



Promoting education for  
a just and sustainable world

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08 October 2010

Science and Technology Committee  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

Dear Baroness Neuberger

**Response to behaviour change call for evidence**

Please find attached our evidence submitted for this call. DEA would be happy to supply further written or oral evidence on any of these areas if required.

Yours sincerely

Hetan Shah  
Chief Executive

# Submission of evidence from DEA to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry into behaviour change

## 1. About DEA

1.1 DEA is an education charity that promotes global learning. We work to ensure that people in the UK learn about global issues such as poverty and climate change and develop an open-minded, global outlook. DEA defines global learning as education that puts learning in a global context, fostering:

- critical and creative thinking;
- self-awareness and open-mindedness towards difference;
- understanding of global issues and power relationships; and
- optimism and action for a better world.

1.2 In recent months DEA has been focusing particularly on the role of education and engagement in promoting behaviour change on global issues. **The evidence for this submission is taken from a recent internal review of 95 literature sources on behaviour change and associated topics.**

1.3 DEA is a membership body, with over 150 organisational members including subject associations, universities, local authorities and many development and environment NGOs in the UK.

## 2. Response to specific questions

### 2.1 What is known about how behaviour can be influenced?

- 2.1.1 There is an ongoing debate within the behaviour change field regarding the relative efficacy of choice editing ('nudge') and deliberative engagement (broadly characterised as 'think'). DEA's review of research finds an important place for deeper deliberative engagement to complement behaviour change work through the media and through 'nudging' members of the public. Research finds that deliberative dialogue helps the public to learn more about an issue, empowers them to take action, and could prevent a damaging loss of public trust in government policy and practice.
- 2.1.2 There is widespread agreement in the literature that effective engagement, whether deep or shallow, fosters a person's emotional connection to an issue and encourages them to view an issue through a positive frame. There is also evidence that effective engagement on issues such as international development and decarbonising public behaviour appeals to people's latent values of empathy, co-operation and security, and that deliberative dialogue can be particularly effective at bringing these values to the fore.

- 2.1.3 The literature suggests that deliberative engagement will not appeal to everyone, but nor is it only for those who are already engaged in an issue (such as tackling global poverty or pursuing sustainable development). There is evidence that deliberative engagement is particularly valuable when communicating with the public about complex, uncertain areas of policy where there are no easy answers (for example how to eradicate absolute poverty globally).
- 2.1.4 Any organisation (government or NGO) seeking to implement a programme of mass deliberative public engagement is likely to face considerable challenges. The literature suggests that these challenges relate primarily to the costs of deeper engagement, bringing engagement to scale, and creating a compelling offer for people to take part. Whilst these challenges are not insurmountable, DEA's analysis of the literature suggests that an alternative to mass engagement may be more feasible. One alternative is to seek out 'catalytic individuals' who can engage their own communities in changing their behaviour on a particular issue.
- 2.1.5 Reviews of the literature on catalytic individuals indicate that they are people who have a disproportionate influence on the attitudes of those around them. They tend to be charismatic, trustworthy, altruistic and motivated by actions that can help their community. Evidence suggests that engaging them in an honest, in-depth conversation about international development can give them sufficient knowledge and convince them to act as catalysts for public behaviour change. Investing in deep engagement with these catalytic individuals could yield a disproportionate return in terms of public behaviour change.
- 2.1.6 However, the literature also indicates that it is not enough to advocate a particular view on a public policy issue to catalytic individuals, because they place a high value on finding things out for themselves, tend not to trust 'received wisdom' and therefore would need to be enabled to reach conclusions based on their own learning.

## **2.2 What are the policy implications of recent developments in research on behaviour change?**

- 2.2.1 Consider focusing part of central and local government behaviour change work on finding ways to seek out and invest in a relatively small number of catalytic individuals.
- 2.2.2 Given the novelty of this approach to behaviour change, consider investing in a pilot project to test the impact of work with catalytic individuals.
- 2.2.3 When engaging with catalytic individuals, offer them opportunities to come to their own conclusions about the public policy issues being discussed.

**2.3 How should different *levels* of intervention (individual, organisational, community and national) and different *types* of intervention (legislative, fiscal, educative) interact in order to achieve policy goals more effectively?**

- 2.3.1 DEA's review of research indicates that behaviour change interventions are often most effectively delivered at a community level, by a trusted and known source (for example a fellow community member).
- 2.3.2 Notwithstanding this finding, there is a clear case for combining educative interventions with both legislative and choice editing ('nudge') interventions (which may include fiscal interventions). Changes in behaviour rely on a complex system of factors, and tend to require all three of these types of intervention if their effectiveness is to be maximised.

**2.4 Should behaviour change interventions be used in isolation or in combination with other policy interventions?**

- 2.4.1 See paragraphs 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 above.

**2.5 What mechanisms exist within government to coordinate and implement cross-departmental behaviour change policy interventions?**

- 2.5.1 Mechanisms to coordinate and implement cross-departmental educative interventions relating to behaviour change are at present inadequate. The recent draft joint Global Learning strategy between the Department for Education and the Department for International Development is a very promising development to promote cross-departmental coordination on education about tackling global poverty and pursuing sustainable development.

**2.6 When is it appropriate for the state to intervene to influence the behaviour of members of the public and how does this differ from when it is appropriate for the commercial or voluntary sector to intervene? In particular, when should this be done by outright prohibition and when by measures to encourage behaviour change? Are some methods of producing behaviour change unacceptable? Which and why?**

- 2.6.1 Nudging members of the public into a particular behaviour, whilst proven to be effective, raises ethical concerns in some cases. This is because it does not empower a member of the public to take control of their own circumstances, and understand the reasons for the choices they make.
- 2.6.2 By contrast, a deliberative dialogue approach has been shown numerous times to be an empowering approach to behaviour change and public engagement in

government policy. By entering into an honest, detailed conversation with members of the public about a particular issue, this enables participants to understand the reasons for and against any choices they make, and helps to build understanding and trust about the need for behaviour change.

- 2.6.3 The ethical issues are not clear-cut here, but on balance DEA's research indicates that a deliberative dialogue and/or educative approach to behaviour change can be more acceptable than either a legislative or choice editing ('nudge') approach.

**2.7 Should the public be involved in the design and implementation of behaviour change policy interventions and, if so, how? Should proposed measures for securing behaviour change be subject to public engagement exercises or consultation? Should they be piloted? Do considerations differ in the case of interventions aimed at changing addictive behaviour?**

- 2.7.1 Where possible, public involvement through deliberative dialogue and education can yield strong benefits both to participants and to the government. As such, the public should be involved wherever possible, and one effective way to create this public involvement is through deliberative dialogue about the need for behaviour change.
- 2.7.2 For further comments on this question, please refer to paragraphs 2.1.1, 2.1.3-2.1.6, 2.2.2. DEA has no comments to make on the case of interventions aimed at changing addictive behaviour.

Submitted by DEA on 08 October 2010, on a corporate basis