



Climate communication in practice: how are we engaging the UK public on climate change?

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Over the last three decades, reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have made it increasingly clear that wide-scale societal and political changes are required to ensure a sustainable, resilient future. Such transformational changes are reliant on a strong platform of public support, and highlight the growing role that climate change communication has to play.

To develop UK capacity for climate change engagement, The Climate Communication Project has conducted new research which takes stock of the current climate communication knowledge base, and sheds light on how to engage audiences with climate change more effectively. This research brings together insights from around 200 UK researchers, academics and practitioners who specialise in climate engagement, as well as NGOs, journalists, artists, and campaigners.

Through an audit survey of UK climate communications practitioners and an expert elicitation workshop (modelled on the process the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change uses to reach its conclusions), this research set out to unpick some important questions: what should be the aim of engagement on climate change? What principles should underpin the way that engagement is carried out? And, crucially, is the science of climate communication settled?

The findings of this research act as a 'barometer' for the current state of UK climate engagement and provides best practice recommendations for anyone who wants to engage the public with climate change. Some longstanding approaches to science communication were re-affirmed, such as conveying the science simply and clearly. But there was also widespread endorsement by practitioners of approaches that nurture agency, empowerment and encourage dialogue. There is no one view on these matters: some of those we surveyed favoured fact-based approaches, while others highlighted the limitations of doing so. Likewise, whereas some communicators set out with an explicit aim to change behaviour, others elected not to do so (or questioned its effectiveness).

The value of creative approaches and two-way dialogue was widely affirmed, as was presenting climate change in ways that are personally relevant to audiences. It is critical that any climate change communication is grounded in the science, but this does not mean that scientists can't have opinions, or that they shouldn't talk about what climate change means to them as an individual.

The findings of this research are a useful step towards shaping a better communications landscape around climate change, but much work is still needed. There is a clear need to build up the infrastructure and capacity around climate engagement, and evidence that communication practitioners can learn more from the likes of artists, journalists and campaigners who made up a smaller proportion of the pool of practitioners we heard from in this research.