



# Citizens Assemblies *Plus*

## Summary of Talkshop project on adult social care

### Introduction to [Talk Shop](#) and the project

Our aim for this project was to make the discussion held by a citizens assembly available to many more people.

This was part of our overall aim, which is to invigorate democracy by involving ordinary people in informed conversations that enable them to have greater influence over the decisions that affect them. We stimulate conversations about tricky issues, local, national or global, that help people to: learn about those issues; find common ground, even when they disagree; develop creative solutions; and make decisions together. In doing so, we strengthen the skills and capacity of citizens and the political system to 'do democracy'.

The assembly we chose was commissioned in 2018 by two select committees of the UK House of Commons, the Health and Social Care Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. The assembly was part of their inquiry into the long-term funding of adult social care. Our challenge was this. The assembly was made up of 47 people, selected at random from the population of England. They met over two weekends, discussing the issue for 30 hours, with a lot of support from witnesses and facilitators. Could we turn that into a two hour discussion that a group of people – sometimes a small group of half a dozen - could organise for themselves?

We were funded by a Catalyst grant from the Royal Society of Arts.

We have made a [five minute video](#) describing the project, and recommend it for anyone wanting an overview.

### Developing the discussion kits

There are images of the elements of the kit on our [website](#).

We took the advice of the Kings Fund, a UK health think tank, to take out as many figures and numbers and as much detail as possible. They said that every fact is based on assumptions, so generates new questions.

We recognised, however, that some people want facts and feel uncomfortable without them. We gradually separated out the facts from the rest of the material, such as stories and quotations from people involved with different aspects of care. In the end, we turned a range of facts into an [infographic](#). The separation meant that groups had some control over how much time they spent on the two aspects.

We learned from the assembly. Even with plenty of time and witnesses on tap, assembly members struggled to understand who was eligible for social care. The Kings Fund developed images to illustrate this: you have to be a pole vaulter to get over the bar on need, but a limbo dancer to get under the means test threshold.

Finally, we used ‘opinion cards’ were used to get over what people with various relationships to social care felt about it:

“It’s very frightening. I have no family. If I have no one and go into a care home, I’m terrified that all my assets would be cheated.”

“One of those things in life you don’t want to face because you are looking at your own mortality.”

## **Talk Shop discussions compared to those of the assembly**

Given that our events often last for only two hours, we could not ask participants nearly as many questions as could the assembly. We gave people only two issues to decide on:

1. What social care the state should provide. There were three options: stick with the current system; provide free personal care; and prevent anyone having to pay ‘catastrophic costs’ (a ‘cap’). If people chose the last of these, we asked them if the cap should be: £50,000; £100,000; or a proportion of their assets. People could give a reason for their choice if they wished.

The choice given to Assembly members was different. They were asked what balance they wanted between public and private funding. We considered this, but did not consider that we could explain it fully enough in the time available.

2. How to raise more money. We gave people five choices: increase income tax; an extra tax on income earmarked exclusively for adult social care; a Social Care Premium; a wealth tax; and reduce govt. spending. Again, people could give a reason for their choice if they wished.

Here, the results of the assembly were very useful. Members had been presented with nine choices, but only three attracted much support. These were the first three choices that we offered, and we explained that they had done well in the assembly. We also explained that options such as inheritance tax had been rejected by the assembly, so were not on the list. People were though invited to add solutions of their own.

## **Talk Shop results compared to those of the assembly**

About 200 people took part in 20 events. We had hoped for more, but Brexit pushed every other issue off the table. One consequence was that the expected Green Paper on adult social care never appeared. That would have given our events a focus. Without it, people were pessimistic that the government would grasp the nettle.

“People have expressed frustration with discussions that don’t have tangible results” Royal National Institute for the Blind

On the first of the two questions we asked people, the most interesting comparison with the results from the assembly relates to the cap on care costs. This was the most popular option, backed by over half the people who took part. People made comments such as:

- “This means that everyone contributes according to means with the well off supporting those with less”
- “Seems to be a happy medium. Gives a compromise between the various 'fors' and 'againsts”
- “I understand that means testing costs money”

The Assembly Members were presented with three options for the maximum amount an individual should be expected to pay for their own social care over their lifetime:

- A limit of £50,000 in personal care costs (i.e. not including ‘hotel’ costs)
- A limit of £120,000 in personal care costs (not ‘hotel’ costs)
- No upper limit on what people might pay

A significant majority (more than three-quarters) preferred the most generous option of a £50,000 ‘cap’ for care costs, with very little support for the current system. The report of the Assembly states, “In discussion, a number of Assembly Members suggested that the ‘cap’ should be set as a “percentage of assets, rather than a fixed amount”. That wasn’t a choice given to them to vote on. We took the hint and included it – and discovered that five people in six preferred it.

The second question was: how should we raise more money to pay for social care? The Social Care Premium came top both in the Assembly and in our events, with identical percentages. This is particularly striking since, as noted above, the assembly used sortition whereas we, of course, did not. As the report of the Assembly notes, income tax would come top, though, if the first two columns were combined.

	Increase income tax	An extra tax on income earmarked exclusively for adult social care	Social Care Premium
Citizens Assembly	32%	26%	42%
Talk Shop	21%	37%	42%

## The effect of our events on people’s knowledge of the topic

We asked people both at the start of each event and at the end how much they felt they knew about the topic. The proportion of participants who said they knew nothing or hardly anything went down, while the proportion who reckoned they knew a fair amount went up.

	At the start	At the end
Nothing or hardly anything	19%	3%
A little	42%	26%
A fair amount	33%	58%
A lot	6%	13%
Number of people answering this question:		135

## How people felt about our events

One event organiser commented that [the topic was] ‘one which challenged us pretty directly on a personal level (especially those of us who are having to deal with difficult parents right now) and was for all of us a bit depressing. I’ve only had one comment back from anyone so far, which says: "Very thought provoking and so depressing to discover or actually to dwell on the fact that our social care system is so fragile. In fact teetering on the edge. Personally I had not given it much thought which is not good in itself and tragic to think that we will all be needing to rely on it in some way before too many more years have gone by.”’

What people said they liked

- ‘Exchange of views, learning from other people’s knowledge and opinions. We found the figures in the infographic very surprising.’
- ‘Being forced to make choices is good.’
- ‘This is a great opportunity to discuss important issues and should be done so more widely on many subjects. Feels good that our thoughts will be passed on to relevant people.’
- ‘Sharing. Changing ideas. Learning. Bouncing ideas off people - hearing other people’s ideas – getting things clear in your own mind. Quality of research/information.’

## Conclusions

We have shown that discussion kits can add value to Citizens Assemblies in at least two ways.

First, they make the essence of the discussion held by assembly members available to more people. This has two benefits. It spreads the practice and understanding of deliberative democracy and it adds to the legitimacy of the assembly and its results.

Secondly, our events were able to follow up on issues to which the Assembly was not able to do justice. The example of the cap above is the best illustration of this.

Talk Shop

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