask them and you don’t consult with them?” (Caernarfon, Positive)</i></p>
<p>Bureaucracy</p> <p><i>“The process and policy can sometimes take over and it can be a barrier to citizen focus” (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p>	<p>Streamline processes / reduce bureaucracy</p>
<p>Citizens’ lack of understanding / knowledge</p>	<p>Education and engagement</p> <p><i>“If you ask a lot of people, they don’t know what the difference is between the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government...I don’t think it’s made clear to everybody out there and by and large....they don’t care who delivers, all they want is it to be delivered...so I think there are two things: there’s people understanding what the Assembly is about, but also [the Assembly Government] recognising that actually to the individual on the street, unless it’s affecting their taxes or their health provision, they want to get on with their daily lives really” (Cardiff, Positive)</i></p> <p><i>“They are one or sometimes two steps away from the citizen so it is difficult for them to get close... I feel they rely on other agencies to be feeding that information up to them and there is not a structured way to do that” (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p>

Barrier to customer focus	Suggested solution / s?
Lack of joined up working (see section 4 of the report)	Better communications between departments <i>"I think at the very least some co-ordination in what they're asking [on consultations]" (Cardiff, Positive)</i>
Lack of understanding of regional needs	<i>"I think civil servants should be more aware to the feelings, needs and aspirations of local regions" (Caernarfon, Negative)</i> Suggested having senior civil servants looking after each region and based in that region
Difficult in accessing / knowing who to speak to <i>"Getting access to a lot of Assembly services is a nightmare, not just for private citizens but in fact for public sector bodies. The Assembly's website is appalling" (Caernarfon, Negative)</i>	Single point of contact within Assembly Improved website (see section 5 below)
Consultation	Involve stakeholders at earlier stage when they can shape strategy more <i>"Trying to meet and engage with the Assembly at an earlier stage...when they put a working group together, so that they actively seek a different range of organisations' engagement at that level as to the proposals, which will then lead to a consultation" (Cardiff, Negative)</i>

4. “JOINED UP” WORKING AT WAG

The next theme discussed with stakeholders was joined-up working and their perceptions of the extent to which the Welsh Assembly Government works in a “joined up” way.

4.1 Summary of key findings relating to “Joined up” Working at the Welsh Assembly Government

- When stakeholders were asked to define “joined up” working, key common elements emerging from their definitions were:
 - Working together / partnership (internally within WAG and externally with stakeholders)
 - Having a common goal / aim
 - Good communication with all interested parties
 - Underpinned by an awareness or understanding of what others were doing

- Stakeholder views on the extent of joined up working within the Welsh Assembly Government were almost universally negative. The issue was in fact raised spontaneously by some stakeholders early on in the discussions as something that made dealing with the Welsh Assembly Government difficult

- The main barriers to joined up working identified by stakeholders, together with their suggested solutions, were as follows:

Barrier	Solution / s
Silo mentality of departments	Develop cross-cutting structures
Poor communications	Different departments should integrate more when dealing with customers Training across departments
Culture - ‘them and us’ / lack of understanding	Gain better understanding of stakeholder organisations – secondments / work placements More openness / transparency in dealings
Geography, regional offices and communications	Better use of video conferencing
Cardiff focus	Regional offices <u>with authority to make decisions</u> Introduce regional directors?

Loss of regional autonomy	Need to take on board regional needs
Bureaucracy	Streamline processes More flexibility Faster decision-making
Politics	No solutions identified!

4.2 What is “Joined up” Working?

4.2.1 How do Stakeholders Define “Joined up” Working?

Stakeholders were first asked what they understood by the term “joined up” working.

Some examples of definitions given are shown below:

“Working to a common understanding and a common aim, objective, whatever you want to call it, with a common vision really of where you want to be. If you haven’t got that, you’ll find it really hard to join up” (Cardiff, Positive)

“Timeliness is key, it’s about knowing what is going out in advance, so you can say ‘Oh right, ok, let’s not send these five strategies out from different departments that all impact on the same people, let’s do it differently” (Cardiff, Positive)

“Different departments should integrate more when dealing with their customers” (Newtown, Positive)

“The right hand knowing what the left hand is doing” (St Asaph, Positive)

“A holistic approach” (St Asaph, Positive)

“Joint ownership of priorities” (Caernarfon, Negative)

“Collaboration” “Partnership” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“Communication” “Listening” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“Making sure all the departments work together” (Caernarfon, Positive)

“Is it the process of ideas from the top working their way down through the ministers to administrators to reach the citizens, the people of Wales? It’s the process and the working together involved in achieving that aim, is it?” “I think it goes across as well as up and down, doesn’t it?also it’s the bottom up approach” (St Asaph, Negative)

“Knowledge sharing” (Newtown, Negative)

“It’s having an awareness that a decision made in one part of an organisation will have a consequent impact on another part of the organisation” (Cardiff, Negative)

One stakeholder (from a private sector business background) was scathing when the subject of joined-up working was raised

"I think it's a bit of management gobbledegook and now I'm feeling quite cross...that the Assembly Government has me to come and sit here when I could be at work, to talk about joined up working!...I'm almost speechless you've been asked to ask this" (Caernarfon, Positive)

4.3 Perceptions of Extent of Joined up Working at WAG

4.3.1 Perceived Performance

A perceived lack of joined up working within the Assembly Government emerged spontaneously within many of the stakeholder discussions as something that made dealing with the Welsh Assembly Government difficult (as was seen above in section 2.2), although 'joined up' was not necessarily a term used by stakeholders.

Most stakeholders taking part in the study therefore did not rate the Assembly Government very highly in this respect.

"That's exactly what they're not doing now, isn't it?" (Cardiff, Negative)

"I have to say, there's very little obvious integration at the departments within the Welsh Assembly Government to the citizen. For example, DCELLS don't obviously talk to Agriculture and Rural Affairs...or whatever it's called in terms of a strategy needed for either young people or CPD for the farming industry" (St Asaph, Negative)

"Joined up working doesn't happen in the Assembly, different departments set different and conflicting priorities without talking to other people...the Assembly is a big entity with a big budget, a lot of staff, a lot of departments and silo working...is endemic within the Assembly" (Caernarfon, Negative)

"Departments are silos and that's where the biggest problem is. There isn't enough knowledge sharing at several levels within departments, they're hierarchical with very little sideways sharing of information...There are invisible walls and it's particularly visible in the allocation of budgets because budgets are allocated to the silos and so if somebody is managed by one grouping but has a project that is centrally important to the interests of another grouping, it's very difficult and there's no movement of funds and that is difficult...As for joined up working in terms of working with, say, local authorities, all the different levels of administration in Wales, that too is quite difficult and I think that comes from the sense that the Assembly Government has that it is the top body and although it doesn't mean to appear controlling at a local level, it does" (Newtown, Negative)

Some felt the situation had got worse in recent years with the mergers of the various quangos and the restructures that had taken place. However, a few stakeholders mentioned the One Wales strategy as a sign of commitment to bringing about improvements in this respect.

"I welcome the One Wales document which committed itself to knocking down the silos between ministerial divisions. I think it is beginning to work, it's got a long, long way to go but I think every strategy that goes out of the Welsh Assembly now, actually goes to some sort of Gateway, doesn't it?" (Newtown, Positive)

A few others felt they had seen positive signs too, in terms of more emphasis on partnership and as a side effect of the introduction of Convergence funding.

“But I think there’s progress...there has certainly been this message for collaboration and partnership, and certainly for convergence...., fewer deeper intervention projects.... That has pushed certain groups of people to work more closely together and I have to say, there are huge advantages to that”
(Carmarthen, Positive)

Despite the criticisms of its performance, the view was that the Assembly Government was no worse than other public bodies in this respect, but no better either. A few people commented that the larger the organisation, the harder it was to work in a joined up way.

4.4 Examples of Good and Bad Practice re. Joined up Working

During the discussion, stakeholders were asked to think of examples of specific good and bad practice within the Welsh Assembly Government as far as being joined up was concerned. Most found it easier to name examples of bad practice than good, reflecting views on the organisation’s current performance in this respect.

As with the theme of citizen focus, examples were very diverse (reflecting the very varied background and perspectives of participants and the fact that they were naturally selected from stakeholders’ own work areas) and most were only mentioned by one or two people, so there was no great consistency across groups.

Some examples are, however, provided below, to illustrate the diversity in the examples given:

Good practice	Bad practice
Food Tourism Strategy	DCELLS
Strategy / planning <i>“I can see links and relevances etc in the strategic directions, and if I go back seven or eight years ago, there weren’t clear policies in place, so there is a better picture as to where they want Wales to be and so on”</i> (Carmarthen, Positive)	Overlapping strategies
Children’s Ombudsman (working across different services)	Participation Training
All Wales Coastal Path	Whole Poverty agenda
Agri-Food Partnership (although now gone)	New procedures on child protection (initially at introduction although subsequently improved)

<p>WAG Seminar on Economic Inactivity</p> <p><i>“They had every single department in the Assembly...stand up for 2 minutes and say what each of them was doing or contributing...It was good practice that somebody actually organised a seminar that day...to try to cut across that”</i> (Carmarthen, Negative)</p>	<p>Different constitutions of 4 bodies that make up Historic Environment in Wales – one in Assembly Government (Cadw) and other three outside</p>
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4.5 Barriers to Joined up Working within WAG and Possible Solutions

Following on from the discussion on good and bad practice, stakeholders were asked to identify what they felt prevented joined up working within the Welsh Assembly Government. Alongside this, they were asked to think of possible solutions to overcome these barriers, to make the Assembly Government more joined up.

The main barriers identified by participants are shown in the table below, together with suggestions on possible solutions (where respondents were able to come up with any). The key barriers that were mentioned by most groups and about which stakeholders felt most strongly are shaded:

Barrier	Solutions
<p>Silo mentality of departments</p> <p><i>“They still have the classic silo mentality by department, they have their plans, their strategies, their political accountability, their budgets and it is very, very difficult to get their attention outside of the documents that they are working to”</i> (Cardiff, Positive)</p>	<p>Develop cross cutting structures, e.g. Participation Champions in Housing sector</p> <p><i>“They do need to have some kind of cross cutting teams that work across departmental boundaries on particular issues”</i> (Cardiff, Positive)</p>
<p>Poor communications</p> <p><i>“We had a project administered through WEFO and we were told that certain costs weren’t eligible so one department said it was ok and one department said it wasn’t so that is not very joined up. And I do think that the department that does their compliance testing and the other departments don’t communicate very well”</i> (Caernarfon, Positive)</p>	<p>Different departments should integrate more when dealing with customers</p> <p><i>“Well they’ve got to improve communications internally to start with, so the departments are talking to each other” “...And of course externally, with their stakeholders”</i> (Carmarthen, Positives)</p> <p>Training across departments</p> <p><i>“How can you have joined up working if you’re only cognisant of the things that relate to your immediate area and you’re not aware of what might be happening in Health or Social Services that could impact on your area of work?”</i> (Cardiff, Negatives)</p>

Barrier	Solutions
<p>Culture / lack of understanding / 'them and us'</p> <p><i>"While you've got existing partnerships with elements of the Assembly, I sometimes get a feeling that we're not working towards the same end. They've got their agenda, we've got our agenda and there's just that little bit of reluctance there to operate in a collaborative way" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p>	<p>Gain a better understanding of stakeholder organisations /more secondments, practical work experience</p> <p><i>"Understanding what we do. Make them work out in the areas, make them work out in the sticks to get an appreciation of what it's like down in the weeds" "Anyone can talk the talk, it's actually walking it that makes the difference" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p> <p>More openness and transparency in their dealings with stakeholders</p>
<p>Geography, regional offices and communication – some envisaged this would worsen when departments were split between regions (e.g. Cardiff), whilst other saw this as being likely to improve service in regions (e.g. Newtown)</p> <p><i>"If the Assembly are becoming more and more split, the departments [split] North and South, I kind of fear that that will become a North South silo, as well as a departmental silo" (Cardiff, Positive)</i></p> <p><i>"I also think we've got a problem geographically, a lot of things are obviously centralised in Cardiff and Merthyr and down in the South and they're trying to move them out, but the geography of it is you've got one department working out of Aberystwyth or Bangor and another in Cardiff, the communication between the two departments will suffer as a result" (Caernarfon, Positive)</i></p>	<p>Video conferencing?</p> <p><i>"But they need to be doing it and fostering it far more effectively, we are not using that technology [properly]" (Cardiff, Positive)</i></p>
<p>Cardiff focus</p> <p><i>"It needs to consider the whole of Wales, it's very easy for it to be concentrated in Cardiff" (Newtown, Positive)</i></p> <p><i>"There's no question that the psyche within the minds of the bureaucrats is Cardiff focused and everything is focused on Cardiff and ...there's little strategic focus on delivery of the service within the region" "We have a poverty of service across North Wales and Mid Wales, I'd suggest" (St Asaph, Negative)</i></p>	<p>Just having an office in the region was not felt to be enough</p> <p><i>"It has to have teeth!" (St Asaph, Negative)</i></p> <p>And policy makers need to be more aware of regional needs</p> <p><i>"One size doesn't fit everyone" (St Asaph, Negative)</i></p> <p>Introduction of regional director</p>

Barrier	Solutions
<p>Loss of regional autonomy / 'one size fits all'</p> <p><i>"Previously for learning and development, when we had the full TECs, then decision making was local to the region, and whilst we have regional offices now, the regional decision-making is not the same"</i></p>	<p>Need to take on board regional needs</p> <p><i>"They could look at the local scenario and make decisions on the need of that area. And it goes back to need all the time" "Which will differ in West Wales to East Wales, and South Wales to North Wales" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p>
<p>Bureaucracy / unwieldy processes</p> <p><i>"Restrictive civil servant practices"</i></p>	<p>Streamline / rationalise processes</p> <p>More flexibility</p> <p>Faster decision-making</p>
<p>Politics</p> <p><i>"There has to be a tension between ministers which can cause barriers to joined up working" (Newtown, Positive)</i></p> <p><i>"I think there's too much meddling of politicians to civil servants. Politicians have to know their role is to set the agenda; civil servants have to be given the economy to implement it creatively and imaginatively" (St Asaph, Negative)</i></p>	<p>No solutions identified!</p>
<p>Limited consultation</p>	<p>More meaningful, less political</p> <p><i>"It's the thing about turning up there to make up the numbers [so] they can say, 'We consulted with this group of people...but at the end of the day there's no clear sort of guide, so we're going to do this [anyway]'" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p>
<p>Competition (between stakeholders / departments for funds)</p>	<p>More collaboration, stronger leadership</p>
<p>Target driven workloads</p>	<p>Focus on quality, not targets</p> <p>Make any targets realistic</p>
<p>Lack of leadership within WAG – too many strategies</p>	<p><i>"They need to go back to the basics and agree on the vision, so that it's clear, and communicate that vision to the different stakeholders" (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p>

5. OBTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT WAG

The next theme explored with stakeholders was obtaining information from and about the Welsh Assembly Government.

5.1 Summary of key findings in relation to obtaining Information about the Welsh Assembly Government

- A wide variety of different information requirements were identified by stakeholders, when asked what information they wanted from the Assembly Government, again linked to the range of backgrounds / organisations represented in the research
- Some common themes emerged, however, as follows:
 - Contact details / organisational structure
 - Direction of travel
 - Benchmarking information
 - Outcomes of consultations / reviews
- Stakeholders also called for all information provided to be timely, clear and easy to understand
- The main channel used currently by nearly all stakeholders to obtain information from and about the Assembly Government is the website ,
- Despite this, views of the website were very negative on the whole, because of its:
 - Poor search facility
 - Difficulty to navigate
 - Lack of contact details at the right level
 - Not comprehensive enough.
- When asked how they'd like to obtain information, most stakeholders were happy with the status quo (although they called for improvements to the website). A significant minority would like more personal contact, however, linking to the desire for more signposting to relevant contacts within the Welsh Assembly Government, should they need help
- Improving the website, which is the main information resource used by stakeholders, therefore appears to be a priority
- There were mixed views on the ease or difficulty of obtaining information from the Welsh Assembly Government and opinions varied according to the level of stakeholder, type of organisation and department / s dealt with. Those at a more senior level tended to have no difficulties, whilst less senior stakeholders seemed to have more difficulties because their relationships were less personal

- There were no issues with information sent out by WAG – difficulties were perceived to arise when stakeholders had queries or needed to initiate contact with WAG
- The main barriers to obtaining information were:
 - the website,
 - the civil service culture (not perceived to be very customer focused) and
 - knowing who to contact if the need arose
- Most stakeholders rated the bilingual information provided by the Assembly Government highly and only a few participants were of the opposite view.

5.2 What Information do Stakeholders want about WAG?

At the beginning of this section of the discussion, participants were asked to jot down on post-its any information that was important to them or their organisation that they'd like to receive from (or about) the Assembly Government.

Whilst a very wide range of information requirements were raised, a few common themes emerged, namely:

- **Contact details / organisational structures:** i.e. how to find who they needed to speak to within the Assembly Government

"I'd be grateful to know the role and work remit of the different departments. How do they co-operate, how do they connect? But also knowing about the role of those on a regional level and a national level, that isn't clear at all" (Caernarfon, Negative)

"I'd like to have clear contacts of who I can go to for what, so then if I want any information I know who to go to" (Cardiff, Negative)

- **Direction of travel:** i.e. Assembly Government's strategy / priorities

"Where are we going on a national level? What exactly is the policy and strategy direction in the different areas?" (Caernarfon, Negative)

To a lesser extent, stakeholders asked for:

- **Benchmarking information** (based on stats submitted)
- **Outcomes of consultations / reviews**

Also, although not an information area as such, many groups specified they'd like information to be timely, clear and easy to understand:

- **More timely information:** this encompassed the Welsh Assembly Government providing stakeholders with information at the right time and speedily enough (including information at a day-to-day level on venues / timings of meetings), but also allowing stakeholders adequate time to supply information to WAG

“There’s a problem with the timing of information, i.e. information about budgets comes out way too late, which makes management at a local level seriously difficult” (Caernarfon, Negative)

“I’m supposed to be in Swansea on Thursday next week for a ministerial meeting. Don’t know where... They don’t always give us adequate notice of when they want us to be in attendance at meetings, the assumption seems to be that we have nothing else to do with our time” (Caernarfon, Negative)

“A little bit longer to collate the information [would help]!” (St Asaph, Positive)

- **Clear and concise information** (less commonly)

“And when they come back to me with my response I want them not to be in gobbledygook. They sometimes write me a letter and they seem to have gone round the houses but they haven’t really answered my question” (Cardiff, Negative)

A few people commented that it would be good to know when their contacts at the Assembly Government changed.

“I think the contact between us and individuals is essential. You phone sometimes to be told that so and so has left their job months ago. There’s never any communication about key people that you have links to within the Assembly, they’ve just gone to a different desk and you don’t know who’s come into their place... They’re very bad at contacting us about developments like that, about staffing changes and I think that’s essential... if we are to get the communications right. The communication between individuals is key to it all” (Caernarfon, Negative)

5.3 Current and Preferred Channels of Information about WAG

When stakeholders were proactively seeking information on a particular subject, the Welsh Assembly Government website was usually their first port of call.

“I would try and obtain it off the internet and find my way round. If I find I’m failing miserably or wasting too much time, I will try and find a phone number and ask somebody, hoping that that person will be able to help me out or at least pass me over to somebody that can” (Caernarfon, Positive)

The website came through as being a very important information source for stakeholders, especially with the diminution of personal contact.

“If the Welsh Assembly Government was 10 miles away from me or 5 miles away, I may go there and speak to a person face-to-face, but as it isn’t, that [website] is my main source of information... and that is the one I would rely on” (Caernarfon, Positive)

Views on the website were, however, largely negative.

“The website’s dreadful” (Carmarthen, Positive)

"I'll tell you what they could do with, yet another new website, their website is awful" (Cardiff, Positive)

"The Welsh Assembly Government website is very un-user friendly" (St Asaph, Negative)

"We're in the electronic age. I don't want myriads of bits of paper, what I do want is access to referenced documents, Making the Connections or whatever it happens to be, through the Assembly website in a way that's easy to navigate and the Assembly website is an absolute nightmare" (Caernarfon, Negative)

The main criticisms of the website related to:

- Poor search facility – making it hard to 'track things down' (with several stakeholders saying they used Google instead to find documents on the WAG website)
- Difficult to navigate
- Lack of contact details at right level
- Not comprehensive

"Sometimes I find that I find things easier on the...website by using Google rather than their own search...engine" (St Asaph, Positive)

"It's really hard to find information if you're after policy documents. I'm always struggling to navigate my way through it"

"It's terribly, terribly difficult" (Carmarthen, Positives)

"If you do the search engine, which for a big website is perhaps key, if you put in the title of a national strategy, it will not throw up for you...that document, it will throw you up minutes of meetings in which this document gets a mention and I cannot understand why, it's poor" (Cardiff, Positive)

One person commented that for business support it was worse now than in the WDA days.

"I'm not saying the WDA was fabulous, although it was quite good, but everything is more difficult since they've disbanded that and gone to the new system" (Caernarfon, Positive)

Others went down the personal route by phoning, either using personal contacts (especially if more senior themselves) or by trying to find a phone number (although this seemed to be more problematic to those at a less senior level, or those whose relationship was arms-length)

When asked how they'd like to obtain information about the Assembly Government, many were happy with the status quo, i.e. using the website (although they called for improvements). A few people (outside South Wales and in rural areas) pointed to lack of access to broadband as an issue here, however.

"Not everybody has access to the web"

"Many people have difficulty getting broadband sorted out as well in these areas, so again, there's that little bit of expectancy in Cardiff to be able to get onto broadband and get everything you need immediately; that doesn't ring true up here" (St Asaph, Negative)

A minority of stakeholders strongly preferred personal contact and felt that communications had generally worsened with the advent of email.

"...I think what's really important to me is to find somebody who knows the subject you're dealing with, then stick to them like glue, because if you've got that personal relationship, you can phone up and say, 'Look, I've got a query on this, what's the best way of going about it?'"

"Since we're living in this electronic age, communication, believe it or not, has not improved; it has become worse, because I sit at my desk, he sits at his desk and we never meet, everything is electronic...It's not coming onto the coalface any more" (Carmarthen, Positives)

5.4 Perceived Ease or Difficulty of Obtaining Required Information

5.4.1 Perceptions of performance

There were mixed views on the ease or difficulty of obtaining information from the Welsh Assembly Government, with opinions varying according to the level of stakeholder, type of organisation and department / s dealt with. Those at a more senior level tended to have fewer difficulties than less senior stakeholders, whilst those dealing with DCELLS were on the whole more negative than stakeholders who interacted with other departments.

The contrast in experiences and views is illustrated by the following interchange from one session:

"They [DCELLS] won't accept queries or questions by phone, it's got to be by email to a helpdesk, and this person on the other end doesn't know anything about what we request, so they have to phone the departments round Wales to get answers to email us back, which takes time. I can honestly say that I've had queries unanswered for weeks, months, and in one instance, it took me 12 months to get an answer, and that was with an important subject on the POVA, Protection of ...Children and Vulnerable Adults...and the response that I had didn't answer my question"

"The thing is, I deal with people eye to eye, or by phone call to phone call, or email to email at a more senior level, and I've always had good service, and I think this is the problem. You're dealing with helpdesks...and they don't help very much" " (Carmarthen, Positives)

Some stakeholders had no real issue with obtaining information.

"I'm kind of struggling with this, because I've got what information I need" (Cardiff, Positive)

"They are very open about what they do and the information is usually there somewhere" (Newtown, Negative)

One stakeholder praised the library service that WAG provided.

"If you phone them up and say 'Can you get us this document?' You know they have three people running around finding a 5 year old document and they photocopied it and sent it out. Now that's service!" (Cardiff, Positive)

Others were more negative about obtaining information from the Assembly Government.

"It's not easy to get information from the Assembly...Because it reflects the way the Assembly is organised and organises itself...around themes and initiatives, it's not structured around the way in which end users want to access it...If you don't understand how it's structured and you don't understand how it's working, getting into it is very difficult – or if they've changed it since you were last there!" (Caernarfon, Negative)

Some of those who were dissatisfied criticised it for being inconsistent and too heavily linked to personalities and relationships.

"...The level of information that you're able to obtain is not based on the department from which it comes, it's who you might know and who you have a relationship with there [that] you can ask questions of" (St Asaph, Negative)

Generally, the consensus was that the information sent out by the Assembly Government was good.

"We're on several lists of their stakeholders and they send us stuff, all their consultations, the circulars, it comes through anyway, there's not a lot we need to go and find" (Cardiff, Positive)

Moreover, some departments were praised because they issued regular information bulletins to stakeholders.

"They [Cymal] actually have information bulletins they send out regularly, so that is brilliant....it's all there, with links" "I wish DCELLS would do that!" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"Agriculture have their monthly bulletin. That is a tremendous step forward in communication, it's well presented" (Newtown, Positive)

Where stakeholders said they experienced problems, however, it was with getting answers to queries, especially by those at a less senior level and / or those dealing with certain departments, e.g. DCELLS.

"Generally, the information that they give us is pretty good. The difficulty comes when we have a query...or something goes wrong and then it's the information we get back from those queries. It takes them too long to respond...or the deadline they expect us to work to [for consultations]; sometimes the timescales are quite ridiculous" (Carmarthen, Positive)

"It's quite simple if you get an email out from the Welsh Assembly...you can talk to somebody about that. But if...you've got a query about something you've heard on the national news, you haven't a clue where to start finding who to ask about those issues" "There's no...general enquiry point, there doesn't seem to be anybody there who knows what anybody else does" (Carmarthen, Negative)

Some stakeholders felt the situation had worsened with the merger / centralisation of services, as discussed above. Some specific examples were given of difficulties faced when seeking to obtain information from the Assembly Government, illustrating what stakeholders felt was a lack of customer focus and a reluctance to be accountable.

"I had a query the other day, this is Convergence, this is about a £5 million application, quite important to us and actually my query was to do with getting something onto the website and the person that could help me wouldn't speak to me and there was a girl on the phone and it was just so obvious, you know. 'I'll see if I can find out' and then she'd come back and say 'Have you tried this? Have you tried that?' And that's not very good customer service. Now that's one particular individual, but in terms of the organisational ethos, if they want to be customer focused [they've got to change]"

"I'm getting the feeling that there's so many people in the Welsh Assembly Government who are averse to making a decision and giving information and sort of say, 'Ooh, if I give that information out, will I get into trouble? Or if I say, yes, you should do this, is it going to come back and [I'll] have my tail feathers burnt?' It just seems they're averse to making a decision and you can't run an organisation like that" (Carmarthen, Positives)

On the whole the Assembly Government was perceived to be about the same as other government organisations in terms of providing information – no better or worse.

5.4.2 Bilingual information

The great majority of stakeholders across the workshops had no issue with the availability of bilingual information from the Welsh Assembly Government (although most, it must be noted, were not themselves Welsh speakers). Many commented it was 'very good' and in their view, readily available.

"All the guidance and all the drafts that I've seen, they're all bilingual" (St Asaph, Positive)

"Their bilingual information is good, it really is" (Cardiff, Negative)

"Fine...I think they tick that box quite well, don't they?" (Newtown, Positive)

"They are committed to it [bilingualism] and they do the job with that, they invest heavily in that side and they do function bilingually" (Newtown, Negative)

A couple of Welsh speakers in North Wales were critical, however, one because information received had not been supplied in Welsh:

"Although we're in a bilingual country, one language [English] has preference over the other. I still get information which I would have expected to be bilingual, whether it's a mistake by some official...I don't know, but it does really annoy me at times...It's not always available in both languages, no. I'll come back to this questionnaire that is in the consultation...about Affordable Housing, that has come through in English, I don't have the choice of filling it out in Welsh" (Caernarfon, Positive)

This stakeholder was also critical of the lack of availability of Welsh speakers to deal with telephone enquiries – although this appeared to be a general comment directed at all public bodies in Wales, not specific to the Welsh Assembly Government:

"Everyone will pick up the phone and say 'Bore da', 'P'nawn da' then 'Sorry, I don't speak Welsh'. [You say] 'Can you find me a Welsh speaker?', 'No, sorry, they're on the phone'. The reason I'm on the telephone is I want some information

and I want it now, not in three days' time. It is a problem, I must admit"
(Caernarfon, Positive)

This view was reinforced by a Welsh speaking stakeholder in St Asaph who felt that the delivery of Welsh language services within the Welsh Assembly Government was patchy, because the Welsh speaking capacity was not there at the moment.

"...the aspirations are much greater than the resources available to meet them and this is absolutely manifested in the position of Welsh language issues" (St Asaph, Negative)

The only other comments made relating to the Assembly Government's bilingual materials related firstly to the style of Welsh in translated materials (felt to be rather un-user friendly for certain audiences) and secondly, to occasional delays in the publication of bilingual documents.

"When...they're reading something that's been produced [in Welsh] ...it sometimes isn't language that's real to them. It's too academic in translation" (St Asaph, Negative)

"I am aware that colleagues who are Welsh speaking will tell me that sometimes there are unacceptable delays between Welsh and English coming out, or the need to provide a Welsh translation will, on occasions, delay the publication of something in English so they get it out in both languages" (Caernarfon, Negative)

5.5 Barriers to Obtaining Information and Possible Solutions

When time permitted, each group was then asked to spend 5 minutes brainstorming the barriers stakeholders faced in obtaining information from the Welsh Assembly Government. Some stakeholders struggled with this exercise, as mentioned above, because they felt there were no particular barriers facing them personally, although they acknowledged the situation could be different for other people, especially the general public.

"I've got a problem with this, only in the sense that I feel if I need information on WAG, I get it"

"We're entitled 'stakeholders', you're not asking the man in the street that question. None of us is going to suffer from that barrier...if I want information, I'll get it" (Newtown, Positive)

"I really don't think there are any particular barriers for me. If you were asking about barriers to citizens, then that's another ball game and it will come back to ...how much do they need to be directly involved with the public anyway"
(Cardiff, Positive)

"I really don't recognise that there are any barriers other than the practical frustrations with the website!" (Newtown, Negative)

For citizens, however, these barriers were identified as being the language of the document, their length and their relevance to a general audience in many cases.

The main barriers identified across the sessions are outlined below, together with stakeholders' suggestions on how they could be overcome:

Barrier	Solutions
<p>Poor website</p> <p><i>"I don't find it particularly informative...if you drill down to what you want...and it doesn't signpost you to anybody to speak to about the particular thing that you're interested in" (Caernarfon, Positive)</i></p> <p><i>"Navigation of the website. It's there and it's got a lot on it, it's just not all easy to find" (St Asaph, Positive)</i></p>	<p>Improve generally</p> <p>Specifically, improve navigation and search facility so less time is wasted by users</p> <p><i>"It needs to be accessible. It needs to be structured in such a way that people can access the information they need. It's not like that now. It is really difficult; in fact, it's practically impossible....It's not user friendly" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p>
<p>Culture (some individuals not very customer focused or open) although some felt that there were signs this was getting better</p> <p><i>"Because they come from the old civil service culture" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p>	<p>Need to understand that employed by public</p> <p>Be accountable</p> <p><i>"I think they've got to understand that the public employ them, we pay their wages. They are accountable, they are answerable to the public, although they don't see it that way" (Carmarthen, Positive)</i></p> <p><i>"...Some of the solutions to this are the Assembly looking more critically at the way they manage relationships with outside organisations. Their relationship and client management skills are woeful. I also think it's about people having access when appropriate, to senior staff, who actually have knowledge and can make a decision" (Cardiff, Negative)</i></p>
<p>Knowing who to contact / where to look</p> <p><i>"The Assembly's a big organisation...and it's not static, it changes fairly regularly, people move around, the job titles change, jobs get shifted into different departments...finding your way in is very difficult" (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p>	<p>Need account managers?</p> <p><i>"In my job, I would dearly love to have a client manager, a single point of contact on education matters or funding matters relating to education...As it is, I probably deal with half a dozen, eight, maybe even ten different people for the same...basic things" (St Asaph, Negative)</i></p> <p>Links in to improvements to website referred to above</p> <p><i>"..Look long and hard at the website and I think they need to look at it from an external perspective. It reflects their way of looking at the world...not necessarily reflecting the end users' views" (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p>

Barrier	Solutions
<p>Have to look for information (for some, not all)</p>	<p>More proactive in providing information? For example, email bulletin one could sign up to (c.f. Local Government one)</p> <p><i>“It would be quite nice...if any new things came up, you could have a bulletin”</i></p> <p><i>“Then you could sign up and tick the sections you want notes on” (St Asaph, Positives)</i></p>
<p>Lack of info on Wales-wide level</p>	<p>Launch of newspaper for whole of Wales (minority view – few people in one group only and disagreement about whether it would be viable)</p> <p><i>“The impression has been, if you read the Liverpool Daily Post, a lot of what goes on in Cardiff we don’t hear about in our North Wales newspapers. We haven’t got a Western Mail North of Aberystwyth” (Newtown, Positive)</i></p>
<p>No presence in North Wales</p> <p><i>“I would say the Assembly Government does not have an effective presence in this region. They’re 5 hours away, 180 miles away and getting access to them, particularly if you’re disenfranchised and don’t have access to a computer, is very difficult” (Caernarfon, Negative)</i></p>	<p>Single point of contact – telephone</p>

6. ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

The last major topic explored briefly with stakeholders was consultation. In many workshops this had already been raised spontaneously and discussed at that point, either as one of the difficulties faced in interacting with the Assembly Government, or as one example of bad practice in terms of citizen focus.

This section therefore summarises and recaps on some of the main points already covered.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings on Consultation with the Assembly Government

- There was widespread experience of Welsh Assembly Government consultation across the workshops – every stakeholder had taken part in consultations in some form, most commonly responding to draft papers
- Opinions were mixed on WAG consultation with stakeholders – whilst having the opportunity to contribute to policy development was applauded, most stakeholders perceived there to be flaws in the current process
- Weaknesses of Welsh Assembly Government consultation were perceived to be:
 - Scepticism about its value – is it meaningful or have decisions already been taken?
 - An absence of feedback to participants
 - Consultation activity not joined up
 - Consultation overload
 - Timing issues – inadequate time for responses / consultation activity happening at inappropriate times of year
 - Issues with content / design / language of documents

6.2 Perceptions of WAG Consultation Process

There was widespread experience of Welsh Assembly Government consultations across the stakeholder groups – every stakeholder had taken part in consultations in some form, mainly being asked to respond to consultation papers. Some had also attended consultation events or took part in Steering Groups on issues.

“I’ve attended seminars, I’ve attended public meetings, I’ve responded to printed documents” (Newtown, Negative)

When asked their views on the Assembly Government consultation process, opinions were mixed. On the one hand, stakeholders appreciated being given the opportunity to contribute to policy development, but on the other, a number of flaws were identified with the consultation process.

“They go through a lot of consultation, that’s good. Whether it’s effective and what it delivers, I think the jury would be out on that and I think some people would say

it doesn't actually deliver in the sense we've got no evidence that they listen to what we actually tell them" (Caernarfon, Negative)

Issues raised by stakeholders with Welsh Assembly Government consultation are outlined below in order of importance:

- **Consultations not meaningful – are minds already made up?**

This was the major criticism, voiced in almost every stakeholder group. Many stakeholders were sceptical about the real value of taking part, with a feeling amongst many that the Assembly Government was just 'going through the motions' and that it was a 'tick box' exercise. These people felt that decisions had already been made, so there was little chance of influencing the outcomes. This was felt to be disheartening, when they'd given up their time to respond.

"How much notice anybody ever takes of my views is an issue...I met with two colleagues last week who sat on a major steering group with me, who said 'I don't know why we bothered attending'....Because it didn't matter what we said, their minds were made up" (Caernarfon, Negative)

"The responses have been perhaps summarised too much and lost some of their substance. And of course the decision that comes out of the consultation, one feels is sometimes made before the exercise" (Newtown, Negative)

"They've already made up their mind really. When you see the final document there's very little difference" (St Asaph, Negative)

"You're consulted to death, but actually the outcomes of consultations are remarkably similar to what's been consulted on. If you are sitting on National Groups, you have your say and it still results in the way they want it to be!"

"Generally, yes, you could spend an awful lot of time undertaking the consultation and then you do feel a little jaded when it comes back printed, pretty much identical to the draft"

"You've ticked the box to say you've consulted....I do think that ...there's that lack of transparency and the way they deal with consultation in saying 'This is what we think would be a good idea, you're going to have to work really hard to convince us to change it" (Carmarthen, Negative)

- **No feedback on results of consultations to participants**

"There have been numerous consultations that have....come down to me and we will have commented and been part of that consultation process on every occasion, but I cannot remember ever having had any feedback. The consultation may have happened two years ago and now you'll get the final document come through as it is put into practice" (Caernarfon, Positive)

- **No co-ordination or joined up thinking with consultations – linked to issue below**

- **Consultation overload!**

There was a sense of overload amongst some of the participants, who felt that they and their organisations were asked to take part in too many consultations.

“We are killed with thick documents inviting consultation within a certain window. Democratically and openly, the integrity of that is great, but the time window in actually responding is considerable. I think at this moment in time, I have six and I had another one this week”

“I’ve had loads of consultations land on my desk that I have to give out to other people to assist in, so I’m putting time pressures on them in turn, which I don’t like doing. I’m not being able to engage people within the consultations fully, so it becomes tokenistic to people and there is a phrase..... which is, ‘we are all consulted out” (St Asaph, Negative)

“Oh god! [when asked how many consultations they were invited to take part in] In a year we....probably do responses to 6 to 10 major documents...and probably as many again on smaller scale things...It’s ongoing, we’re almost always involved in some kind of response” (Cardiff, Positive)

One participant made the comment that the number of consultations linked to his criticism of the Assembly Government being ‘risk averse’, feeling that sometimes they went out to consultation unnecessarily and could just have made a decision.

“I think we all think there are times the Ministry should make more executive decisions and avoid consultation and take risks. What we’re looking for is risk-taking civil servants” (Newtown, Positive)

- **Timing issues – inadequate time for response or being issued at wrong time of year**

“It’s when they want something from us, a consultation, sometimes we have two or three at once and fairly short turnaround times, to do them justice, sometimes you just don’t have the time” (St Asaph, Positive)

“Sometimes the times are pressured, they don’t give us enough time to respond to some of the consultations...they did have a wonderful propensity in Education to send out consultation documents just as the summer term was finishing and expect a response in six weeks when the schools were shut” (Caernarfon, Negative)

- **Issues with design / content of documents and language used (minority)**

“They have developed a method of consultation which is usually used, where they pose specific questions, they say ‘We would like your answers specifically on these’. Now that’s valid and it can be quite helpful because it focuses you on the question, but what is bad about that is that, if you say something that is not within the frame of their set questions, it never sees the light of day. They are too blinkered in their set questions because it’s administratively convenient...any...outriders or differing perspectives tend not to be captured and they need to be better about that and more careful...And then if you put something in, it’s prescriptive in that they filter it out because it doesn’t fit the matrix that they’re taking their markings against” (Cardiff, Positive)

When asked if they’d ever declined to take part in any consultations, some said no, that they always took part, whilst others (more commonly) said they tried to participate in those that they considered relevant to their work area / skills and expertise, but that they needed to be selective on occasion due to the large number of documents / invitations received. So many said they only responded to

those that they considered particularly important, or to which they had most to contribute, rather than to all.

“We had one around recently, it was something to do with Police Reform...right out on the margins of our interest and we have no particular expertise to offer to it, and it’s all time, it’s all capacity, so you have to select what it is, [where] you think you’ve got something worthwhile to say about it and where...you want to make an influence” (Cardiff, Positive)

Where ‘consultation’ meant attendance at meetings, this was more so.

“I get lots of invitations to participate on All Wales Working Groups and initiatives and I have to be very selective about how many of these I participate in, otherwise I could spend all my time travelling backwards and forwards to South Wales for yet another meeting” (Caernarfon, Negative)

Nobody had declined to take part in a consultation as a result of cynicism about the value of the exercise, despite the widespread reservations voiced.

6.3 Suggestions for Improving Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholder suggestions for improving the consultation process were largely the inverse of the problems experienced above. A few comments are provided below:

More openness to stakeholder comments

“[They need to] be very careful not to confuse the fact they’ve done a consultation exercise with what is involved in true consultation, because it’s very easy to tick a box and say ‘We did a consultation exercise, we produced a document, we put it on the website...’ and then say ‘Yes, of course, we have consulted” (Newtown, Negative)

More evidence of comments being taken on board through feedback on outcomes

“...it runs the risk of being devalued....of losing credibility, if you don’t get evidence that they’re listening to what you’re telling them, particularly when a number of people that you know have been through the same consultation, have come up with much the same message” (Caernarfon, Negative)

“That is very annoying and rather rude, to ask for people’s opinions...and then to completely ignore it, do exactly what they didn’t want and not explain yourself....it’s not true engagement unless you explain why it is you’ve rejected their opinions, if you have” (Caernarfon, Positive)

A few also called for more quantitative feedback including the number of responses, to indicate the strength of feeling and interest in the issue.

“Always providing feedback....and give you an idea of the strength of feeling, had they said 500 [were sent out] and 427 replied and they all wanted to keep the street lights on. Whereas if it was 500, but only 13 replied, you’d think ‘We feel strongly about it but nobody else did really and now we understand why”

“The one that recently came through to me...it was Elin Jones’ department...the feedback... was absolutely excellent, it went through the document and it said ‘People have expressed concerns that...’ and then there was a response, ‘We want to reassure you that this, this and this won’t happen because...’ and they

addressed maybe 10 major concerns that people had expressed, they addressed each one of them and that was very, very good” (Caernarfon, Positive)

Consultation documents need to be improved

“I find some of the consultation is very tightly drafted. They’ll come out to consultation on something, justify what they think should happen, and then only want you to comment or respond to a handful of particular questions and obviously you can put in more comments than that, but there’s an element of preconception there in the way that consultation is structured and the way they look for you to engage and respond to it, which could be reviewed and improved” (Carmarthen, Positive)

“I’d like them to be more open to others’ perspectives, which perhaps don’t fit with their immediate analysis of the key issues and I’d like them to be open to picking up, and recording, those sort of outrider, slightly outside their frame of reference issues” (Cardiff, Positive)

Better co-ordination of consultations

More time for stakeholder responses and improve timings of consultation periods

More use of face-to-face or telephone methods

“...I did one last year by telephone. It was much easier than by paper” (Newtown, Negative)

“A meeting of small groups of people on a one-to-one basis [is most effective]. You get more out of them, people will open up, If you have a large group of people, you only get the people that are more full on [contributing] and they’ll go on spouting and...just have a crusade” (St Asaph, Negative)

There were also a few positive comments made about this research exercise and the signals that sent out about the Welsh Assembly Government. At the same time, there was an expectation that the results from this study would be fed back to participants, or it would strengthen their negativity.

“I have to say hallelujah to what the Welsh Assembly’s doing here in this exercise. They sense a mismatch or a dysfunctioning service... they want to confirm that...that’s positive”

“Will we have a copy of the report which you will be preparing?...I think the cynicism of not knowing whatthey do with the information would be strengthened if we don’t get that feedback” (St Asaph, Negative)

APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY LETTER



Dear Sir / Madam

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY 2008 – FOLLOW UP RESEARCH

Thank you for taking part in the 2008 Welsh Assembly Government Stakeholder Survey. I am writing to seek your participation in follow up research that we will be conducting.

The Stakeholder Survey highlighted certain themes relating to stakeholder relationships which we are keen to explore in more depth. To this end, we have commissioned an independent research contractor, Beaufort Research, to carry out a further stage of research with some of those who took part in the survey.

You are being contacted because you indicated, when interviewed for the Stakeholder Survey, that you were willing to help us by taking part in follow-up research.

The next stage of research will consist of a series of informal workshops that will be convened at selected Welsh Assembly Government offices across Wales over the next few months. Workshops will last for up to an hour and a half and will take place during the working day. Each session will be facilitated by a researcher from Beaufort Research. All discussions will be completely confidential and any individual comments will be anonymised. You will be able to participate in English or Welsh.

You will receive a telephone call from Beaufort Research over the next few weeks to determine your availability for a workshop in your region. We very much hope you will be willing to participate in this next stage of research, which is very important in helping us to further improve how we work with you.

Thank you for your contribution, both through your engagement with Welsh Assembly Government staff and your participation in this research.

If you would like to discuss the study further please contact Lisa Williams at Beaufort Research on 029 2037 8565 or by e-mail: lisa@beaufortresearch.co.uk

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gill Morgan".

Gill Morgan

Dame Gill Morgan DBE

Ysgrifennydd Parhaol • Permanent Secretary



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Annwyl Syr / Madam

AROLWG BUDD-DDEILIAID 2008 – YMCHWIL DILYNOL

Diolch am gyfrannu at Arolwg Budd-ddeiliaid Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru 2008. Rwy'n ysgrifennu atoch er mwyn holi i chi fod yn rhan o'r ymchwil dilynol y byddwn yn ei gynnal.

Daeth rhai themâu i'r amlwg o ganlyniad i'r arolwg budd-ddeiliaid yng nghyswllt perthynas â budd-ddeiliaid ac rydym yn awyddus i ystyried y rhain mewn mwy o ddyfnder. I'r perwyl hwn, rydym wedi comisiynu contractwr ymchwil annibynnol, Beaufort Research, i wneud gwaith ymchwil pellach gyda rhai o'r rheini a gyfrannodd at yr arolwg.

Rydym yn cysylltu â chi gan i chi fynegi eich parodrwydd i fod o gymorth pellach gydag unrhyw ymchwil pellach pan gawsoch eich cyfweld ar gyfer yr Arolwg Budd-ddeiliaid.

Bydd cam nesaf yr ymchwil ar ffurf cyfres o weithdai anffurfiol a fydd yn cael eu cynnull yn rhai o swyddfeydd Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru ar draws Cymru yn ystod y misoedd i ddod. Bydd y gweithdai yn para o ddeutu awr a hanner ac yn cael eu cynnal yn ystod oriau gwaith. Hyrwyddir pob sesiwn gan ymchwilydd o Beaufort Research. Bydd pob trafodaeth yn gwbl gyfrinachol ac ni fydd unrhyw sylwadau yn cael eu priodoli i unrhyw unigolion. Bydd modd i chi gymryd rhan naill ai yn Gymraeg ynteu yn Saesneg.

Byddwch yn derbyn galwad ffôn oddi wrth Beaufort Research dros yr wythnosau nesaf er mwyn gweld a ydych ar gael i gymryd rhan mewn gweithdy yn eich ardal chi. Mawr obeithiwn y byddwch chi'n barod i fod yn rhan o gam nesaf y gwaith ymchwil, sy'n hynod bwysig wrth ein cynorthwyo i wella ymhellach y ffyrdd yr y'm ni'n gweithio gyda chi.

Diolch am eich cyfraniad, trwy eich ymwneud â staff Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru a'ch cyfraniad i'r gwaith ymchwil hwn.

Os hoffech drafod yr astudiaeth hon ymhellach yna cysylltwch os gwelwch yn dda â Lisa Williams yn Beaufort Research ar 029 2037 8565 ynteu trwy anfon e-bost at: lisa@beaufortresearch.co.uk

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gill Morgan".

Gill Morgan



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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APPENDIX B: TOPIC GUIDE

BQ2843 OCSRO STAFF & STAKEHOLDER FOLLOW-UP QUAL

Topic Guide and Research Session Structure – Stakeholders REVISED FINAL 1.10.08

1. BEAUFORT INTRODUCTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY (5 mins)

- Thank everyone for attending
- Introduce Beaufort – we are an independent research company commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to help gather stakeholder views in an impartial and confidential way
- We're facilitating informal workshop sessions lasting for around an hour and a half with a cross-section of stakeholders of the Assembly Government across Wales
- This research follows on from the Stakeholder Survey carried out earlier this year and will be exploring certain key themes relating to stakeholder relationships in more depth
- There are no members of the Assembly Government management team present during these discussions – we want you to feel able to speak openly and frankly about the issues and not feel constrained in any way
- Your views will be reported back to the Assembly Government anonymously – we don't put names to comments but report at a general level to protect the identity of individuals taking part
- As a professional research company, all our work is carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, which guarantees confidentiality and protects the anonymity of those taking part in research
- Lastly, our normal practice for research is to record discussions to help us with our analysis and reporting – is this ok? This recording won't be passed to the Assembly Government but will only be used by ourselves internally and only anonymised transcripts will be supplied to OCSRO

2. THE RULES & RESPONDENT INTRODUCTIONS (10 mins)

Show slide

- Don't be afraid to speak up
- But don't all talk at once
- All views are welcome
- If you'd rather make a suggestion/comment privately, you can write it on a post-it and post in the suggestions box at door before leaving
- **Please share your views! This is your chance to have your say and put forward your ideas to the Assembly Government**

Show slide explaining difference between the Assembly Government & NAfW

Explain that focus of research is the Welsh Assembly Government and their relationship with officials of the Assembly Government, not with ministers or politicians within NAfW. We want their views on engagement with Assembly Government officials, not views on NAfW policies

Divide participants into pairs – give each pair a few minutes to find out a little about each other (first name, organisation, role and how long in it) then each person to introduce other to group

3. CONTEXT – RELATIONSHIP WITH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT (10 mins)

Explain we'll begin by talking about their dealings with the Assembly Government

- When you think of the Welsh Assembly Government, what words come to mind?
- For what reasons / purposes do you interact with the Assembly Government? In what ways? And with which department / s?
- How often do you have contact with the Assembly Government?
- What's the Assembly Government like to deal with overall? Why is that?
- What about the department/s you have most to do with? Is it / are they better, worse or same as the Assembly Government overall? If so, in what way /s?
- How long have you been dealing with the Assembly Government? Have you seen any changes over that period? If so, what?
- Are there any particular things that make it difficult to interact with the Assembly Government? If so, what?
- Do you have any suggestions (within reason!) for improving the way the Assembly Government interacts with stakeholders?

4. CITIZEN FOCUS (20 mins)

Now we'll move on to one of our themes for today – citizen focus

- How would you define 'citizen focus'? What does it mean?
- What about 'customer focus' - how would you define this? What does this mean?
- How do these differ? Why?

Facilitator to capture spontaneous definitions on flipchart and identify key elements that feed into definitions

Then, prompt with Welsh Assembly Government definition of citizen focus (on slide)

- Is this what you'd have expected? Why / not? Does this differ from earlier definitions? If so, how and in what ways?
- Why is it important that the Welsh Assembly Government is citizen focused?
- How good or bad do you think the Welsh Assembly Government is overall at being citizen focused? Why is that?
- What about the department / s you deal with most? Is it / are they better, worse or same than overall? Why?
- How does the Welsh Assembly Government compare with other organisations at being citizen focused? If better or worse, why / in what ways?
- Would you say Welsh Assembly Governmentthe works with you to engage citizens in public service design and delivery? Why do you say that?
- In what ways is the Welsh Assembly Government **good** at being citizen focused and in what ways is it **bad**?
- Can you think of specific examples of good practice and bad practice within the Assembly Government as far as being citizen focused is concerned? *Probe: Any others?*

Facilitator to capture specific examples on flipchart (2 columns – Good Practice / Bad Practice)

- What do you think are the barriers to the Welsh Assembly Government being citizen-focused?
- What can the Assembly Government do to make itself more citizen-focused? Do you have any suggestions on how it could improve and work better with stakeholders in this respect?

5. 'JOINED-UP' WORKING (20 mins)

Now we'll move on to our next theme – 'joined up' working

- How would you define 'joined-up working'? What does it mean?

Facilitator to capture definitions on flipchart and identify key elements that feed into definitions

- How good or bad do you think the Assembly Government is overall in this respect? Why is that?
- What about the department /s you deal mostly with? Is that better, worse or same than overall? Why?
- How does the Assembly Government compare to other organisations in terms of joined up working? If better or worse, why / in what ways?
- In what ways is the Assembly Government **good** at being joined up and in what ways is it **bad**?
- Can you think of specific examples of good practice and bad practice within the Assembly Government as far as being joined up is concerned? *Probe*: What others?

Facilitator to capture specific examples on flipchart (2 columns – Good Practice / Bad Practice)

Group task 1 – stakeholders to spend 5 minutes as a group brainstorming what the barriers are to joined up working. What stops the Assembly Government from being joined up / being more joined up?

Suggestions to be written on flipchart then presented to facilitator by nominated leader and discussed

- How can these barriers be overcome? What suggestions do you have to address each of these barriers? What could the Assembly Government do to make itself more joined up? *Probe*: What else?

Facilitator to record solutions alongside barriers on flipcharts and group to reach consensus on top 3

6. INFORMATION (25 mins)

Our next theme is obtaining information about the Assembly Government

Post-it individual task 1:

- What information about the Welsh Assembly Government do you want?
What is important to you / your organisation?

Allow 5 minutes for stakeholders to write on post-its

Facilitator to collect and summarise main themes on flip chart then discuss with group. Group to reach consensus on most important information areas

- How do you go about obtaining the information you require about the Assembly Government? *Probe:* What other ways?
- How would you like to obtain information about the Assembly Government? Is there any difference?
- Why would you prefer these channels?
- How good or bad is it at providing the information you want / need? Why do you say that?
- Is certain information easier to obtain than others? If so, what sort of information is relatively easy to obtain? And what, if anything, is more difficult to obtain? Why is that?
- How does the Assembly Government compare with other organisations in terms of providing information? If better or worse, why / in what ways?
- What about the bilingual information provided by it? How readily available is it? Why do you say that?

Group task 2 – stakeholders to spend 5 minutes as a group brainstorming the barriers stakeholders face in obtaining information about the Assembly Government. What stops them from obtaining the information they need or makes it more difficult to get it?

Suggestions to be written on flipchart then presented to facilitator by nominated leader and discussed

- How can these barriers be overcome? What suggestions do you have to address each of these barriers and make it easier for stakeholders to obtain information about the Assembly Government? *Probe:* What else?

Facilitator to record solutions alongside barriers on flipcharts and group to reach consensus on top 3

7. ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION (10 minutes)

Lastly, we'll briefly discuss Assembly Government consultation

Show slide giving definition of consultation

- Have you ever taken part in any Assembly Government consultation?
- If so, on what subject / s and when? How would you rate the consultation process – good / bad / indifferent? Why do you say that?
- Have you ever thought about taking part in an Assembly Government consultation or been invited to do so, but then decided not to? If so, what made you decide not to take part?
- In what way /s could the Assembly Government improve the consultation process for stakeholders? *Probe:* What other suggestions?

8. SUMMARY & CLOSE

- Does anyone have any other comments to make regarding your relationship with the Assembly Government or on any of the themes discussed before we wrap up?

Thank and close

APPENDIX C: WAG DEFINITION OF 'CITIZEN FOCUS'

Our vision brings citizens and communities into the centre of the way public services are designed and delivered. Services should be more responsive to the needs of users, and should be easy to access for people in Wales of all generations and circumstances. Effective services will be designed and delivered with the active participation of citizens, communities and businesses

Source: Making the Connections

APPENDIX D: WAG DEFINITION OF CONSULTATION

Consultations are formal exercises carried out to seek people's and organisations' view on things the Assembly Government is proposing to do. Consultations can be carried out in many different ways, e.g. formal, printed documents, simple letters, public meetings, seminars, online open access, agenda items in standard meetings with stakeholders

Source: Welsh Assembly Government