



Crossing the river: Developing a strategy to support understanding of uncertainty within probabilistic climate projections.

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The UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) was established by government in 1997 to support the UK's engagement with becoming better adapted to a changing climate. As the lead organisation in the UK on climate change adaptation, UKCIP oversaw the development of the UK Climate Projections (UKCP09) which were launched in June 2009 providing, for the first time, probabilistic climate projections for the UK. As with previous generations of UKCIP climate scenarios, they were freely accessible and intended for a whole spectrum of users, from technical experts to a lay audience. .

Prior to the launch of UKCP09 it was acknowledged that users would need support in understanding key concepts, such as the uncertainty inherent in the projections, to be able to use them appropriately. The user support strategy was therefore developed. It is founded on robust pedagogical principles and draws on the latest thinking on public understanding of science (PUS) that places the user at the centre of the communication process. The adopted approach first identifies profiles of the key users of the climate projections and the ways in which they would use and access the data. Based on these profiles it is possible to identify a range of mechanisms that allow the user to engage with understanding the projections in different ways and situations including lectures, workshops and online learning.

Within this blended strategy an exercise was developed specifically to support users' understanding of the concept of uncertainty within the probabilistic climate projections. The 'Crossing the River' exercise encourages the participants to actively consider the nature of information they are using, and how it could be applied in a specific decision. Reflection and discussion are key elements in supporting the users' understanding of the concept and allowing them to apply the principles in the exercise to their own context. Their reflection is facilitated through a range of mechanisms that provide social and personal spaces and is guided by the communicator.

The exercise has been used successfully with a broad range of users (from government officers to environmental managers) in groups ranging from small community events to large corporate conferences. Feedback has shown that the majority of people who completed the exercise had a better understanding of the concept of uncertainty within the probabilistic climate projections as a result. We are now working to create an online version that can be freely accessed by users along with other resources that develop understanding of other key concepts associated with UKCP09 and the broader climate change adaptation agenda.

This paper evaluates the development and application of the user support strategy and provides a practical illustration of how it can be used within a face-to-face group setting and also as an online resource.